

Groton Daily Independent

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Friday, May 15

Saturday, May 16

Pickleball, 9:30 a.m., elementary gym
Graduation, 2 p.m., Arena

Sunday, May 17

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m., at Zion, 11 a.m.
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.
Sign up for swimming lessons at the pool, 4:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
North Super Region High School Baseball Tournament



Monday, May 18

Senior Menu: Spanish Rice with hamburger, broccoli, fruit, vanilla pudding, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Cook's choice.
School Lunch: Chicken strips, potato squares.
Track at Warner, 9:30 a.m.
NEC Girls Golf at Groton, 10 a.m.
Softball at Redfield (JV at 4:30 p.m. followed by varsity)
Pickleball at Elementary Gym, 5:30 p.m.
JVT Practice at Arena, 7 p.m.
Senior Citizens meet at Community Center, potluck at noon.
Sign up for swimming lessons and pass pre-sale at the pool, 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.
North Super Region High School Baseball Tournament

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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.

Trump Leaves China

President Donald Trump travels back to the US today after concluding the first presidential visit to China in nearly a decade.

Trump met with Chinese leader Xi Jinping behind closed doors for over two hours yesterday afternoon. Trump said Xi expressed interest in brokering an end to the Iran war. Xi also reportedly warned of clashes between the US and China if the US supports Taiwan's independence. While the US does not officially recognize Taiwan as a sovereign state, it maintains strong economic ties with the self-governing island. Trump last year authorized an \$11B arms sale to Taiwan, but it has yet to be delivered.

The centerpiece of the visit was a state banquet last night, where the two leaders exchanged praise, and Trump invited Xi to the White House in September.

The 'Last Titan' of Thailand

Scientists in Thailand have identified a new giant dinosaur species, *Nagatitan chaiyaphumensis*, believed to be among the largest ever found in Southeast Asia.

The fossils, uncovered in 2016 in Thailand's Chaiyaphum province, include vertebrae, limb fragments, and a front leg bone nearly 6 feet long. The long-necked sauropod lived roughly 100 million to 120 million years ago during the early Cretaceous period, measured around 88.5 feet long, and weighed about 27 tons—roughly equivalent to four African elephants, the world's largest living land mammal. Scientists say subtle skeletal features distinguish the species from other sauropods, a group of massive plant-eating dinosaurs that includes *Brontosaurus*.

The name combines "Naga," a reference to serpent-like water spirits, "titan," a nod to Greek mythology, and "chaiyaphumensis," which marks the discovery site. It was nicknamed the "last titan" after being found in Thailand's youngest dinosaur-bearing rock formation.

Honda Hits Reverse

Honda reported its first annual loss since becoming a publicly listed company in 1957. The \$2.7B drop comes months after the Japanese carmaker scaled back its electric vehicle plans in the US.

In 2021, Honda pledged to ensure its entire fleet would be electric or hydrogen-powered by 2040. It aimed to do so in part through in-house development and in part through partnerships with General Motors and Sony. However, the company cited tariffs and the end of electric vehicle tax credits as reasons for a reduced consumer appetite in the US for EVs over the past year. Now, Honda says it will refocus on hybrid vehicles, financial services, and motorcycles.

The company was founded by Honda Soichiro, who began working as a mechanic at the age of 15.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NFL releases complete 2026 schedule, with a Seahawks-Patriots game slated for Week 1.

How thousands of computers and a handful of executives created the 272-game schedule.

Library of Congress adds music by Taylor Swift, Beyoncé, Ray Charles, and more to National Recording Registry

Shakira, Madonna, and BTS to headline first-ever World Cup halftime show, July 19 at MetLife Stadium.

Science & Technology

Anthropic and the Gates Foundation pledge \$200M over four years to develop AI tools for public health, education, and economic mobility, with a focus on serving low- and middle-income countries.

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James Webb Space Telescope captures what was likely one of the earliest stages of galaxy formation, roughly 13 billion years ago.

Autonomous underwater robot identifies biodiversity hot spots on coral reefs with unparalleled precision by analyzing audio and visuals in real-time.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.8%, Dow +0.8%, Nasdaq +0.9%), driven by optimism over US-China ties after President Donald Trump's Beijing visit.

AI chipmaker Cerebras nearly doubles in Nasdaq composite debut, closing at around \$95B in this year's largest initial public offering.

Defense startup Anduril is valued at \$61B, becoming the 12th-most-valuable private company.

Federal Reserve Gov. Stephen Miran submits resignation letter after serving the remaining five months of former Fed Gov. Adriana Kugler's term as a temporary appointee; Kugler abruptly resigned last August.

Politics & World Affairs

New El Niño forecast finds the pattern is more than 80% likely to emerge in the coming two to three months, potentially supercharging storms impacting California, Hawaii, and Mexico. There's at least a one-third chance it could become a super El Niño.

Cuba says fuel has run out on the island of more than 9 million people amid months long US blockade; US State Department reiterates offer of \$100M in direct aid to population.

US Border Patrol Chief Michael Banks resigns in the latest leadership change at the Department of Homeland Security.

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FOOD TRUCK

TTT GRILL & CATERING



20
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Thorson changes profession in Alaska

by Dorene Nelson

Scott Thorson, long time Groton high school teacher and athletic coach, decided to change his occupation to something quite different from his previous years. He is currently hauling crude oil and sea water in Alaska!

"I started my career to become an educator and athletic coach," Thorson explained. "The main attraction for me was to be able to coach various athletic teams."

"I attended the University of South Dakota in Vermillion and Dakota Wesleyan in Mitchell, receiving my Bachelor's degree plus twenty-five hours," he stated.

"After receiving my teaching degree, I taught in various places, including Conde, Waubay, and Groton," Thorson listed. "I coached football and wrestling as well as teaching various social studies classes and elementary physical education."

"I've been an educator for thirty-four years and even a reporter for KELOland for five years," he added. "In addition to coaching football, I was a track coach and helped get Groton's baseball program started in the high school."

"I found that keeping up with new technology to be the most difficult part of being a high school teacher," Thorson admitted. "Working with the students and learning from others on staff are the most rewarding aspects of being an educator."

"My wife Ann is a pharmacist at Avera St. Luke's in Aberdeen," he stated. "We have three sons and one daughter who have gifted us with nine grandchildren!"

"I really enjoyed my years in education but decided it was time for a change!" Thorson smiled. "In order to do my new current job, I needed to get a CDL and hazardous material endorsement! That was quite challenging, but I'm currently in Alaska, on a new job and enjoying new experiences!"



Scott Thorson

Groton Area Boys and Girls Finish Third at NEC Track Meet in Milbank

The Groton Area Tigers turned in a strong performance Thursday at the Northeast Conference Track Meet in Milbank, with both the boys and girls teams earning third-place finishes against a competitive field.

The Groton boys totaled 91 points to finish behind team champion Milbank (161.5) and runner-up Deuel (110), while the Tiger girls also scored 91 points to place third behind Clark/Willow Lake (198) and Milbank (145).

Leading the way for the Groton boys was standout sprinter Keegen Tracy, who captured conference titles in both the 200-meter dash and 400-meter dash. Tracy won the 200 in 22.80 seconds and followed with another first-place finish in the 400 at 50.51. He also added a third-place finish in the 100 meters with a time of 11.31.

Jayden Schwan had a dominant day in the distance events, sweeping both the 1600-meter and 3200-meter runs. Schwan claimed the 1600 title in 4:35.89 and later won the 3200 in 10:04.87. Riley Shellenberger also contributed valuable points in the distance races, placing fifth in the 800 meters, seventh in the 1600, and fourth in the 3200.

Ethan Kroll turned in a strong performance in the field events for Groton. He finished third in the long jump with a leap of 19 feet, 4 inches and added a fourth-place finish in the triple jump at 38 feet, 6 inches.

The Tigers also scored well in several relays. The 4x200 relay team of Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, Ethan Kroll, and Ryder Schwan placed third in 1:36.80. Groton's sprint medley relay team of Krause, Ryder Schwan, Jace Johnson, and Kyson Kucker also finished third with a time of 3:58.84. The 4x100 relay team took fifth place, while the 4x400 relay squad added a sixth-place finish.

On the girls side, Groton collected several conference championships and relay victories.

Makenna Krause captured the conference title in the 100-meter dash with a winning time of 12.96, while Raquel Tracy added a sixth-place finish in the same event and later placed eighth in the 200 meters.

McKenna Tietz had an outstanding meet, sweeping both hurdle events. She won the 100-meter hurdles in 15.66 and the 300-meter hurdles in 45.78. Tietz also helped lead Groton's relay teams to success throughout the day.

The Tigers dominated the relay events, winning both the 4x200 and 4x400 relays. The 4x200 team of McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy, and Makenna Krause captured first place in 1:47.29. The same quartet later won the 4x400 relay in 4:11.14.

Groton also earned a runner-up finish in the 4x100 relay behind the team of Raquel Tracy, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy, and Makenna Krause, which posted a time of 51.24. The sprint medley relay squad of Raquel Tracy, Taryn Traphagen, Ashlynn Warrington, and Ryelle Gilbert added another second-place finish in 4:35.59.

Ryelle Gilbert had a strong showing in the distance races, placing third in both the 800 meters and 1600 meters.

In the field events, Rylee Dunker earned a second-place finish in the javelin with a throw of 104 feet, 8 inches, while Avery Crank also placed in the javelin competition.

Boy's Division

Team Points: 1. Milbank 161.5, 2. Deuel 110, 3. Groton Area 91, 4. Webster Area 81, 5. Britton-Hecla 65, 6. Clark/Willow Lake 64, 7. Hamlin 58, 8. Sisseton 51.5, 9. Aberdeen Roncalli 50.5, 10. Redfield 37.5

100 Meters: 3. Keegen Tracy, 11.31; 9. Lincoln Krause, 11.66; 12. Ryder Schwan, 11.72; 30. Tate Johnson, 13.21.

200 Meters: 1. Keegen Tracy, 22.80; 9. JJ Muller, 24.67; 19. Tate Johnson, 26.94; 23. Wesley Borg, 28.52.

400 Meters: 1. Keegen Tracy, 50.51; 5. Jace Johnson, 57.47; 21. Wesley Borg, 1:04.35.

800 Meters: 5. Riley Shellenberger, 2:16.20

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1600 Meters: 1. Jayden Schwan, 4:35.89; 7. Riley Shellenberger, 5:02.77.

3200 Meters: 1. Jayden Schwan, 10:04.87; 4. Riley Shellenberger, 11:38.25.

4x100 Relay: 5. Groton: (Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, JJ Muller, Ryder Schwan), 46.09.

4x200 Relay: 3. Groton: (Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, Ethan Kroll, Ryder Schwan), 1:36.80.

4x400 Relay: 6. Groton: (Jordan Schwan, Kyson Kucker, Ethan Kroll, Jace Johnson), 3:42.18.

SMR 1600m - [200-200-400-800]: 3. Groton: (Lincoln Krause, Ryder Schwan, Jace Johnson, Kyson Kucker), 3:58.84.

Discus - 1.6kg: 18. Jordan Schwan, 90' 1"

Long Jump: 3. Ethan Kroll, 19' 4"; 23. Fernando Nava, 11' 6".

Triple Jump: 4. Ethan Kroll, 38' 6"

Girl's Division

Team Points: 1. Clark/Willow Lake 198, 2. Milbank 145, 3. Groton Area 91, 4. Deuel 73, 5. Britton-Hecla 71, 6. Webster Area 57.5, 7. Aberdeen Roncalli 44, 8. Sisseton 27.5, 9. Redfield 26, 10. Hamlin 22

100 Meters: 1. Makenna Krause, 12.96; 6. Raquel Tracy, 13.39.

200 Meters: 8. Raquel Tracy, 28.41

400 Meters: 15. Suri Jetto, 1:16.55

800 Meters: 3. Ryelle Gilbert, 2:28.26; 13. Suri Jetto, 3:05.19.

1600 Meters: 3. Ryelle Gilbert, 5:38.86

100m Hurdles - 33" / 0.838m: 1. McKenna Tietz, 15.66; 9. Teagan Hanten, 19.60.

300m Hurdles - 30" / 0.762m: 1. McKenna Tietz, 45.78; 9. Teagan Hanten, 57.19.

4x100 Relay: 2. Groton: (Raquel Tracy, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy, Makenna Krause), 51.24.

4x200 Relay: 1. Groton: (McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy, Makenna Krause), 1:47.29.

4x400 Relay: 1. Groton: (McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Makenna Krause, Kella Tracy), 4:11.14.

SMR 1600m - [200-200-400-800]: 2. Groton: (Raquel Tracy, Taryn Traphagen, Ashlynn Warrington, Ryelle Gilbert), 4:35.59.

Shot Put - 4kg: 18. Avery Crank, 25' 5".

Javelin - 600g: 2. Rylee Dunker, 104' 8"; 9. Avery Crank, 80' 11".

Long Jump: 25. Teagan Hanten, 12' 1.5".

Triple Jump: 18. Teagan Hanten, 27' 5.5".

Groton Area Middle School Track Teams Turn in Strong Showing at Warner Meet

The Groton Area middle school track teams continued their strong spring season Thursday at the Warner Invitational, with the Tigers placing third in both the boys and girls divisions against a competitive field.

In the boys team standings, Groton Area finished third with 108 points, trailing only Mobridge with 121 and host Warner with 111. On the girls side, the Tigers also earned third place with 104 points behind Ipswich and Warner.

The Groton boys were led by several standout sprint performances. In the 100-meter dash, Groton swept four of the top six spots as Ivan Schwan placed second in 12.75, narrowly edging teammate Trey Tietz, who was third in 12.76. Liam Lord added a fifth-place finish in 13.05 while Trayce Schelle was sixth in 13.18.

Groton continued its dominance in the 200 meters as Schwan again finished runner-up in 26.53, followed closely by Lord in third at 26.97 and Schelle in fifth at 27.20. Tietz added a seventh-place finish in 28.29.

The Tigers also excelled in the 400 meters, where Keegan Kucker captured first place in 59.43. Tietz followed just behind in second with a 59.53, while Lord added a fourth-place finish in 1:01.88.

In relay action, Groton's "A" team of Kucker, Tietz, Schelle and Schwan placed second in the 4x100 relay with a time of 50.70.

Schelle added another championship for the Tigers by winning the high jump after clearing 5-foot-0.

In the field events, Liam Johnson earned third place in the shot put with a throw of 32-feet-10-inches, while Bentley Harms placed second in the discus at 81-feet-2-inches. Johnson also added a fifth-place finish in the discus.

The Groton girls also delivered numerous top finishes throughout the meet. Rowan Patterson and Kinley Sandness paced the Tigers in the sprint events. Patterson finished second in the 100 meters in 13.81 while Sandness was close behind in third at 13.83. Libby Johnson added a sixth-place finish.

In the 200 meters, Sandness again claimed runner-up honors in 28.95, followed by Patterson in third and Johnson in fourth as Groton placed three runners in the top four.

Patterson continued her strong day with a second-place finish in the 400 meters at 1:12.09, while Taylor Fliehs took third in 1:13.30. Fliehs also added a fifth-place finish in the 800 meters, with teammate Andi Iverson placing fourth.

Groton dominated the hurdle events behind Charli Jacobsen and Addison Steffes. Jacobsen won the 100-meter hurdles in 18.03 and later placed second in the 200-meter hurdles with a time of 33.48. Steffes finished fourth in the 100 hurdles and third in the 200 hurdles.

The Tigers also posted another strong performance in the girls 4x100 relay, where the team of Iverson, Patterson, Johnson and Sandness placed second with a time of 56.58.

Boy's Division

Team Points: 1. Mobridge 121, 2. Warner 111, 3. Groton Area 108, 4. Roncalli 83, 5. Gettysburg 78, 6. Ipswich 59, 7. Northwestern 46, 8. Frederick 4

100 Meters: ; 2. Ivan Schwan, 12.75; 3. Trey Tietz, 12.76; 5. Liam Lord, 13.05; 6. Trayce Schelle, 13.18; 25. Wyatt Morehouse, 14.97; 32. Micah Krause, 15.80; 35. Jack Schuelke, 16.13; 40. Hank Fliehs, 16.91; 42. Titan Johnson, 17.53; 45. Weston Kettner, 18.59; 47. Grayson Warrington, 20.25.

200 Meters: 2. Ivan Schwan, 26.53; 3. Liam Lord, 26.97; 5. Trayce Schelle, 27.20; 7. Trey Tietz, 28.29; 20. Wyatt Morehouse, 31.46; 25. Gavin Hanten, 33.53; 28. Micah Krause, 33.86; 37. Titan Johnson, 39.38; 39. Weston Kettner, 43.76.

400 Meters: 1. Keegan Kucker, 59.43; 2. Trey Tietz, 59.53; 4. Liam Lord, 1:01.88.

4x100 Relay: 2. Groton: (Keegan Kucker, Trey Tietz, Trayce Schelle, Ivan Schwan), 50.70.; 4. Groton: (Wyatt Morehouse, Bentley Harms, Gavin Hanten, Liam Johnson), 58.65.; 6. Groton: (Quinton Flores, Jack Schuelke, Micah Krause, Hank Fliehs), 1:01.46.

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Shot Put - 8lb: 3. Liam Johnson, 32' 10"; 9. Bentley Harms, J 25' 1"; 11. Gavin Hanten, 23' 11.5"; 14. Hank Fliehs, 22' 8"; 23. Grayson Warrington, 18' 6.5".

Discus - 1kg: 2. Bentley Harms, 81' 2"; 5. Liam Johnson, 77' 8"; 13. Gavin Hanten, 63' 7"; 20. Grayson Warrington, 50' 8"; 22. Hank Fliehs, 45' 3".

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

Long Jump: ; 19. Jack Schuelke, 11' 7"; 25. Weston Kettner, 9' 3"; 29. Titan Johnson, 7' 2".

Girl's Division

Team Points: 1. Ipswich 182, 2. Warner 125, 3. Groton Area 104, 4. Mobridge 103, 5. Roncalli 60, 6. Northwestern 41, 7. Gettysburg 17

100 Meters: 2. Rowan Patterson, 13.81; 3. Kinley Sandness, 13.83; 6. Libby Johnson, 14.23; 10. Mya Moody, 14.84; 12. Avery Huber, 15.13; 15. Zoe Olson, 15.24; 17. Shealee Gilchrist, 15.55; 27. Gracie Borg, 16.37; 28. Harley Furman, 16.39; 34. Lennox Locke, 16.62.

200 Meters: 2. Kinley Sandness, 28.95; 3. Rowan Patterson, 29.99; 4. Libby Johnson, 30.20; 8. Addison Steffes, 30.91; 10. Mya Moody, 31.53; 13. Zoe Olson, 32.18; 15. Shealee Gilchrist, 32.46; 22. Gracie Borg, 33.78; 23. Rowan Hanson, 34.28; 24. Lillian Davis, 34.31; 25. Lennox Locke, 34.43; 28. Harley Furman, 34.66; 34. Hadley Heilman, 35.41.

400 Meters: 2. Rowan Patterson, 1:12.09; 3. Taylor Fliehs, 1:13.30; 8. Rowan Hanson, 1:19.69.

800 Meters: 4. Andi Iverson, 2:44.62; 5. Taylor Fliehs, 2:46.99.

100m Hurdles - 30" / 0.762m: 1. Charli Jacobsen, 18.03; 4. Addison Steffes, 20.29; 9. Hallie Perkins, 23.97.

200m Hurdles - 30" / 0.762m: 2. Charli Jacobsen, 33.48; 3. Addison Steffes, 35.08.

4x100 Relay: 2. Groton: (Andi Iverson, Rowan Patterson, Libby Johnson, Kinley Sandness), 56.58; 5. Groton: (Gracie Borg, Avery Huber, Zoe Olson, Mya Moody), 1:01.83; 7. Groton: (Harley Furman, Lennox Locke, Rowan Hanson, Shealee Gilchrist), 1:03.37.

Shot Put - 6lb: 13. Lillian Davis, 22' 5"; 18. Hadley Heilman, 19' 6"; 20. Andi Gauer, 19' 3".

Discus - 1kg: 10. Andi Gauer, 54' 9"; 12. Lillian Davis, 51' 4"; 19. Hadley Heilman, 41' 3".



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Campaign fact check: Rhoden voted for failed gas tax increase, but didn't raise concealed carry fees

Governor demands removal of ads placed by political action committee

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

A claim in a political ad that South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden "increased the gas tax" is wrong, although he did vote for a failed increase, while a claim that he then "targeted your guns, increasing fees on concealed carry permits" is false.

The claims are in ads paid for by the Rushmore Principles political action committee, chaired by Hadyn Smith of Mountain Brook, Alabama. Smith's email address in campaign finance documents indicates he's affiliated with the Crosby Ottenhoff Group, which describes itself as "focused on building strategic, quality services for political committees." Smith did not respond to requests for comment.

Because Rushmore Principles was formed in March and doesn't face a campaign finance reporting deadline until next week, nothing is publicly known about the committee's funding sources.

One of Rushmore Principle's ads says "Rhoden raised fees on plumbers, nurses, miners, barbers, and even on assisted living facilities that care for seniors. And he increased the gas tax, the cell phone tax, and fees on milk. Then Rhoden targeted your guns, increasing fees on concealed carry permits and hunting licenses."

Rhoden's campaign singled out the two claims that he raised the gas tax and increased fees on concealed carry permits as false, and demanded that broadcasters pull the ad. A broadcast official contacted by Searchlight indicated that the ads are under review and have not been pulled, and Fury did not respond when asked whether he knew of broadcasters pulling the ads.

Rhoden campaign manager Ian Fury called the claims "patently false" and said Rhoden "has cut taxes his entire career." Fury said the last state gas-tax increases happened in 1999 and 2015, when Rhoden was not serving in the Legislature or the executive branch. Before being elevated to governor last year when then-Gov. Kristi Noem departed for a job in the Trump administration, Rhoden had been lieutenant governor since 2019. He previously served 16 years in the Legislature.

As a state senator in 2009, Rhoden voted for Senate Bill 201. The version of the bill that came to the Senate would have increased the gas tax by 3 cents per gallon. The bill was amended on the Senate floor to an increase that amounted to a tiny fraction of a penny. The bill's primary sponsor, Sen. Mike Vehle, R-Mitchell, proposed the amendment in an attempt to keep the bill moving.

"I want to keep this bill alive," Vehle told fellow senators in the Senate chamber.

Rhoden voted for the amended version of the bill, but it failed. Fury said the description of the vote in the ad was inaccurate.

"The ad doesn't say 'voted to raise gas tax,'" Fury told Searchlight in a statement. "It says he raised it."

Regarding the concealed carrying of pistols, the Noem-Rhoden administration eliminated fees for concealed carry permits in 2022. South Dakota Searchlight was unable to find evidence of Rhoden increasing fees on concealed carry permits. He did cast a vote in 2017, while serving as a state representative, for a bill that created an easier renewal process for concealed-carry permits and set the renewal fee at \$10, but that fee was unchanged from the prior reapplication process.

A broader Rushmore Principles claim that Rhoden raised "400 taxes and fees" was not fully documented. Fury told Searchlight that he highlighted the gas-tax and concealed-carry claims because those were "patently false," while describing other claims as "twisting the facts."

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"There are certainly other false claims in Dusty's ads," Fury said, referring to Republican U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, who is running against Rhoden for the Republican nomination for governor in the June 2 primary election. State House Speaker Jon Hansen and businessman Toby Doeden are also running.

Johnson disclaimed any connection to the Rushmore Principles ads.

"I did not approve these ads, but it's clear this PAC supports me and opposes the governor's history of tax and fee increases," Johnson said. "Every other candidate has a PAC supporting them and this is no different."

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.

How the rush to mine the metal of the future echoes America's colonial past

Companies have staked claims for more than 100 lithium-mine projects; tribes are among the most affected

BY: JOHANNA HANSEL, CARLA SAMON ROS AND WYATT MYSKOW

This article originally appeared on Inside Climate News, a nonprofit, non-partisan news organization that covers climate, energy and the environment. Sign up for their newsletter here.

This investigation was reported in collaboration between Inside Climate News and Columbia Journalism Investigations.

BLACK HILLS — Trina Lone Hill wasn't surprised that mining companies had found lithium in South Dakota's Black Hills. Gold and uranium had drawn drillers to the Lakota Sioux tribe's hallowed ground in these western highlands years ago. Now, with this new mineral powering the global green-energy transition, the tribe's historic preservation officer had one thought: "Here we go again."

About 1,000 miles away in southwest Nevada, Joe Kennedy, of the Timbisha Shoshone tribe, watched a sacred stream fade after a lithium-mining company began drilling in search of the mineral—all while his tribe fought to prevent a second company from boring into the aquifer beneath its reservation.

And in western Arizona, Brandon Siewiyumptewa, of the Hualapai Tribe, witnessed fissures crack open the earth and drain a spring sacred to his people after another mining company had drilled into land they warned would be too fragile to touch.

Scenes like these have played out across the country as the U.S. ramps up production of lithium—a key metal for electric vehicle batteries. By 2030, at least six new mining projects are projected to extract lithium from American soil and another 13 will soon follow—mostly in the dry Southwest. That's a huge jump from the single one currently in operation. And it's just a fifth of the more than 100 projects to which companies have staked claims, according to a unique database compiled by Columbia Journalism Investigations (CJI) and Inside Climate News (ICN).

Using public records and corporate filings accessed through the financial firm S&P Global, CJI and ICN have identified roughly 540 proposed lithium mines worldwide, as well as operators and shareholders behind them. The original dataset underscores how quickly the U.S. is becoming a player in the global lithium market: An analysis of the data shows U.S. lithium's global market share rising from less than 1 percent today to as high as 8 percent in the next five years alone.

Touted as a way to strengthen U.S. energy independence, the rush for lithium gained momentum during the Biden administration. But under the banner of "Drill, Baby, Drill," President Donald Trump has supercharged it. Records and interviews show mounting pressure on federal officials to fast-track permits and greenlight lithium projects in a fraction of the standard timeline. To push projects forward, the Trump administration has taken the unprecedented step of buying shares in lithium mines to guarantee federal loans.

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On the ground, dozens of proposed mines manifest as wooden stakes marking land claims or massive drills boring into rock or brine. Yet as mining companies seek permits and lure investors, frontline communities must grapple with the fallout of the so-called “white gold.”

Socially and economically vulnerable communities are bearing the brunt of this boom, according to an analysis by CJI and ICN. The newsrooms mapped lithium mines with tribal lands and county demographic measures, such as income and race. Nearly two-thirds of all lithium projects are located in vulnerable counties—many of them places where people in poverty and people of color disproportionately live.

Indigenous communities are hard hit: Roughly one in 10 proposed mines sits within 10 miles of a tribal reservation, even though reservations comprise 2 percent of U.S. land overall. And that doesn’t take into account the millions of acres of lost tribal territory.

Many Native Americans, like Lone Hill, fear getting caught up in yet another mineral’s development for what the extraction industry calls the “greater good,” they say. Tribes forced off ancestral territory by past mining activities say their cultural and historical sites remain at risk today. Federal regulators’ inability to protect tribal interests—coupled with an outdated mining law that lacks safeguards—has given companies near-total freedom to exploit public land, according to one 2023 government report assessing the mine-permitting process.

The combination paves the way for history to repeat itself.

“All those minerals ... are right in our sacred sites,” Lone Hill said. The pattern of sidelining tribal voices and dispossession, she added, “has always been oppressive.”

The U.S. Department of the Interior did not respond to multiple requests for an interview for this story, or to a list of written questions. In a statement, the department said it “is taking urgent action to strengthen America’s supply of critical minerals and domestic energy to protect national and economic security and reduce reliance on foreign sources.”

While it has streamlined permitting, the department said it will continue to comply with the law, including for environmental review and tribal consultation.

“Honoring our trust and treaty responsibilities to tribes and engaging communities early and meaningfully remain core to our mission,” the statement said.

Kate Finn, who founded the California-based nonprofit Tallgrass Institute—formerly known as First Peoples Worldwide, which works to create equitable partnerships between Indigenous peoples and the private sector—said there’s still time for federal officials to consult tribes on new lithium projects. But with so many mines in development and officials scaling back practices meant to include tribal perspectives, she believes the U.S. government is facing a critical moment in its relationship with Indigenous nations.

“There are incredible risks that are not being viewed in total,” said Finn, noting potential legal battles and other conflicts with Indigenous peoples. “To skip over those [risks] is detrimental and really shows that the green transition may not live up to its promise.”

‘A very aggressive schedule’

The move to accelerate domestic lithium production dates to the first Trump administration. In 2017, the Interior Department ordered faster reviews of proposed projects on public land. Within three years, Interior’s Bureau of Land Management, which oversees the permitting process, reduced environmental assessments from four years to 15 months, on average, BLM told a congressional committee at the time.

“In addition to the faster review time, this reform has resulted in enhanced coordination with elected officials, tribes, other federal agencies and the public,” said William Perry Pendley, then chief of the BLM, in written testimony.

But the sole lithium mine approved by the BLM during Trump’s first term suggests otherwise. Developed by the Canadian company Lithium Americas, Thacker Pass sits near the Oregon–Nevada border. In 1865, U.S. soldiers massacred several dozen Paiute people around here. Every year, tribes gather on this land—which the Paiute call Peehee Mu’huh, or “rotten moon”—for a prayer horse ride to honor the victims.

Agency emails uncovered in a lawsuit later filed by the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony against BLM show staff scrambling to meet a one-year deadline to issue Thacker Pass a permit.

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"I'm thoroughly frustrated trying to keep this process moving given the complexities of this proposal," one employee wrote in an April 2020 email to BLM's Nevada office, explaining a draft of the unfinished environmental study was due in a day.

Employees ended up approving the project five days before Trump left office in January 2021—at the expense of this historic tribal site, critics say.

Tribal and local parties, as well as environmental groups, sued the BLM that year, alleging the agency hadn't properly consulted federally recognized tribes affected by the project, among other claims. A judge ruled there was "no question BLM could have done more" to contact tribes, according to a 2021 ruling, but found the agency had made a "reasonable" decision about who it should consult.

The Biden administration fueled the lithium rush further by funneling billions of public dollars into clean-energy projects—including \$2.26 billion for Thacker Pass.

In a statement provided to CJI and ICN, Tim Crowley, Lithium Americas' senior vice president for government and external affairs, notes the company "has worked extensively with the local community and tribes," and is proud of the community benefits agreement it has signed with the Fort McDermitt Tribe.

"The Thacker Pass project complies with all applicable state and federal laws and has undergone rigorous environmental review," Crowley said. "Any assertion to the contrary is baseless."

Another beneficiary of this windfall was the Australian company Ioneer, which is planning a lithium mine on Nevada's Rhyolite Ridge, home to a rare, endangered wildflower. Environmental and tribal groups have argued the Rhyolite Ridge mine—which is expected to produce enough lithium to power 370,000 electric vehicles annually—could drive the flower to extinction and threaten a spring sacred to the Western Shoshone.

While Biden's Interior Department replaced his predecessor's rule on fast-tracked reviews, internal emails show BLM employees remained under pressure to advance Ioneer's project. In a December 2023 email to Ioneer, one BLM employee noted the company's groundwater model would have to be approved "without any edits or comments" to meet the agency's deadline.

"This is a very aggressive schedule that deviates from other project schedules on similar projects completed recently," the employee said.

Ten months later, BLM greenlit the Rhyolite Ridge Lithium Boron Project—the only lithium mine authorized during Biden's presidency. In January 2025, three days before Biden left the White House, his administration gave Ioneer a \$996 million loan guarantee to break ground on the mine.

The Western Shoshone Defense Project and other groups filed a 2024 lawsuit over the mine's approval. In March, a judge upheld the BLM's action. The Indigenous rights and environmental groups appealed.

Bernard Rowe, Ioneer's managing director, told CJI and ICN that the volatile lithium market and funding issues have delayed the project, but it's only a matter of time before the mine gets built. At the site, Rowe has examined the lithium-rich clay abundant in the area.

"There isn't another lithium deposit like that that we know of anywhere in the world," he said.

Steve Feldgus, Interior's deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals management from 2021 to 2024, said his team aimed to prevent permit approvals that later could be delayed by legal challenges.

"We wanted things to be done right," he said. "But it's totally possible that individual staff felt there was pressure to move faster than they wanted."

Now more than a year into Trump's second term, the accelerated reviews proliferate. In March 2025, the president signed an executive order to speed up permits for new lithium mines and other critical-minerals projects that can be "immediately approved." The order makes no mention of BLM's longstanding practice of consulting Native American tribes affected by proposed mines on public land.

One month later, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, the former North Dakota governor and an oil industry ally, introduced a radical change: Regulators will get roughly 28 days to review and comment on projects' environmental impacts. Indigenous tribes? Seven days to respond.

Under these guidelines, BLM announced it would give the public just five days to comment on a proposed lithium drilling site on the Oregon side of the McDermitt Caldera, a volcanic depression containing one of the world's largest known lithium deposits and home to the Thacker Pass mine on the Nevada side. A

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subsidiary of the Australian mining company Jindalee Lithium, HiTech Minerals Inc., plans to drill 168 exploratory holes in this biodiverse region, affecting the same tribes as Thacker Pass. Tribal members have long hunted and gathered traditional medicines in the area.

Public outrage ultimately prompted BLM to extend the public comment period to 30 days. But by then, the agency had added Jindalee's project to a new federal effort meant to streamline development, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, known as "FAST-41." To date, the Trump administration has flagged nine lithium mines for the program. It approved Jindalee's drilling in December; three environmental groups have since sued.

Jindalee CEO Ian Rodger said in a statement to CJI and ICN that the company was not aware in advance of the BLM's decision to shorten the public comment period for the proposed drilling. Jindalee supported BLM extending the deadline, he said, and the company will join the agency in its defense of the project approval.

The project is only for exploratory drilling, not yet a full-scale mine, Rodger added. He said the company is committed to continued community and tribal consultation. In April, Jindalee's HiTech Minerals merged with Constellation Acquisition Corp. to form US Elemental Inc. and announced plans to go public.

"It's my backyard there," said Myron Smart, an elder in the Fort McDermitt Paiute-Shoshone tribe who has advocated for the region's protection. "It really bothers me. But what can I do? I'm just at the bottom of the totem pole. I don't have no say over anything. The only thing that I rely on is my prayer."

Despite Smart's prayers, mining developments at nearby Thacker Pass march forward. In September, the Trump administration renegotiated the Biden-era loan with Lithium Americas, giving the U.S. Department of Energy a 5 percent stake in both company and project.

In a statement on the deal, Energy Secretary Chris Wright thanked the president for his "bold leadership." "American lithium production is going to skyrocket," Wright said.

'The last checkbox'

The legal framework for BLM's permitting process dates back more than 150 years, when, following California's Gold Rush, Congress passed the General Mining Act of 1872. The act allows American citizens and companies to stake mining claims on public land—using literal wooden stakes. Federal officials will grant exclusive mining rights to any entity if it shows the ground beneath has minerals. Established mining claims are treated much like private property—almost impossible to revoke even for conservation purposes.

"It's like, 'Here, go [prospect for minerals]. If you find anything, it's all yours,'" said Feldgus, the former Interior official.

Regulators can intervene if environmental damage exceeds what's considered "necessary" for extraction, a subjective threshold that's rarely met. Unlike other federal laws, the act doesn't require the U.S. government to consult with tribes about how mining might affect their health, environment and heritage on ancestral territory outside reservation boundaries, a safeguard enshrined in international law.

The BLM has issued a patchwork of policy manuals instructing staff on how to carry out the environmental reviews and limited tribal consultations required by modern laws. These policy documents stipulate that such consultations should be "meaningful," reflect a "government-to-government relationship" and involve a "reasonable and good-faith effort" to consider tribal concerns.

In practice, the agency rarely enforces its own policies, Indigenous leaders say. Typically, tribal consultations occur too late to make a difference, if they happen at all.

"It's insufficient," said Finn, of the Tallgrass Institute. Better consultation would help, she said, but even more than that, "we need consent."

At the tribal headquarters on Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota—home to the Lakota people, who are part of the Sioux Nation—Lone Hill serves as the key liaison between the tribe and the federal agencies. On a visit to her office last spring, her desk brimmed with documents. None involved the lithium activities occurring in the Black Hills, which are on private land located within the tribe's ancestral territory.

On public land, federal agencies should notify tribes about proposed lithium projects that might affect them and give tribal members at least 30 days to comment. But official notice doesn't always arrive. And

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when it does, tribes may not have the resources or expertise to respond.

When Lone Hill gets a call, she said, she's learned to remind regulators: "This [phone call] isn't a formal consultation." Regulators must reach out to the tribal councils to kick off the official process.

"They just want to say, 'We sent you the notice, so you know about it ...we're done,'" said Lone Hill, who calls tribal consultation "the last checkbox."

"It's just all a play," she added.

Some foreign firms have tried to change that. Take Integra Resources, a Canadian company developing a gold and silver mine on several tribes' ancestral homeland, including the Shoshone-Paiute, in Idaho. Several years ago, Integra sought to initiate a tribal consultation much like it would have in Canada, said Mark Stockton, its vice president for external affairs and sustainability. Unable to obtain a comprehensive list of tribal contacts from the local BLM office, Integra did its own research, relying on old maps and asking tribal councils for help.

BLM employees "just don't know, and they don't have contacts," Stockton said. "They don't know who to call."

Despite an executive order issued in 2000 and subsequent White House directives calling for more consistent tribal consultation standards and annual training, former BLM employees note that the agency's policy standards remain vague, with little guidance on what tribal consultations should entail. As a result, interpretations can vary among district offices; often, tribal engagement falls to staff archaeologists rather than chief administrators. A universal training standard doesn't exist, Feldgus confirmed.

In 2022, Feldgus headed an interagency working group that examined how to improve the permitting process for mines on public land. A year later, the group released a report outlining broad reforms, such as establishing training policies and providing tribes with resources to ensure they can participate. The report concluded these efforts would fall short without a fundamental overhaul of the country's 1872 mining act.

Feldgus said the act is "so unfathomably beneficial" to the mining industries that they "fight to the death to keep it, and they have enough supporters in Congress who really care [to preserve it]."

During his tenure, he said, the BLM worked to expand informal tribal consultations before the official permitting process started and to hire additional BLM tribal liaisons. But the agency was still recovering from the hollowing out of its workforce during the first Trump administration. The COVID-19 pandemic and complex federal hiring procedures made rebuilding harder.

The second Trump administration's push to streamline permitting threatens to undo it all. "Now the situation is going to be that much worse," Feldgus said.

Never trading land for lithium

As lithium development accelerates, new mining claims can appear and vanish so quickly that residents struggle to keep track. In the Black Hills, longtime Custer resident Meg King monitors locations where companies drill for lithium, piecing together what information she can. The forested mountains, central to the Sioux Nation's ancestral territory, consist of a hodgepodge of public and private land that enables exploration to remain largely hidden. As her car crept along a gravel road near the town of Custer in the southern Black Hills, she looked for the place where she'd spotted the latest drilling site.

"Down there between the trees—you can see the delivery trucks!" King said, motioning toward a clearing where snow remnants clung to the hills.

Inching toward a tangle of trees, she found a path blocked by signs that read "Private Property," alongside others bearing the name "IRIS Metals," an Australian lithium mining company that has turned a Custer storage unit into its field office.

Understanding why this land matters to the Lakota Sioux requires confronting the history of land ownership in the Black Hills, King says. She's learned about it through her work as a tribal lawyer and from spending time on the tribe's Pine Ridge Reservation, immersing herself in its heritage.

From 1778 to 1871, the U.S. government signed more than 350 treaties with Native American tribes to formalize relations between sovereign nations. The treaties assigned distinct borders to tribal territory in exchange for peace, but did little to protect tribal interests once settlers moved west. Many treaties were

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rewritten without tribal consent. Others shattered when military troops seized tribal land, killing and displacing thousands of Indigenous people.

When federal officials signed the treaty with the Sioux Nation in 1868, they promised to set aside land encompassing the Black Hills for the tribe's "absolute and undisturbed use and occupation." But gold seekers soon trespassed on this territory; in 1875, officials tried to purchase land to settle conflicts. Lakota Sioux's chiefs vowed to sell the Black Hills only for a price high enough to provide for their tribe's women and children in perpetuity.

In response, U.S. soldiers stormed the Black Hills and blocked the tribe from hunting on its land. They forced starving tribal members to sign a new agreement that would nullify the Sioux Treaty of 1868. As a result, the Sioux, including the Lakota, lost roughly two-thirds of their treaty land, including the revered Black Hills.

"Once they found that gold, they didn't care," said Lone Hill. "They gave us those lands, and then they said, 'We'll take it back now.'"

Tribes lost additional territory when federal legislators passed a law dividing all reservation land into farm plots for individual Native American families. Land deemed "surplus" became a real estate free-for-all, sold or leased to white settlers, cattle ranchers and miners. Many Indigenous people, often assigned the low-quality plots, struggled to grow crops on their farms and had to sell, tribal historians explain. By 1934, Native land holdings had shrunk from 138 million acres to 48 million.

At the Indigenous-led nonprofit organization NDN Collective's headquarters in Rapid City, South Dakota, which borders the eastern Black Hills, then-staff organizer Taylor Gunhammer noted in an interview last year that this chapter of American history is rarely recognized in the mythology of westward expansion.

"At a certain point, operating these mines and establishing these settlements stopped being about pure capitalism, pure greed, and it started to be about harming Indians," said Gunhammer, a Lakota Sioux member who presses for Indigenous empowerment. "The wealth accumulated from all that extraction was a self-awarded prize for harming Indians, which was at the time, and possibly still is, the most American patriotic thing."

About 50 miles southeast of Custer—named after George Armstrong Custer, the Army general who led the first mineral expedition into Sioux territory—what remains of the tribe's land emerges on the horizon: Pine Ridge Reservation. The 2.2 million acres stretch across open and sparsely settled grasslands, punctuated by deteriorating housing, clusters of abandoned vehicles and potholed roads. Nearly 30,000 Lakota Sioux people live here—more than half under 18, according to Lone Hill, sitting in her office flanked by portraits of her great-grandfather.

She considers her historic preservation officer job to be a sacred responsibility, guided by her ancestors' voices to protect their land from mining. But she says it's hard to rally community members when daily life is shaped by poverty. According to the U.S. Census, only a third of working-age adults on the reservation are employed.

"Food, general welfare, health," said Lone Hill, ticking off issues that loom large for tribal members. The environment often comes last, she said, because people are too busy trying to survive.

Lone Hill remembers a time when the Lakota people moved with the seasons: spring brought the tribe out of the Black Hills after sheltering in its trees all winter; summer meant traveling back to sacred sites like Devils Tower in Wyoming. Families came together on summer solstices for sun dances and spiritual renewal. The Black Hills was their "little sanctuary," she recalled—open for hunting, fishing, prayer gatherings.

Now, because of national monument and forestry designations, tribal members say federal regulations have limited those ceremonial practices. Often, they need permits to leave traditional offerings like prayer bundles full of tobacco and herbs.

Reflecting on all that past mining has taken from the tribe without giving back, she said they would never trade their land for lithium development. "This is our tribal footprint—we're still fighting for these lands to be left untouched."

Other Indigenous communities share this conviction. Near Wikieup, Arizona, Brandon Siewiyumptewa, the Hualapai tribesman, worked for about a month overseeing the tribe's sacred spring and the ranch before

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noticing something strange: Water stopped flowing. Eventually, the spring dried up, and the earth cracked open. The only other change he could detect? An Australian mining company had begun drilling for lithium.

For years, the Hualapai Nation warned that Arizona Lithium's Big Sandy Lithium Project could impact their cherished spring. The tribe called attention to the site's status as a cultural property eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and hired a hydrologist to study how the drilling could affect it. An expert federal panel later urged the BLM to consider "the clear potential for effects on the Ha'Kamwe' historic property."

The agency approved the mining project's third-largest drilling phase in June 2024, relying on a 24-year-old study to conclude the drilling would not harm the spring.

That same year, the tribe sued the BLM over Big Sandy's approval and won a temporary restraining order pausing the drilling. In February 2025, Arizona Lithium rescinded its plan, returning to the drawing board.

It's a rare win for a tribe, largely due to its location and the judge's determination that the BLM had not properly studied the project's impacts to groundwater and a protected historical site, said Roger Flynn, director of the legal nonprofit Western Mining Action Project, who represented the Hualapai.

Arizona Lithium has since been purchased by the Navajo Transitional Energy Co., which owns the project. It did not respond to requests for comment.

The Hualapai continue to face threats from other mines. Ka-Voka Jackson, the tribe's historic preservation officer, said keeping up with developments has taken much of her time—time she'd rather spend building the tribe's language, arts and ethno-botany classes.

"We have a lot of responsibility to our people [and] the land," Jackson said, but the barrage of mining projects "doesn't seem to ever stop or slow down."

U.S. laws 'don't give us any rights'

Sioux Nation members, including the Lakota people from Pine Ridge, have spent decades in court fighting to reclaim their traditional territory. As far back as 1923, the tribe sued the federal government, arguing their treaty rights were invalidated illegally—and the U.S. Supreme Court partly agreed. In a landmark 1980 decision, the court ruled the government had violated the original Sioux Treaty of 1868 and essentially stolen tribal land.

Of the breach, a lower court—quoted in the Supreme Court's decision—ruled that a "more ripe and rank case of dishonorable dealings will never, in all probability, be found in our history."

But the justices stopped short of deeming the land's seizure itself illegal and instead ordered Congress to pay about \$105 million for it as "just compensation," including interest accrued since the 1877 taking.

Lakota Sioux members have refused to accept the money. Left in a federal trust account, the award has since grown to about \$2 billion.

"We want the land back. We don't want money," Gunhammer said.

Several Native American tribes have brought similar territorial claims in federal court, often citing the Sioux case. Some ended in financial settlements; others were dismissed or stretched into protracted legal battles. Many cases never restored tribal control over land.

In Nevada, ground zero for America's lithium rush, Western Shoshone members, much like their Sioux counterparts, have maintained that they never ceded their ancestral land. The roughly 80 million acres stretches across multiple states in the West, encompassing the contentious Rhyolite Ridge and Thacker Pass lithium projects. Today, many of the state's 69 proposed mines are sited in or near the tribe's traditional territory.

Like the Sioux, the Shoshone have sued the federal government over its land loss, arguing before the U.S. Supreme Court twice—first in 1984 and again in 2007. But the court dismissed the claims. The government classified money the tribe had accepted as compensation for past damages to the land as payment for the land itself, arguing the tribe had relinquished it, said Fermina Stevens, a Western Shoshone member who heads the Western Shoshone Defense Project, a nonprofit advocating for land and treaty rights. Now, she said, tribal members fear they have little recourse to stop the adverse impacts from projects planned across their ancestral territory.

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"The [American] laws don't give us any rights," Stevens said.

Joe Kennedy, Timbisha Shoshone tribe's former chairman, has spent his life exploring the terrain where construction for the Rhyolite Ridge mine is scheduled to begin later this year. The 58-year-old, who has hunted and gathered pine nuts here since he was a child, has seen dramatic changes. Now, he says, much of what was once there is gone, as drought intensifies and mining companies drill in the region.

'A convenient legal fiction'

The Sioux Nation's precedent-setting case involving traditional tribal territory hinges on the 1831 legal classification of Native American tribes as "domestic dependent nations," says Akim Reinhardt, a Towson University history professor who studies Indigenous communities in North America. Rather than treat tribes as fully sovereign nations, the doctrine treats them as subject to American laws—self-governing, but ultimately under U.S. authority in a guardian-ward relationship. Reinhardt describes the classification as "a convenient legal fiction" designed by U.S. courts to justify an unequal power relationship.

Building on this, the courts have ruled over time that the U.S. holds ultimate title to tribal lands and that Congress can unilaterally change or override constitutionally recognized treaties made with tribes—unlike those between independent nations under international law.

This legal framework helps explain why the U.S. Supreme Court would recognize the Black Hills seizure as wrongful but not order it returned to the Sioux peoples. Under U.S. law, Congress can take tribal land for public use in exchange for fair compensation. The court ruled that the taking was unlawful only because it failed to pay for the land at the time. Paradoxically, U.S. law treats mining claims as highly protected property rights, which makes them more secure than an Indigenous land right recognized by treaty.

Soon after the mine installed monitoring wells in 2019, Cave Spring, a sacred site where Shoshone members gather for cultural teachings and harvest pine nuts known for their golden shells, went dry, Kennedy says.

While groundwater-monitoring wells don't remove water, they can affect hydrologic flow. But Chad Yeftich, Ioneer's vice president for corporate development and external affairs, said in a statement that the project is not affecting the site.

"Independently verified hydrological analysis ... and the BLM's Environmental Impact Statement conclude that the availability of water at Cave Springs is affected by the precipitation cycle in the Silver Peak Range and not by Ioneer's past, current or future activity," he said.

Years before the Rhyolite Ridge project was approved, international human rights bodies sided with the Western Shoshone concerning their land loss claims. In 2002, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which investigates and reports on human rights abuses across North and South America, found that the U.S. government hadn't adequately compensated the tribe for its lost property, or ensured its access to spiritually and culturally significant land. And in a warning letter four years later, a United Nations committee urged the government to cease actions taken against the Western Shoshone people.

Federal officials ignored these rulings. And the U.S. government has refused to ratify international agreements meant to protect Indigenous sovereignty and rights. That includes the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples resolution that calls on officials to obtain the "informed consent" of Indigenous communities before approving development projects that affect them directly.

"Our religion doesn't seem to matter to the United States or these mining companies," Kennedy said. "That's the hurtful part: We have to witness the destruction of these areas that are important to us."

Alysha Khambay, who researches business and human rights in energy transition projects for Amnesty International, said governments and companies alike are using the race for clean energy to sidestep due process.

"The pattern that we're seeing," she said, "is the creation of what we call sacrifice zones for the energy transition. And while the transition is critical in the face of the climate crisis, it can't come at the cost of human rights."

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Fast-tracking could backfire

Studies and interviews with lawmakers and experts suggest that cutting down on environmental reviews or tribal consultations won't significantly speed up the build-out of a domestic lithium industry, as Burgum has claimed. Delays come, for instance, from companies not following permitting rules and submitting incomplete information, or from swings in mineral prices that affect company financing. Bringing a mine into operation consequently takes 15 to 20 years on average, so shaving off a year during permitting can only marginally speed up the process. Instead, many experts warn that fast-tracking mines could backfire.

"Failing to involve these communities early and equitably can result in project delays, litigation or complete shutdowns," said Tom Moerenhout of Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy.

Interviews and research indicate that understaffed agencies struggling to process applications are also a key source of delays. Last year, more than 100 federal lawmakers sent a letter urging the Trump administration to reverse executive orders that would slash funding, eliminate jobs essential to tribal programs and, they warned, ultimately "undermine" tribal sovereignty, violating treaty obligations and the Constitution. The White House moved forward anyway, cutting about 11,000 Interior Department jobs as part of massive layoffs and resignations across the government.

"I don't know if the administration really understands ... [who] could be critical for some permits," Feldgus said. "I think they lost a lot of people who can do that."

One former BLM archaeologist and tribal liaison, who asked not to be named for fear of retaliation, said he accepted the administration's second resignation offer after burning out from trying to cover multiple roles at once amid staffing shortages, and because he saw little chance that situation would improve under Trump. While the first offer placed no restrictions on who could leave, the second wasn't available to employees involved in the permitting process—including archaeologists. By then, he says, he had stepped into a project manager role while backfilling as an archaeologist, and officials didn't realize he should have been ineligible to leave.

Lone Hill has seen an immediate impact. Federal employees with whom she has worked on tribal consultations have lost their jobs, sometimes in the middle of the process. One of them handed her an envelope with a promised report, she told CJI and ICN in March 2025, then was fired a few days later.

Though the price of lithium has been down in recent years, plans to mine are still moving forward in the Black Hills area. Under U.S. mining law, companies can hold claims, get their permits and wait years until the price is right to begin extraction.

Gunhammer, the former NDN Collective organizer, isn't waiting for that day to come. He and fellow activists are drafting state legislation to return all public lands in the Black Hills to tribal stewardship, which would prohibit any kind of mining.

"People [here]now understand that treaties are laws, not little poems, not suggestions," Gunhammer said of support for the bill.

The proposed state legislation has sparked difficult conversations among the tribe. Some worry it could undermine the tribe's claim to remaining ancestral lands beyond the Black Hills if it were to pass. Others wonder who would maintain the land if it were returned. Activists are also fighting a common narrative, pushed by mining companies, that presents the proposed lithium mines as the area's only economic opportunity.

Lone Hill still holds out hope that the Black Hills might one day return to tribal stewardship—and that, for once, history will stop repeating itself. Her biggest dream "is for all of our tribes to come together" on summer solstice at Mato Tipila at Devils Tower "and have our annual sun dance," referring to a rock formation sacred for many Native nations that in 1906 became the first U.S. national monument. Too often, she said, Native children grow up hearing only about the tribe's painful past at least in part because they have lost access to places where they might learn something different.

The cycle of mining, land loss and broken promises has stolen so much, she said. And every new lithium mine, she fears, puts that dream further out of reach.

Wyatt Myskow reported this story for Inside Climate News. Johanna Hansel and Carla Samon Ros were fellows at Columbia Journalism Investigations, the investigative-reporting unit at the Columbia Journalism

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School. Inside Climate News and CJI provided editing, fact checking, data analysis, photography, graphic illustration and other support.

Additional support was provided by the National Press Foundation and the National Press Club Journalism Institute.

Wyatt Myskow covers drought, biodiversity and the renewable energy transition throughout the Western U.S. Based in Phoenix, he previously reported for The Arizona Republic and The Chronicle of Higher Education. Wyatt has lived in the Southwest since birth and graduated from Arizona State University with his bachelor's degree in journalism.

US House rejects constraint on Trump action in Iran, one day after Senate

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

South Dakota's vote

FROM SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, voted against the resolution, which failed 212-212.

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House Thursday rejected a proposal to rein in President Donald Trump's months-long military actions in Iran that have left more than a dozen U.S. military members dead, while killing thousands of civilians and displacing millions in the Middle East, according to third-party monitors.

The measure, known as the War Powers Resolution, is a tool for Congress to limit the president's ability to initiate or escalate military actions abroad. The resolution failed in a 212-212 vote. Most Democrats voted for the measure, though Jared Golden of Maine opposed it. Three Republicans also crossed party lines to vote in favor. They were Tom Barrett of Michigan, Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania and Thomas Massie of Kentucky.

Democratic Rep. Josh Gottheimer of New Jersey sponsored the measure, H.Con. Res. 75.

During Wednesday's debate on the House floor, Gottheimer said that Congress has still not been briefed on the progress or objectives in the Iran war, and argued it's a violation of the U.S. Constitution.

"Oversight is a key constitutional responsibility of Congress," he said.

Pentagon officials testified before Congress this week that the war so far has cost \$29 billion, not including Iran's drone and missile damage to U.S. military installations in the region.

Republican Rep. Brian Mast of Florida, who chairs the House Foreign Affairs Committee, argued on the House floor that Iran was an "imminent threat." He added that he was satisfied with the briefings from the Trump administration's top military officials.

The U.S. Senate on Wednesday rejected an identical measure, its seventh vote on the matter. Three Republicans joined nearly all Democrats, a sign of growing dissatisfaction with the president's own party amid the war.

GOP Sens. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Susan Collins of Maine and Rand Paul of Kentucky joined Democrats. Sen. John Fetterman, Democrat of Pennsylvania, joined Republicans.

The Iran war started on Feb. 28 and so far, at least 13 U.S. military members have died. Human Rights Activists in Iran, a nongovernmental organization based in Fairfax, Virginia, estimated that at least 1,701 civilians, including 254 children have died because of the war.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated in late March that up to 3.2 million Iranians have been displaced due to the U.S. and Israel attack on Iran.

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

US Senate votes to freeze members' pay during future shutdowns

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate approved a resolution Thursday that will prevent lawmakers in that chamber from receiving their paychecks during any government shutdowns that begin after this year's midterm elections.

The voice vote on the measure from Louisiana Republican Sen. John Kennedy will not impact members in the House of Representatives since each chamber of Congress is able to set its own rules and procedures.

The two-page resolution requires the secretary of the Senate to disperse but then hold onto lawmakers paychecks if Congress fails to fund any agency within the federal government on time.

Kennedy said during a floor speech Wednesday he hoped the resolution would reduce the likelihood of future government shutdowns, following three within the last year.

"It's got to stop," he said. "Shutting down government should not be our default solution to our refusal to work out our issues and our differences."

Similar to how federal employees receive back pay after a shutdown ends, Kennedy said his resolution would do the same for senators.

"The senator's salary just would not be available to that senator while we're in a shutdown but once a shutdown is over you'll get your money," he said.

In order to get the votes to adopt the resolution, Kennedy said he "had to make a few accommodations," including that it did not apply to the House and wouldn't take effect before the elections to comply with the 27th Amendment.

Members of Congress earn \$174,000 annually, with those in leadership positions making more. The Constitution allows lawmakers to set their own salaries, which are covered by a permanent, mandatory appropriation.

Lawmakers and the president, unlike the staff who work for them or those throughout the rest of the federal government, received their salaries during past shutdowns unless they took action to halt their paychecks.

Several members asked either the House Chief Administrative Officer or the Senate Finance Clerk to hold onto their paychecks during the first shutdown.

Congress is supposed to pass the dozen annual government funding bills before the start of the new fiscal year on Oct. 1 but hasn't completed all of its work on time in three decades.

Lawmakers regularly approve at least one stopgap spending bill to keep federal programs running mostly on autopilot while the House and Senate work to finalize those appropriations bills during the fall, typically sending them to the president sometime in December.

Policy differences and heightened political tensions, however, led to three shutdowns of varying impact during this fiscal year.

The first began last October and lasted through Nov. 12 as Democrats tried unsuccessfully to force Republicans to extend enhanced tax credits for people who buy health insurance on the Affordable Care Act marketplace.

Lawmakers were able to pass six of the spending bills before a brief partial shutdown took place from Jan. 31 through Feb. 3. The law that ended that funding lapse included five more of the spending bills, leaving Homeland Security as the only department without its annual appropriations bill.

Democratic demands for constraints on immigration enforcement after federal officers shot and killed two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis led to a third shutdown for many of the agencies within DHS. That lasted from Feb. 14 through April 30 when Congress approved their last funding bill without new spending for Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Border Patrol.

Republicans plan to use the complex budget reconciliation process to approve \$72 billion that would cover three years of immigration enforcement activities. GOP lawmakers can do that without Democratic votes in the Senate as long as they stick to the rules.

Lawmakers in both chambers have also begun work on the next fiscal year's batch of 12 government

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funding bills, though it's highly unlikely they all become law before the end of September.

That presents the possibility of yet another government shutdown just weeks before voters head to the polls during November's midterm elections to decide which political party will control Congress for the next two years.

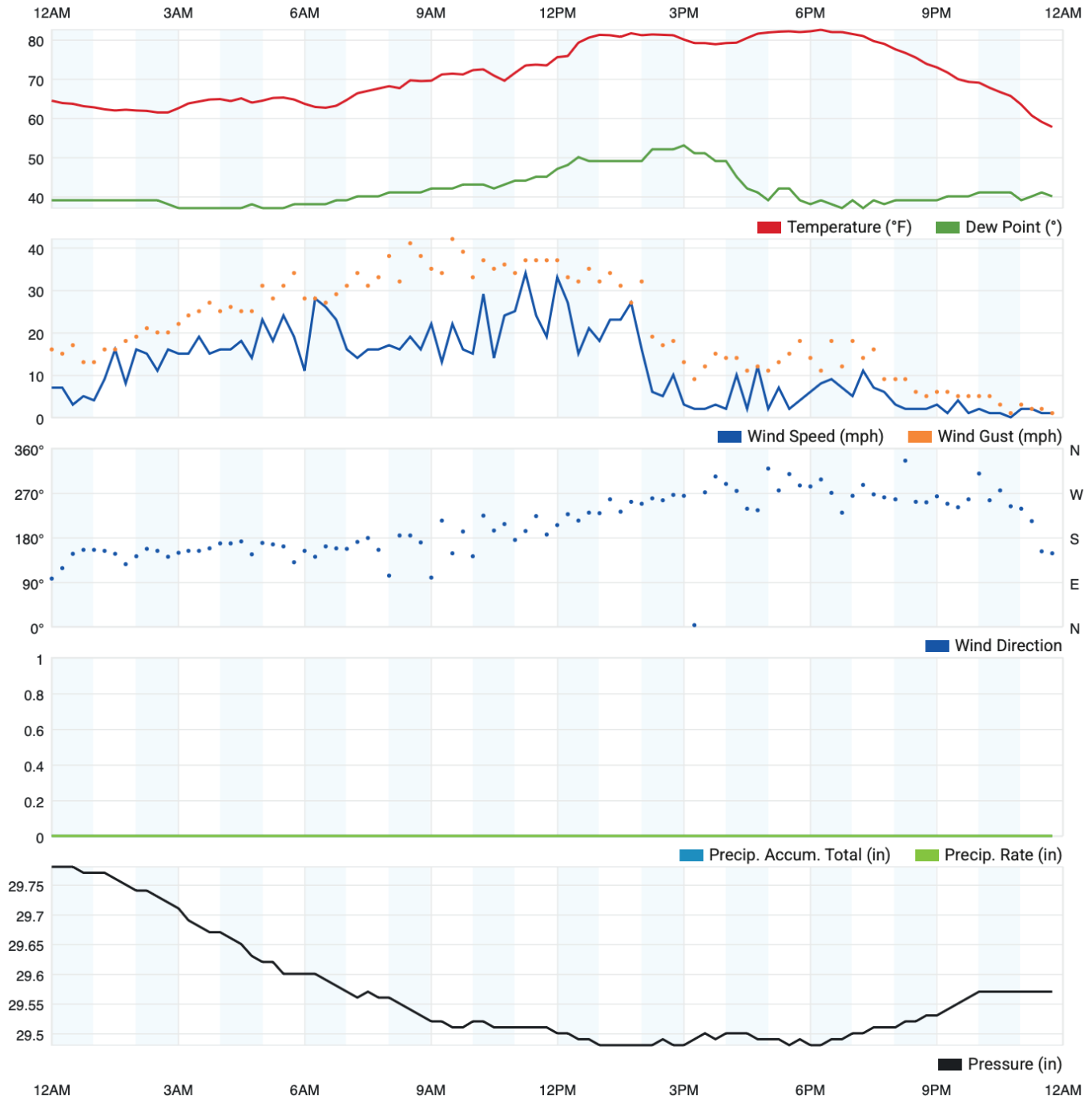
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

May 14, 2026



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Red Flag Warning

Today



High: 81 °F

Sunny then
Sunny and
Breezy

Tonight



Low: 44 °F

Mostly Clear
and Breezy
then Partly
Cloudy

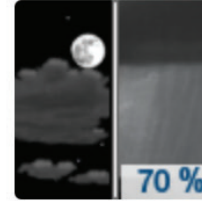
Saturday



High: 79 °F

Mostly Sunny

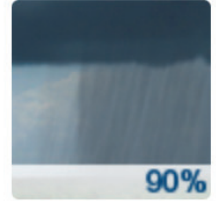
Saturday Night



Low: 46 °F

Partly Cloudy
then Showers
Likely

Sunday



High: 69 °F

Showers



NWS Aberdeen, SD
www.weather.gov/abr

Warm & Dry into Saturday. Storms possible Sunday.

Today



78-84°

Warm

Winds gusting out of
the west 30-40 mph
north of U.S highway
212

****Elevated Fire
Weather Concerns****

Saturday



near 80°

Winds out of the
southeast gusting 25-35
mph over central SD

****Elevated Fire Weather
Concerns over central
SD****

30-60% chance of
evening showers and
isolated thunderstorms
over mainly central SD

Sunday



67-75°

showers and
thunderstorms

**A slight risk of
severe storms in
the afternoon**

Monday



50-60°

Cool - lowest
temperatures over
central SD

60-80% chance of
showers and
thunderstorms

Morning wind gusts
out of the east
30-40 mph

Warm and dry weather continue into Saturday. There is a Red Flag Warning for much of north central to northeastern South Dakota, and west central Minnesota today as winds gust out of the west to northwest 30-40 mph. Fire weather concern will be of central South Dakota Saturday. There is a Slight Risk of severe storms Sunday afternoon.

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THREAT ASSESSMENT

HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

2

WHAT THIS MEANS:
Isolated to Scattered Severe
Storms Possible

Sunday Afternoon

PRIMARY THREATS



LARGE HAIL

SECONDARY THREATS

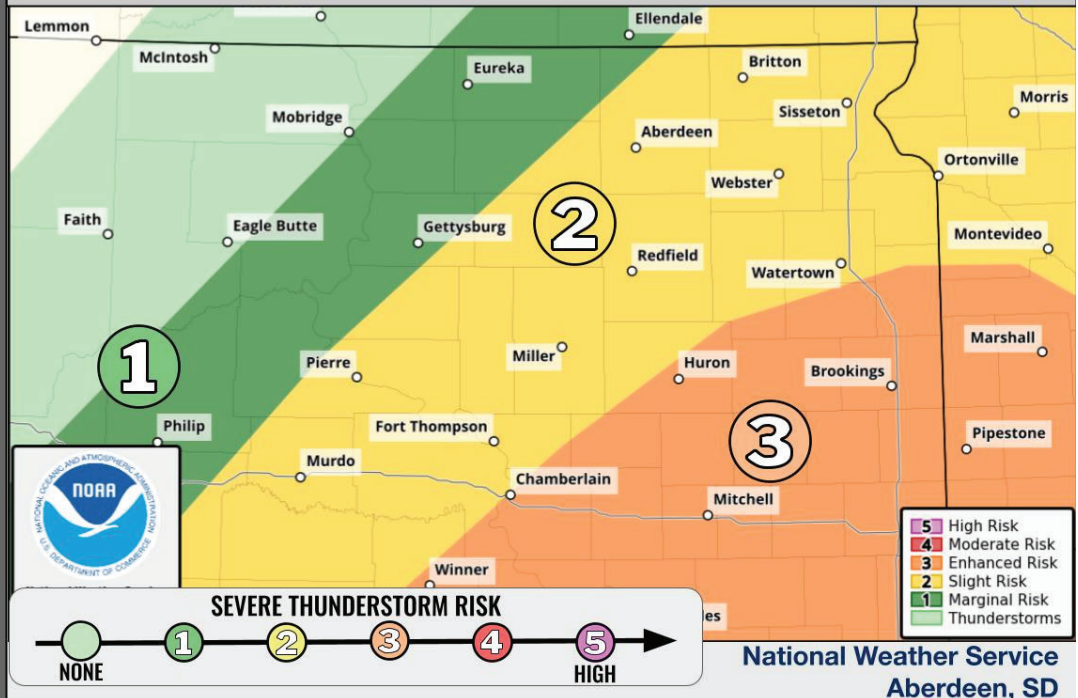


DAMAGING
WIND GUSTS



HEAVY
RAINFALL

Slight Risk For Severe Storms Sunday



There is a Slight Risk of severe storms Sunday afternoon. The primary threat will be large hail. There is an enhanced risk of severe weather over southeastern South Dakota. Stay alert to later updates for timing and intensity forecasts. Have outdoor plans Sunday afternoon? Think about where you would go to stay safe if storms approach.



Peak Wind Gusts Today

May 15, 2026
4:02 AM CDT

Winds gusting out of the east to northeast 30-40 mph today. A few localized higher gusts over north central SD.

Winds diminishing tonight and increasing out of the east Saturday afternoon with gusts 20-35 mph.



**Dry with Elevated Fire Weather
conditions today and Saturday!**
Relative humidity 15-20% this afternoon and again Saturday afternoon.

Maximum Wind Gust (mph) Forecast

	5/15 Fri					5/16 Sat					5/17 Sun			
	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am
McIntosh	36	41	45	44	24	16	12	9	10	20	26	32	37	38
Eagle Butte	29	32	32	31	17	15	12	13	17	28	31	33	33	33
Murdo	21	23	21	18	14	10	10	14	23	32	33	35	33	30
Mobridge	25	31	33	33	18	14	9	7	10	16	22	25	30	32
Pierre	20	23	23	20	10	6	5	6	14	25	29	30	29	28
Gettysburg	25	30	31	30	17	14	10	12	15	22	28	29	32	35
Eureka	30	37	40	41	25	16	12	7	8	13	23	29	35	39
Chamberlain	12	18	22	22	12	6	7	9	18	24	28	28	26	28
Miller	18	23	25	25	13	10	10	9	16	22	26	26	29	29
Redfield	21	25	28	28	16	13	12	9	13	16	23	25	31	31
Aberdeen	24	29	33	33	21	14	13	9	10	13	20	22	29	29
Britton	26	31	35	35	21	13	12	8	10	12	14	20	29	33
Clark	18	22	26	26	17	12	12	12	14	14	20	23	32	36
Webster	22	26	29	29	21	14	13	9	12	13	15	21	29	32
Watertown	18	22	25	25	16	10	10	9	13	13	17	21	26	30
Sisseton	25	29	31	31	21	15	14	13	13	13	13	15	18	20
Milbank	21	23	25	25	17	14	13	12	12	13	14	16	20	22
Wheaton	24	26	28	29	20	13	14	14	13	14	12	14	22	26



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 83 °F at 6:13 PM

Low Temp: 59 °F at 11:27 PM

Wind: 42 mph at 9:26 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 103 in 1931

Record Low: 23 in 2014

Average High: 70

Average Low: 44

Average Precip in May.: 1.65

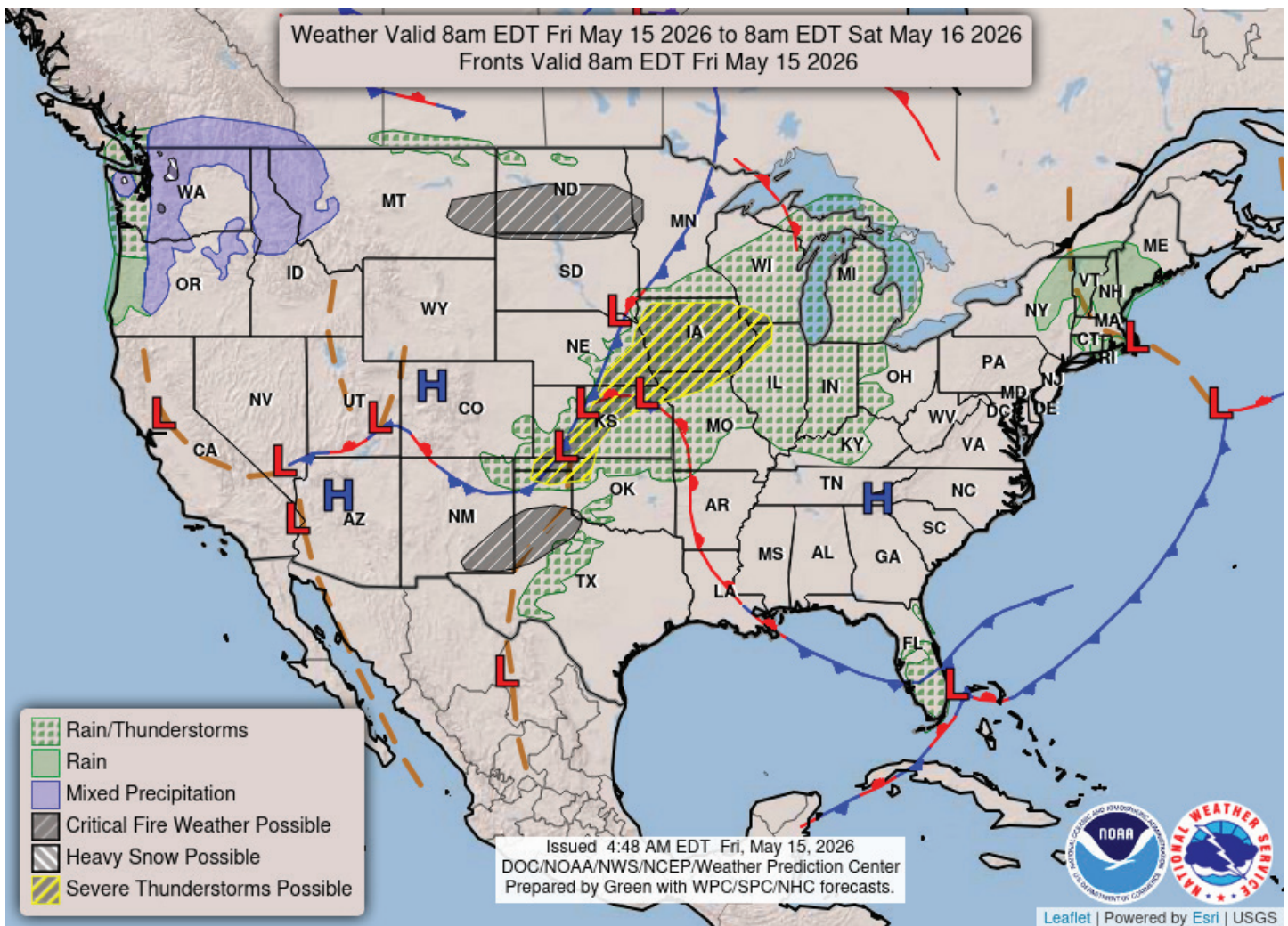
Precip to date in May.: 0.03

Average Precip to date: 5.62

Precip Year to Date: 3.15

Sunset Tonight: 8:55 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:00 am



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Today in Weather History

May 15th, 1964: A two-day rainfall event ended with 3.57 inches at Rapid City. Damage to roads and bridges was reported in the northern Black Hills.

1834 — The Northern Atlantic Coast States were in the midst of their greatest May snowstorm of record. The hills around Newbury, VT, were covered with two to three feet of snow. (David Ludlum)

1968 — A tornado touched down southwest of Anchorage, AK. It was the second of just three tornadoes reported in Alaska since 1950. ([The Weather Channel](http://www.weather.com))

1972 — The worst ice jam flooding of memory for long-time residents took place along the Kuskokwim River and Yukon River in Alaska. It was the first time since 1890 that the two rivers "flowed as one". The towns of Oscarville and Napaskiak were completely inundated. (15th-31st) ([The Weather Channel](http://www.weather.com))

1987 — Unseasonably warm weather returned to the north central U.S. Seven cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Janestown, ND, with a reading of 96 degrees. Thunderstorms in Utah produced five inches of rain south of Bicknell. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Thunderstorms in Oklahoma produced wind gusts to 80 mph in Oklahoma County, and baseball size hail at Pawnee. Hail piled up to a depth of 18 inches south of Pawnee. Hail damage in Oklahoma was estimated at close to 25 million dollars. Thunderstorms in the Upper Midwest produced golf ball size hail around Cleveland, OH, and wind gusts to 83 mph at Angola, IN. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Thunderstorms developing along and north of a stationary front produced severe weather in the south central U.S. Thunderstorms spawned eleven tornadoes, and there were 145 reports of large hail and damaging winds. Softball size hail caused 2.1 million dollars damage at Sherman, TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Central Plains Region and Oklahoma to Indiana and western Kentucky. Thunderstorms spawned fifteen tornadoes, including seven in Oklahoma, and there were 165 reports of large hail or damaging winds. A tornado killed one person, injured a dozen others, and caused four million dollars damage at Stillwater, OK. Another tornado injured eight persons at Foyil, OK. Thunderstorms in Oklahoma also produced wind gusts to 92 mph at Oologah Lake, and softball size hail at Canton and north of Oakwood. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



The Church: What's It All About?

Finding a church is easy, but choosing the right one requires biblical wisdom and the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Colossians 1:18-20: 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,

20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Churches are easy to find, but choosing which one to join is more involved. Such an important decision deserves some investigation, and it's good to start with what God's Word says.

Ekklēsia—the Greek word for "church"—refers to people called out by God's grace for the purpose of assembling to worship and serve Christ. Scripture describes the church as a body of believers and Jesus as the head (Ephesians 5:22-30; Col. 1:18).

God's design involves worship, instruction, encouragement, and evangelism, as well as ministry to those in need—both within the fellowship and in the greater community. A healthy, vibrant congregation is possible when members rely on the Holy Spirit's guidance. The work of the church is to be done in His power, in humble and prayerful submission to the Lord.

When thinking about membership, consider these important questions: Does the church believe the Word of God? Is it discipling its people? Does the fellowship have missionary or evangelistic programs?

Joining a congregation is a significant matter, as a fellowship of believers is one tool God uses to mature and encourage His children. Listen for His Spirit's direction as you prayerfully seek out a church home.

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:
05.14.26

12 32 36 37 40 2

TOP PRIZE:
\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 57 Mins 47 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.12.26

17 32 35 40 47 17

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$251,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 42 Mins 47 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.13.26

17 18 28 37 42 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$25,750,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 57 Mins 47 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.13.26

7 16 29 31 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$90,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 12 Mins 47 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.13.26

8 13 39 63 66 2

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 41 Mins 47 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.13.26

22 31 52 56 67 15

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$86,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 41 Mins 47 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Democrats test a new red state strategy: Back independents over their own nominees

By STEVE PEOPLES and MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Democratic leaders, desperate to compete in red states where their party brand is toxic, are embracing something new this midterm season: Not backing Democrats.

In states like Nebraska, Idaho and Alaska, Democratic officials are, in some cases, looking past their own party's candidates while subtly encouraging — or even openly promoting — independent candidates they hope can outperform the Democratic label. The Democratic National Committee and some of its allies in Washington are quietly supporting the new strategy.

Meanwhile, some of the independent candidates are chatting in a group text about their approach as they plot a path that could shake up Congress, which is consumed by partisan gridlock.

Nebraska Democrats this week chose a nominee for U.S. Senate, Cindy Burbank, who said a major campaign priority was to ensure a Democrat wouldn't be on the fall ballot to pull support from independent Dan Osborn. Shortly after polls closed, Burbank reiterated her plan to drop out in the coming weeks during a private conversation with a party official, according to state Democratic chair Jane KleeB.

Democratic leaders believe Osborn, who came within 7 points of winning a Senate seat in 2024, has the best chance to defeat Republican Sen. Pete Ricketts.

Democrats' pivot toward independents is part of an intentional strategy in some places — and something closer to a wink and a nod in others — that covers a handful of high-profile Senate and House and even statehouse contests. Independent Senate candidates are also running in states like Idaho, South Dakota and Montana, where Democratic leadership has so far been unwilling to fully embrace the independents, although many view them as the Democrats' best chance to stop Republicans this fall.

"For some states, and Nebraska is one of them, where Democrats are 32% of the electorate, this is a long-term strategy for us," said KleeB, who also serves as a vice chair to the Democratic National Committee.

KleeB said her state party is backing independents in at least four state legislative seats in addition to the U.S. Senate: "We have to build a coalition with independents in order to win elections so we can do good work for the people. Period."

Some of the Democratic Party's national political machine appears to be on board.

The Democrats' fundraising site, ActBlue, serves some of the independent candidates, as do popular Democratic-allied website builders. At the same time, some of the party's campaign committees in Washington quietly provide logistical support in some cases, while avoiding public criticism of the independent candidates even in some races where there is a Democratic nominee.

"The Democratic Party's brand is awful right now," said Democratic strategist Josh Schwerin. "The combination of the brand problem and the existential nature of the threat that our country is facing requires us to have a big tent and look for candidates who can win."

There are risks for the Democratic Party

Some Democratic donors, strategists and party leaders from other states have privately pushed back, insisting Democrats should not look past their own nominees for short-term political gain. They want Democratic officials, in Washington and on the ground in red states, to work harder to make the Democratic brand more attractive — even if it takes several more years to be competitive.

"What's the independent going to do for the Democratic Party if they win?" asked Democratic strategist Mike Ceraso, who sees the shift toward independents as an attempt to disguise Democrats in some cases. "We're the party of truth and honesty and integrity, but we're playing these stupid political games?"

And there is no guarantee that the independent candidates, if elected, would support all of the Democrats' policy priorities or even Democratic leadership in Congress.

In Idaho, independent Senate candidate Todd Achilles, an Army veteran and former Democratic state

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legislator, said he won't be caucusing with either party if elected. He explained his politics as "straight down the middle," and said he believes in individual liberties.

"Idahoans should be able to live how they want," he said. But the Democratic Party was a bad fit because it "has given up on little red states like Idaho."

On his list of problems with Democrats is that the party made a big mistake by initially running Joe Biden again for president in 2024. But he also said "the shine is coming off" Trump, whom Idaho voters backed by 36 points in 2024.

Achilles said he and other military veterans running for Senate as independents chat in the text chain and are "very much on the same page." He says the group wants to see "guardrails," including term and age limits and campaign finance reform.

"The priority is to get Congress functioning again," he said. "We gotta break the grip of the two-party system."

'I'll never vote for a Democrat'

In South Dakota, Navy and Air Force veteran Brian Bengs has launched an independent bid to defeat Republican incumbent Sen. Mike Rounds, who's seeking a third term this fall.

Bengs ran as a Democrat against Senate Majority Leader John Thune four years ago and lost by 43 points.

A lifelong independent, he said he got turned down by the party this time when he sought to run with its organizational support but without the label. Still, he insists he can win without the party's formal backing.

One key lesson from his 2022 campaign, he says, was how hard it was to break through with the Democratic Party label.

Voters would immediately ask, "What are you?" he recalled.

"When you say, 'I'm a lifelong independent running as a Democrat,'" Bengs said, the response was quick. "I'll never vote for a Democrat.' And that was it," he said.

"So that takeaway soured me on running again in any party system, because it was just a soul-sucking experience."

In Alaska, some Democrats believe that commercial fisherman Bill Hill, a retired school superintendent, may represent their best hope in defeating first-term Republican Rep. Nick Begich for the state's only House seat.

Hill, a lifelong independent, raised more than \$780,000 in the first three months of the year, besting Democrat Matt Schultz, a pastor, who raised \$578,000.

The state Democratic Party declined to endorse Schultz at its recent convention, which Hill also attended. The House Democrats' campaign committee in Washington has also declined so far to promote Schultz's candidacy. Hill, meanwhile, is racking up local union endorsements.

Hill's message to voters, he said, is the same for Republicans, Democrats and independents: "You need to be pragmatic about who you choose to support in this election cycle, because at the end of the day, we need a change in the House seat in Alaska."

A spokeswoman for the National Republican Senatorial Committee criticized independents like Osborn, Bengs, Achilles and Seth Bodnar, who is running in Montana, as "fake Independents who would push liberal Democratic policies in the Senate."

Currently, there are two independents in the Senate: Maine Sen. Angus King and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders. Both caucus with Democrats.

In an interview, Hill said he's unlikely to caucus with Republicans in Washington if elected, but he's not committing to joining Democrats either. He was reluctant to criticize the Democratic Party or Trump.

Hill acknowledged the challenge of running for Congress as an independent, but said there are benefits, too.

"There's freedom," he said. "I can truly represent the working people of Alaska."

Death toll in attack on Kyiv apartment building now stands at 24

By SAMYA KULLAB and BARRY HATTON Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Friday that a Russian missile attack on a Kyiv apartment building the previous day killed 24 people, including what local officials said were three teenagers.

Emergency workers finished digging through the building's rubble after more than a day, Zelenskyy said on X.

The cruise missile hit the nine-story corner block during what the Ukrainian air force said was Russia's biggest barrage of the country since its all-out invasion.

The assault mostly targeted the Ukrainian capital, where 48 people were wounded, including two children, Zelenskyy said.

Russia hammered Ukraine with large-scale aerial attacks in the days following a May 9-11 ceasefire that U.S. President Donald Trump said he asked Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin to observe. Fighting went on over those 72 hours, although reportedly on a lesser scale.

This week's attacks ran counter to recent suggestions from Trump and Putin that the war, now in its fifth year, is close to ending.

Zelenskyy said Thursday that Moscow had launched more than 1,560 drones against Ukrainian population centers since Wednesday. In all, some 180 sites across the country were damaged, including more than 50 residential buildings, he said.

Previously, the biggest Russian drone attack was from the evening of March 23 to the evening of March 24 when Moscow's forces fired nearly 1,000 drones and missiles at Ukraine.

Ukraine has also built up significant long-range capabilities, and Russia's Defense Ministry said Friday that air defenses downed 355 drones overnight in one of the largest Ukrainian drone attacks of the war.

Several airports suspended flights overnight because of the attacks.

Also, a Ukrainian drone attack on Ryazan, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) southeast of Moscow, killed four people, including a child, Ryazan Gov. Pavel Malkov said.

After the attack, massive plumes of black smoke spewed from a fire at a local oil refinery. Ukraine has targeted Russian oil facilities in an effort to deny vital export revenue for Moscow and rattle the Kremlin.

Ukrainian officials made no immediate comment about the Ryazan strike.

The Ukrainian capital observed an official day of mourning Friday in remembrance of those killed Thursday, and Zelenskyy visited the site.

The cruise missile that hit the apartment building was built in the second quarter of this year, Zelenskyy said, apparently after Ukrainian experts analyzed the wreckage.

"This means Russia is still importing the components, resources and equipment necessary for missile production in circumvention of global sanctions," Zelenskyy said in another post on X late Thursday.

"Stopping Russia's sanctions evasion schemes must be a genuine priority for all our partners," he said.

Russia and Ukraine have continued to occasionally swap prisoners of war, and 205 from each country returned home Friday.

Zelenskyy said it was the first phase of a planned 1,000-for-1,000 prisoner swap. Some of the Ukrainians released had been held in Russian captivity since 2022, he said, and had fought in some of the war's fiercest battles.

Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed the exchange and thanked the United Arab Emirates for helping broker it.

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World shares are lower after South Korea's Kospi hits records, as Trump wraps up Beijing trip

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — World shares retreated Friday and South Korea's Kospi index gave up gains after reaching an all-time high, as investors watch for developments from the Iran war and as U.S. President Donald Trump wrapped up his summit in Beijing with Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

U.S. futures were down after Wall Street reached fresh records.

In early European trading, Britain's FTSE 100 traded 1.2% lower at 24,092.41. France's CAC 40 also fell 1.2% to 7,987.27, while Germany's DAX dropped 1.5% to 24,092.41.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 fell 2% to 61,409.29 after rising briefly earlier in the day. South Korea's Kospi lost 6.1% to 7,493.18 on investors' profit-taking, after crossing the 8,000 mark for the first time and reaching 8,046.78, in part powered by excitement around the artificial intelligence boom.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng was down 1.6% to 25,962.73, while the Shanghai Composite index fell 1% to 4,135.39.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 dipped 0.1% to 8,630.80.

Taiwan's Taiex was 1.4% lower while India's Sensex was up 0.1%.

Trump wrapped up his China visit on Friday after a series of meetings with Xi that touched on issues including U.S.-China trade, further economic cooperation and Taiwan. Investors are monitoring trade deal updates on areas such as American soybeans, beef and airplanes as Xi warned Trump that differences over Taiwan could lead to clashes and conflict.

While there is some optimism over U.S.-China relations, some analysts suggest any deals should be looked at with a sense of caution.

They recalled how a number of the promised projects and investments that came out of U.S.-China deals from Trump's last China visit in 2017 did not end up materializing, as tensions between Washington and Beijing rose in the following years.

"Headline deals should be looked at with a healthy degree of skepticism," wrote Leah Fahy and Julian Evans-Pritchard, China economists at Capital Economics, in a Friday note.

Trump also said in an interview that China could buy U.S. oil, more than a year after China effectively stopped buying crude oil from the United States following Trump's imposition of hefty trade tariffs last year. Trump said Xi told him China "would like to be of help" in brokering an end to the Iran war.

Oil prices climbed more than 3% early Friday, as U.S.-Iran talks on permanently ending the Iran war stalled, and after a ship anchored off the United Arab Emirates was seized and another cargo ship near Oman was attacked.

Brent crude, the international standard, was 3.2% higher at \$109.11 per barrel. It was trading at around \$70 a barrel before the war in Iran started in late February.

Benchmark U.S. crude was up 3.7% to \$104.94 per barrel.

Global energy flow has remained constrained with the Strait of Hormuz, crucial for global oil and gas transit, still largely closed and as the U.S. imposed a sea blockade on Iranian ports since last month. The White House said on Thursday after a bilateral meeting between Trump and Xi that both sides agreed the Strait of Hormuz must remain open.

On Thursday, Wall Street shares gained with the benchmark S&P 500 rising 0.8% to 7,501.24 and hitting an all-time high for a second consecutive day.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average was up more than 0.7% at 50,063.46, the first time it closed at above the 50,000 level since the Iran war. The technology-heavy Nasdaq composite climbed 0.9% to 26,635.22.

Shares of technology giant Cisco Systems jumped 13.4% following better-than-reported results and after the company said it was cutting fewer than 4,000 jobs. Nvidia rose 4.4% as investors' hopes grew over updates on sales of its advanced H200 chips to Chinese firms as CEO Jensen Huang visited Beijing with Trump.

In other dealings, the U.S. dollar rose to 158.54 Japanese yen from 158.37 yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1622, down from \$1.1669.

Powell's legacy at the Fed to be shaped by his misjudging inflation and standing up to Trump

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Jerome Powell was sworn in as chair of the Federal Reserve eight years ago, economists worried that inflation and interest rates were too low and that too few Americans had jobs.

Now, as Powell steps down from the post after eight tumultuous years, the U.S. economy is transformed: Inflation soared after the pandemic and has remained above the Fed's 2% target for more than five years, angering voters and making rents, cars, and groceries harder to afford. The Fed's key short-term rate rose to a two-decade high in 2023, even as unemployment fell to a half-century low.

Along the way, Powell shrugged off relentless personal attacks from President Donald Trump that began just months after his appointment. But in January, he pushed back against an unprecedented legal investigation by the Justice Department, becoming one of the few top officials in Washington to stand up to the Trump White House.

Powell said he will continue serving on the governing board until he is confident the Fed's independence is truly restored. His success at protecting the central bank from day-to-day politics will be a key part of his legacy.

"It is not an unblemished record, but in an extremely challenging context, he's performed exceedingly well," said David Wilcox, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics and director of research at Bloomberg Economics. "And my overall assessment is that the country has been lucky indeed to have him as chair."

Unlike many of his predecessors, Powell, 73, is not a trained economist, but a lawyer who also worked in finance before joining the Fed's board of governors in 2012. Unassuming in public and private, Powell often introduces himself as "Jay" and would display his guitar-playing skills, honed as a student busking through Europe, at the Fed's holiday parties.

'Transitory' inflation proved persistent

An inescapable part of Powell's legacy will be the post-pandemic inflation surge, when consumer prices rose by a four-decade high of 9.1% in June 2022.

Overall prices are now 27% higher than just before the pandemic six years ago, a staggering change for a country that had experienced little inflation for generations. Prices rose just 10% in the six years before the pandemic. Groceries are 30% more expensive than six years ago, after they rose just 3.6% in the six years preceding COVID.

Powell and other Fed officials — and indeed most economists — initially said the inflationary surge was "transitory," a result of supply chain snarls brought about by the pandemic, as COVID shut down factories and slowed ports around the world.

Their immediate priority was supporting the economy in a crisis.

In two moves in March 2020, they slashed their benchmark interest rate by 1.5 percentage points to near zero. The Fed also bought large amounts of Treasury debt and government-backed mortgage securities to reduce longer-term interest rates and took other steps to pour money into the financial system to keep credit markets functioning during pandemic chaos.

In April 2020, Powell said that the Fed would "continue to use these powers forcefully, proactively, and aggressively until we are confident that we are solidly on the road to recovery."

Even as inflation zoomed past the Fed's 2% target in 2021, the central bank kept its key interest rate near zero until March 2022, when inflation hit 6.9%, according to the Fed's preferred measure.

The Fed's delay in raising rates was largely informed by a traditional economic view that inflation, stemming from a supply shock, would be temporary and if a central bank cranked up borrowing costs to fight it, the higher rates would just harm the economy and lift unemployment even as the supply crunch faded.

Misreading tea leaves

Meanwhile, the Trump and Biden administrations pumped about \$5 trillion in government spending into the economy, in the form of multiple stimulus checks, support for small businesses, and other aid. The

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flow of dollars fueled a spending spike just as supply chains were unable to deliver on the demand.

By keeping its key rate near zero for so long, Powell's critics charge, the Fed contributed to that excess spending and worsened inflation.

"Even though there was all the evidence there in the data that aggregate demand was going through the roof, they still said it was a transitory supply shock," said Mickey Levy, a former top economist at Bank of America and a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution. "The Fed contributed to that inflation and completely misread the tea leaves."

As inflation began to spread into items such as apartment rents and surveys showed Americans increasingly worried it would last, Powell pivoted and oversaw the sharpest increase in interest rates since the early 1980s to combat the price spike.

Still, many leading economists, including former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, worried that defeating inflation would require a recession and a sharp increase in unemployment. Instead, inflation dropped to 2.3% by September 2024, according to the Fed's preferred measure, nearly reaching its 2% target.

By reducing inflation without a sharp economic downturn, Powell largely achieved an elusive "soft landing." Inflation then moved higher after Trump imposed sweeping tariffs last April.

Focusing on unemployment

Fighting inflation was a sharp shift for a Fed chair that began his term more focused on the Fed's mandate to pursue maximum employment. Before the pandemic, Powell often lauded the benefits of a strong job market for disadvantaged workers, winning plaudits from many progressive economists.

Yet some economists argue the Fed's focus on employment contributed to its delayed response to post-COVID inflation. In an August 2021 speech, Powell said the then-elevated unemployment rate of 5.4% was a reason to avoid hiking rates too early.

Still, many analysts defend Powell's support for the maximum employment mandate. Julia Coronado, president of MacroPolicy Perspectives and a former Fed economist, said Powell was right to keep rates low before the pandemic, even as unemployment steadily declined, because there were no signs inflation was worsening.

"If you can actually push a little harder for a little longer with no consequences for inflation, then you should damn well do it," she said. "He was absolutely right about that. He's still right about that."

For his part, Powell said in late April that "overweighting the employment market" had nothing to do with the inflation spike.

"It was a global shock that happened essentially very, very similarly all over the world," he said.

Fighting for Fed independence

Last July, in an image that will likely prove the most enduring of his time as Fed chair, Powell and Trump stood before cameras in hard hats at the site of the Fed's extensive \$2.5 billion building renovation, which Trump had criticized as excessive.

Trump claimed the project would cost even more -- \$3.1 billion — and showed Powell a paper listing the costs. Powell took out his reading glasses and corrected the president, on camera, by noting that he had included a third building that had already been renovated.

It was emblematic of Powell's willingness to push back against Trump's unprecedented attacks. Economists have long supported an independent Fed because it allows the central bank to take difficult steps — such as sharply raising interest rates to combat inflation — that politicians often oppose because they can be painful.

Powell benefited from strong relationship-building with Congress. Research by University of Maryland economist Thomas Drechsel has found that Powell met with senators more than twice as often as his two predecessors, with the meetings evenly split between both parties.

During one visit, Powell even endeared himself to North Carolina Republican Sen. Thom Tillis' dog, a move that paid huge dividends. Tillis essentially blocked Senate approval of Kevin Warsh, Trump's pick to replace Powell, until the investigation of the building project was dropped. The Justice Department eventually gave up on its probe.

Even those who fault Powell on some policy decisions credit him for defending the Fed.

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"The big plus is the way he has protected central bank independence," said Don Kohn, a former vice chair of the Fed. "That is the most important thing for the future of the Federal Reserve and for protecting the public interest in having an independent central bank."

Powell hasn't said when he may leave the Fed, though he could remain on the governing board until January 2028.

"You want people to ... set interest rates to benefit the general public," Powell said at his last news conference, "and focus only on that and ignore political considerations. This isn't bipartisan, this is nonpartisan."

Iran war energy shock drives interest in ethanol and other biofuels across hard-hit Asia

By SIBI ARASU and ANTON L. DELGADO Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — Taxi driver Ravi Ranjan, who lives with his wife and child in New Delhi, said shipping disruptions caused by the Iran war have forced him to pay higher prices for cooking fuel at a time when India's prime minister is also urging residents to reduce driving and travel.

It's all hitting Ranjan's bottom line, he said, as he's paying three times as much for liquid petroleum gas after facing delays on delivery of the cooking fuel.

"I used to get a cylinder of LPG for 1,000 rupees (\$11), now I pay 3,000 rupees (\$31) in the black market," he said.

On the other side of the country, in the coastal city of Chennai, Sushmita Sankar, an advertising executive, said her gasoline and cooking fuel expenses are skyrocketing because of the war. Sankar said gasoline blended with ethanol — the default mix available at fuel stations now — is also worsening her car's mileage.

"Fuel expenses are increasing and with only ethanol mixed petrol available, I feel my car's mileage has reduced in the last year or so," she said. "Already our days are busy with work and taking care of our child's school and other needs. Having to now spend a lot of time to fill my car or buy LPG is making things even more hectic."

Against the backdrop of cooking gas shortages and crude oil price increases, India has proposed letting vehicles run on 85%, or even 100%, ethanol. On Friday, India increased its petrol and diesel prices and local news outlets reported panic buying leading to long queues in India's Odisha state. India has also banned all exports of sugar at least through September to ensure a local supply of sugar, but also to ensure enough raw material is available if ethanol blending levels are to be increased.

The government claims more ethanol will reduce vehicle pollution, but drivers have concerns about mileage. Environmental experts also say that producing corn, rice and other grains for ethanol can take away from food and livestock needs.

Asia was first and hardest hit by fossil fuel disruptions caused by the Iran war's closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a critical shipping artery for energy.

As nations brace for a second wave of impacts, governments want to use more biofuels to slash fuel imports. Indonesia and Malaysia are also pushing policies to increase fuel mixing with palm oil-based substitutes, though experts warn this could drive agricultural expansion and deforestation.

Despite this war-driven interest, it may still take years for higher fuel blends to hit the road in Asia because of time needed for developing supply chains, researching new blends and testing vehicle compatibility.

India blends biofuels to cut costs

Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked Indians this month to make "nationally responsible choices" to save fuel by using more public transport, carpooling and skipping international travel.

India imports nearly 90% of its crude oil, so the Iran war has hampered vehicles that need gasoline and millions of homes and restaurants that need LPG. Industries that require natural gas have also been affected. Meanwhile, a national electric grid that runs mostly on coal and some renewables has kept the lights on.

After the Iran war started, the Indian government responded by diversifying their oil sources and proposing higher biofuel blends, but this has only cushioned the shock a little, said energy experts.

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Most fuel pumps in India now sell a 20% ethanol blend after the country achieved its goal to roll the blend out nationally in 2025, five years ahead of a government target. Policymakers are considering increasing the blend across all gasoline up to 27% by 2030. The recent announcement by India's transport ministry proposing to allow vehicles that run on 85% ethanol, or even fully on it, is the strongest signal so far to automobile makers to begin producing vehicles compatible with such high blending. The timeline for these even higher blends is still unclear.

"Moving toward higher ethanol blends reflects the government's long-term vision for energy security, lower emissions, and reduced dependence on imported crude oil," said Chandra Kumar Jain, president of the Grain Ethanol Manufacturers Association.

India's 20% ethanol blend led to a 2.5% reduction in crude oil imports in 2025, according to the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

Any oil import reduction is good, but a downside of the rapid pace of fuel blending is policy uncertainty and confusion among automobile manufacturers, said Charith Konda of IEEFA.

Southeast Asia raises biofuel ambitions

Southeast Asia similarly sees bioenergy as a way to shield itself from the current crisis and future shocks, according to Reza Yosri, an energy expert at the consultancy Ramboll.

Indonesia wants to increase fuel blending to 50% biodiesel, up from 40%, under a program launched in March by President Prabowo Subianto, who said, "We are going in a big way to biofuel."

The biofuel initiative is part of Indonesia's push for "energy sovereignty" in response to the recent fuel disruptions, according to Putra Adhiguna of Jakarta-based Energy Shift Institute.

Fuel blending will also help Indonesia develop a local market for the palm oil it sells globally, he said. But he cautioned that land clearing and deforestation must be monitored.

In April, Malaysia approved a proposal to gradually increase its fuel mixing to 15% biodiesel and 85% fossil diesel, with a future 20% blend under consideration.

Skyrocketing fuel costs have "revived the idea," said Ahmad Rafdi Endut, a Kuala Lumpur-based energy analyst. However, he cautioned that higher concentrations will need more testing and consumers are wary about reduced mileage.

Debated biofuel benefits

While ethanol blending is often presented as a substitute for gasoline, experts warn that it is more complicated.

Shyamasis Das of the New Delhi-based Centre for Social and Economic Progress said it's not clear how higher blends would affect current engines, and it will take time to scale up manufacturing for engines that can run on the even higher concentrations.

Drivers may notice trade-offs. Ethanol is less energy-dense than gasoline, meaning vehicles tend to consume more fuel to cover the same distance, Das explained.

Concerns also remain that the crops needed for ethanol could compete with the food supply, raising prices and increasing water stress, according to Das. In India, about 70% of ethanol comes from crops like sugarcane, corn and rice.

Producing a single liter (34 fluid ounces) of ethanol can require anywhere from 3,000 liters (792 gallons) to 10,000 liters (2,641 gallons) of water, a resource already under pressure in a country facing groundwater depletion.

While biofuels can reduce tailpipe emissions, their overall climate impact depends on their production.

Konda, the analyst with IEEFA, said that electric vehicles are likely a more efficient long-term solution, along with moving industries to renewable energy instead of fossil or biofuels.

The climate benefits of crop-based ethanol can be limited by factors including land use and water consumption, analysts say.

Das, with CSEP, said producing ethanol from materials that do not require additional land or water — like agricultural residues, municipal waste and used oils — is key.

"If the biofuel is not sourced from residues or waste, they are not usually treated as renewable," he said.

Tensions flare near Strait of Hormuz as a ship is seized and another is sunk

By ADAM SCHRECK and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A ship anchored off the United Arab Emirates was seized and taken toward Iran and another — a cargo ship near Oman — sank after being attacked, authorities said Thursday, as tensions escalated near the Strait of Hormuz.

It wasn't immediately clear who was behind these incidents, but they happened as a senior Iranian official reiterated his country's claim of control over the waterway and another said it had a right to seize oil tankers connected to the U.S.

The turmoil in the strait, which a fifth of the world's oil passed through before the war, has been a sticking point for weeks in talks between the U.S. and Iran to end the conflict. Iran's grip on the vital waterway has jolted the world economy and spiked fuel prices far beyond the Middle East.

The ongoing instability in the region came as U.S. President Donald Trump met with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Beijing. The White House said both sides had agreed that the Strait of Hormuz must remain open.

Just last week, tensions flared in the strait when U.S. forces fired on and disabled Iranian oil tankers that they said were trying to breach its blockade of Iran's ports.

Seizures and attacks in Hormuz ongoing

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said it received reports that the ship seized Thursday was taken by unauthorized personnel while anchored 38 nautical miles (70 kilometers, 44 miles) northeast of the UAE port of Fujairah, an important oil export terminal that has been repeatedly attacked during the war with Iran.

The U.K. maritime center did not name the ship seized Thursday and said it is investigating. The British military said the vessel is heading toward Iranian waters.

Indian authorities said Thursday that an Indian-flagged cargo ship sank off the coast of Oman after an attack sparked a fire aboard the vessel while it was en route from Somalia to Sharjah, another UAE port. They did not say who attacked the ship.

The attack on the Indian-flagged cargo ship Haji Ali occurred Wednesday, according to Mukesh Mangal, a senior official in India's shipping ministry. He said all 14 Indian crew members were rescued by Oman's coast guard and were safe.

India's foreign ministry called the incident "unacceptable" and condemned continued attacks on commercial shipping and civilian mariners. The ministry did not identify who carried out the attack.

Seizures come at tense diplomatic moment

Iranian semiofficial news agencies reported that Chinese ships began passing through the strait Wednesday night under new Iranian protocols. According to the reports, Tehran agreed to facilitate the passage of several Chinese vessels after requests from China's foreign minister and Beijing's ambassador to Iran. The ships began their passage as Trump arrived in China.

The seizure of a ship off the coast of the UAE happened hours after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced he had quietly visited the country during the Israeli-U.S. war with Iran, though the UAE swiftly denied it.

The Gulf nation normalized relations with Israel in 2020. Iran has criticized that agreement and has repeatedly suggested over the years that Israel maintained a military and intelligence presence in the UAE.

Netanyahu's decision to go public with the sensitive meeting was likely an effort to drum up support for his flagging party ahead of Israeli elections, said Yoel Guzansky, a senior researcher at the Institute of National Security Studies in Tel Aviv.

"It's amazing, it's the deepest cooperation we've ever had ... that during a war, Israel is defending an Arab state against Iran. It shows how complicated the Middle East is," he said.

The UAE is trying to highlight its cooperation with Israel but not with Netanyahu and his government, Guzansky said, because many in the UAE are against Israel's policies in Gaza.

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"They're trying to differentiate between security cooperation and cooperating with this government," said Guzansky, who previously worked for the national security council within the Israeli prime minister's office.

Iran sets demands for new talks

Iran said it will not enter more talks with the United States unless five conditions are met, including paying reparations for the war and accepting Iran's sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz, Iran's semiofficial Fars news agency reported, citing an informed source.

The White House is again unlikely to accept those demands, which would essentially formalize Iran's control over a waterway that was open to international traffic before the war.

Iran's senior vice president, Mohammadreza Aref, said Thursday that the strait belongs to Iran and that Tehran would not give it up "at any price," state TV reported. "It has always been our property," Aref said.

Iran defends right to seize ships

Iran's judiciary spokesperson told the state-owned Iran Daily newspaper on Thursday that Iran has the legal and judicial right to seize oil tankers in the strait that are connected to the U.S. because the U.S. has violated international maritime laws and committed piracy. The spokesperson, Asghar Jahangir, did not explicitly refer to the tanker seized on Thursday.

Iran seized a number of ships, including a tanker identified as the Ocean Koi, last week, saying it was attempting to disrupt oil exports and Iranian interests, according to the official IRNA news agency. It said the tanker was seized in the Gulf of Oman and carrying Iranian oil when it was taken to Iran's southern coast.

The U.S. sanctioned the Ocean Koi in February as part of a "shadow fleet" transporting Iranian oil.

Top US military leader says Iran's threats impact shipping

The top U.S. commander in the Middle East said Thursday he believes Iran's military capabilities have been "dramatically degraded," but its leaders are impacting shipping in the strait with rhetoric alone.

"Their voice is very loud, and the threats are clearly heard by the merchant industry and the insurance industry," Adm. Brad Cooper told lawmakers in Congress.

He said the U.S. has the military power to permanently reopen the strait and escort ships. But he deferred to policymakers about the best path forward amid a "time of sensitive negotiations."

Trump, Xi wrap up summit claiming progress stabilizing US-China relations but differences persist

By AAMER MADHANI, WILL WEISSERT and SIMINA MISTREANU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping wrapped up critical talks on Friday, claiming important progress in stabilizing U.S.-China relations even as deep differences persist between the world's two biggest powers on Iran, Taiwan and more.

Xi welcomed Trump at his official residence, Zhongnanhai, on Friday for their final engagement of the summit before the U.S. leader's return to Washington. The leaders took a short walk through the grounds that feature ancient trees and Chinese roses, and strolled through a covered passageway with green columns and archways painted with birds and traditional Chinese mountain scenes.

Over tea and lunch, Trump and Xi — with top aides and translators in tow — huddled for nearly three hours of talks before the U.S. leader completed his three-day visit to China.

"It's been really a great couple of days," Trump told reporters.

Xi, for his part, called it a "milestone" visit. "We have established a new bilateral relationship, or rather a constructive, strategic, stable relationship," he said.

But the optimistic outlook collides with some difficult truths about the thorniest issues between the two superpowers.

Beijing has shown little public interest in U.S. entreaties to get more involved in solving the conflict in Iran, even though Trump said in an interview with Fox News' Sean Hannity that Xi had in their conversations offered to help. In recent weeks, the U.S. State Department has accused Chinese firms of providing satellite imagery to the Iranian government and the Treasury Department has moved to target Chinese oil refineries accused of buying oil from Tehran, as well as shippers of the oil.

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And the White House believes China can still do more to stem the flow of Chinese-made precursor chemicals into Mexico used to make illicit fentanyl that has wreaked havoc on many U.S. communities.

Xi, meanwhile, warned Trump during private talks that their differences on the self-ruled island of Taiwan, if handled poorly, could hurtle the world's dominant powers toward "clashes and even conflicts," according to Chinese government officials.

Trump appeared impressed by the bucolic grounds, remarking the roses were the most beautiful he had ever seen. Xi promised to send him some rose seeds.

The compound is wrapped around two artificial lakes that had been built for the pleasure of emperors. Zhongnanhai is often compared to the White House, the Kremlin or South Korea's Blue House. But unlike the other presidential residences, Zhongnanhai does not serve as the main venue for diplomatic visits. The invitation appeared to be an attempt by Xi to extend a personal touch to a U.S. leader who appreciates big gestures.

"I think he's a warm person, actually. But he's all business," Trump said of Xi in the Fox News interview. "There's no games."

The Chinese government also bid farewell to Trump with great pomp.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi saw a smiling Trump off at the airport. And schoolchildren dressed in Air Force One's light blue and white colors waved American and Chinese flags in a coordinated movement as the U.S. president arrived to board the plane.

Taiwan remains the most important issue for China

Xi's sharp language on Taiwan loomed large over the visit, with Chinese government officials amplifying that differences on the self-ruled island pose the biggest risk to U.S.-Chinese relations.

But Secretary of State Marco Rubio told NBC News that U.S. policy toward Taiwan was "unchanged" and cautioned that it would be "a terrible mistake" for China to try to take Taiwan by force. He also framed Xi's comments as standard practice.

"They always raise it on their side. We always make clear our position, and we move on to the other topics," said Rubio, who was among senior aides to join Trump for the talks.

China in recent weeks has sought to put more focus on its view that Taiwan sits at the "core" of its interests and is key to ensuring a stable relationship with the U.S. Trump at moments has shown ambivalence toward Taiwan, raising speculation that he could be open to loosening ties with Taipei.

Trump has demanded Taiwan increase defense spending, and in December, the White House announced an \$11 billion weapons package for Taiwan, the largest ever to the island democracy.

But the U.S. has yet to begin fulfilling the arms sales, and Trump had said he expected to discuss the matter with Xi in Beijing. He's also groused that Taiwan "stole" America's semiconductor business and called on Taiwan to pay the U.S. for protection.

China wants the Strait of Hormuz opened

The leaders agreed that the Strait of Hormuz — effectively closed since the start of the Iran conflict — needs to be reopened to support global energy demands. About 20% of the world's oil flowed through the strait before the war started on Feb. 28.

"We feel very similar about (how) we want it to end," the president said with Xi at this side. "We don't want them to have a nuclear weapon."

White House officials say Xi was also opposed to any implementation of tolls on vessels crossing the strait and expressed interest in China potentially purchasing U.S. oil to reduce Chinese dependence on Gulf oil in the future.

Trump earlier this week had downplayed the importance of talks with Xi on the 11-week-old Iran war that has led to surging energy prices and threatens to plunge the global economy into recession if the conflict does not conclude soon.

But before Air Force One could land in Beijing, Rubio said administration officials would make the case to the Chinese officials about why they should be invested in prodding Iran to come to terms to end the war.

Indeed, the Chinese, who have been critical of the U.S. and Israeli bombardment of Iran, hold unique

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leverage as Iran's biggest trading partner. The Chinese government has managed to weather the economic damage caused by the war with the help of its strategic oil reserves, but that backstop is not limitless. Economists say the Iran conflict could still have a big impact on China's export-driven economy.

Will Trump announce any major business deals?

The White House, ahead of the visit, insisted that Trump wouldn't be making the trip without an eye toward securing results before he leaves, suggesting there could be announcements coming on trade.

Trump says some "fantastic trade deals" had been struck during the visit, but did not offer further details.

The U.S. side had been hoping to nail down Chinese commitments to buy U.S. soybeans and beef. Trump told Fox News that Xi had indicated a commitment for China to buy 200 Boeing jets from the U.S.

The leaders on Thursday discussed increasing U.S. agricultural purchases by the Chinese and opportunities for both sides to expand investment into each other's markets, according to the White House. Trump administration officials also want to work toward establishing a Board of Trade with China to address commercial differences between the countries.

Trump, whose delegation for the trip included the CEOs of Mastercard and Visa, said he also raised with Xi expanding access to the China market for the U.S.-based credit card companies.

6 passengers from hantavirus-hit ship arrive in Australia for 3-week quarantine

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Six passengers from a cruise ship hit by a hantavirus outbreak arrived Friday in Australia for a quarantine expected to last at least three weeks.

The Gulfstream long-range business jet carrying them from the Netherlands landed at RAAF Base Pearce outside the Western Australia state capital, Perth. The passengers, crew and a doctor who accompanied them were taken by bus to the nearby Bullsbrook quarantine facility.

Australian Health Minister Mark Butler said the government would implement one of world's strongest quarantine responses to the outbreak.

He said passengers of the cruise ship MV Hondius who returned to the United States and most European countries would spend a few days in a quarantine center before they were sent home.

"We have taken the decision to take a stronger approach to quarantine arrangements than that because we are determined to ensure there is no risk at all of any transmission of this virus into the Australian community," Butler told reporters in his hometown of Adelaide.

The five Australians and one New Zealand citizen will spend the three-week quarantine period in the facility that had remained largely unused since it was built in 2022 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A decision had yet to be made on what precautions should be taken for the remainder of the 42-day period of potential incubation that the World Health Organization had identified, Butler said.

The six passengers all tested negative for the virus before they left the Netherlands, had been assessed by a doctor during the flight and would undergo more detailed health assessments at Bullsbrook, Butler said.

The MV Hondius ship was on a cruise from Argentina to the Antarctic and then to several isolated islands in the South Atlantic Ocean when the hantavirus outbreak was identified. Three people among the 11 cases from the ship have died.

With the evacuation of all passengers and many crew members completed, the MV Hondius is now sailing back to the Netherlands, where it will be cleaned and disinfected.

Palestinians in Gaza mark anniversary of 1948 mass expulsion and say today's catastrophe is worse

By JULIA FRANKEL and WAFAA SHURAFI Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Blink and you might miss the few stone walls that are all that's left of the village that Yusuf Abu Hamam's family was forced to flee when he was an infant in 1948.

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The village, al-Joura, was demolished by the Israeli military at the time. It has since vanished under neighborhoods of the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon and the grounds of a national park.

The neighborhood where Abu Hamam's family ended up — and where he spent most of his life — now lies also largely in ruins. Buildings in the Shati Camp in the northern Gaza Strip have been razed and wrecked by Israeli bombardment and demolitions during the past 2½ years of war.

On Friday, Abu Hamam and millions of Palestinians mark the 78th anniversary of the Nakba, Arabic for "catastrophe," referring to the mass expulsion and flight of some 750,000 Palestinians from what is now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation. It's the third commemoration of the Nakba since the war in Gaza began.

The 78-year-old Abu Hamam, one of a dwindling number of Nakba survivors, says the current war is an even greater catastrophe.

More than six months after an October ceasefire, he and the rest of Gaza's more than 2 million people are now crammed into less than half of the 25-mile-long strip along the Mediterranean coast, surrounded by an Israeli-controlled zone encompassing the rest of the territory.

"There is no country left," Abu Hamam said, speaking next to his home, which was heavily damaged by Israeli shelling earlier in the war. "A square kilometer and a half extending from the sea, this is what we are living in ... It's indescribable, unbearable."

What was the Nakba?

For Palestinians, the Nakba meant the loss of most of their homeland. Some 80% of the Palestinians who lived in the area that became Israel were driven from their homes by forces of the nascent state before and during the war. The fighting began when Arab armies attacked following Israel's establishment as a home for Jews in the wake of the Holocaust. Palestinians who remained behind hold Israeli citizenship.

After the war, Israel refused to allow Palestinian refugees to return to ensure a Jewish majority within its borders. Palestinians became a seemingly permanent refugee community that now numbers some 6 million, with most living in refugee camps in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Gaza.

Around 530 Palestinian villages in what became Israel were destroyed, according to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics.

Abu Hamam's birth village was one of them. Al-Joura was seized by the Israeli military as it advanced against Egyptian forces in November 1948. Soldiers were ordered to destroy every home in al-Joura and neighboring villages to ensure their Palestinian populations couldn't come back, according to military archives cited by Israeli historian Benny Morris.

Refugees swelled the population of the tiny patch of territory along the southern coast that became the Gaza Strip. They stayed in tent camps, run by a newly created U.N. agency for Palestinians, UNRWA, which provided aid and schooling. Those camps, like Abu Hamam's Shati Camp, grew into dense urban neighborhoods over the decades, before many were flattened during the latest Gaza war by Israeli bombardment.

In Gaza, Palestinians live a new Nakba

The ancestors of Ne'man Abu Jarad and his wife, Majida, were already living in what would become the Gaza Strip in 1948. They both recall stories from their families about refugees streaming in by foot from areas further north, like the village Abu Hamam came from.

Though they avoided the original Nakba, there was no escaping from what Majida now calls "our Nakba."

Their hometown has been wiped off the map. Over the past year, Israeli bulldozers and controlled detonations have razed nearly every building in the northern Gaza towns of Beit Lahiya and Beit Hanoun. A new Israeli military base stands about 700 meters (765 yards) from where the Abu Jarads' house once stood, according to satellite photos.

Also gone is the southern Gaza city of Rafah, once home to a quarter million people, and other villages and neighborhoods located in the Israeli-held half of the Gaza Strip. The military says it is destroying positions used by Hamas and preparing the area for reconstruction. Satellite photos show nearly every structure reduced to rubble.

Over the last 31 months of war, the Abu Jarads and their six daughters have been displaced more than a

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dozen times as they fled Israeli bombardment and offensives. They currently live in a camp in the southern city of Khan Younis. Their tent offers little shelter from biting winter winds or summer heat, Majida said.

Their daughters have been out of school for over two years now.

"The Nakba of '48, I don't think it can be compared to our Nakba," Majida said. "In '48, they say people were displaced once and settled in one place, and they are still there until now. But our Nakba, honestly, is more severe because our displacement has happened multiple times. There is no stability."

Around 90% of Gaza's more than 2 million people have lost their homes, according to U.N. estimates, with most of them now sheltering in huge tent camps with rat infestations and pools of sewage. They are dependent on aid to survive.

Israel's offensive has killed over 72,700 Palestinians, according to local health officials. It was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel that killed some 1,200 people. Militants also abducted 251 hostages.

In the northern West Bank, tens of thousands of Palestinians are entering their 15th month of displacement, after the Israeli military ordered them out of their refugee camps as it launched an operation it said was targeting militant groups.

Since then, troops have demolished or heavily damaged at least 850 structures across the refugee camps of Nur Shams, Jenin and Tulkarem, according to an analysis of satellite imagery by Human Rights Watch released in December.

Saving what was lost, again and again

The 1948 Nakba also brought the loss of Palestinians' history, as those fleeing struggled to keep hold of the documents and possessions tying them to their homes.

One of the largest archives of Palestinian documents dating back to the Nakba belongs to UNRWA.

UNRWA staff members, who fled their offices in Gaza after Israel ordered the north evacuated, had to leave behind the agency's extensive archive.

The staff then launched a mission to rescue the most crucial documents — birth, death and marriage certificates and refugee registration cards, according to Juliette Touma, a former senior UNRWA official.

Without those documents, Palestinians could lose their rights and refugee status. Staffers crammed their personal suitcases full of papers and carried them through checkpoints and out of the territory, Touma said.

The current war has cost Palestinians in Gaza what little remained of their personal histories. Majida's parents' home in Beit Hanoun was destroyed, and with it family photos.

"There is nothing left," she said.

Abu Hamam, too, says everything has been lost.

"When this war came, it devoured trees, stones and people," he said. "Entire families were erased from the civil registry. Hundreds of families are still buried under the rubble."

Journey of a lifetime: A US teen Buddhist lama is now a monk studying in the Himalayan foothills

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — At a monastery in the Himalayan foothills, a teenage Buddhist lama blesses thousands. One by one, he taps bowed heads with a ritual vase and a peacock feather, sprinkling holy water for protection, purification, wisdom. He stops to smile at children who eye him with curiosity, reverence and awe. He tries to keep pace with others who, like him, are among the few chosen to give the final blessing.

Just six months earlier, thousands of miles away, this same young man was pulling all-nighters to play Madden NFL on his Xbox at his home near Minneapolis. Sometimes he'd pause to snack on pizza rolls and Diet Coke, or check his texts for the next hangout at TopGolf or Buffalo Wild Wings.

Two separate worlds. Both are home to Jalue Dorje.

A typical American teen, he grew up loving rap music, video games and football. He is also an aspiring

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spiritual leader who, from an early age, was recognized by the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan Buddhist leaders as a reincarnated lama.

Now he's 19. He graduated from high school last year and moved to northern India to join the Mind-rolling Monastery, about 7,200 miles (11,500 kilometers) from his home in Columbia Heights. Recently, he came to Nepal to meet his parents, who flew from Minneapolis, and attended sacred rituals and teachings conducted by the abbot of Shechen Monastery.

Maroon and golden monastic robes had replaced his usual hoodies and sweatpants. But he still quoted from Drake (the rapper) and Shantideva (the 8th-century Indian monastic). And beneath his robes, he wore white Crocs decorated with Jibbitz charms of "The Simpsons." He wore them often at Shechen Monastery, near the 1,500-year-old Boudhanath stupa, one of Tibetan Buddhism's most sacred sites.

Each morning, he'd awake at dawn. After prayers, he walked from his hotel through crowded Kathmandu streets lined with fruits, incense and spices, dodging mopeds near the soaring white dome and spire of Boudhanath with its colorful Tibetan prayer flags and the painted, ever-watching eyes of the Buddha.

On a recent day, he strode to the monastery and took off his Crocs before entering a prayer hall reserved for monks with doctorates and lamas like himself. Incense wafted. The sound of ancient instruments — cymbals, bells and drums — punctuated the monastic chants.

Standing before three huge gold statues of the Buddha, Dorje bowed to Shechen Rabjam Rinpoche, the monastery's spiritual head, and presented him with a golden plate that symbolizes the entire universe, and a "khata" — a white Tibetan ceremonial scarf.

It was the first mandala, or offering, Dorje had made since his long journey to follow his predestined spiritual path. It was a moment, he says, when he realized how far he'd come.

"This is the real one, you know? We're here and this is really happening," he says. "I'm doing what the prophecy fulfilled."

A reincarnation cycle dating to 1655

Since the Dalai Lama recognized him at age 2, Dorje had spent much of his life training to become a monk, memorizing sacred scriptures, practicing calligraphy, learning the Buddha's teachings.

The process of identifying a lama is based on spiritual signs and visions. Dorje was four months old when he was identified by Kyabje Trulshik Rinpoche, a venerated master of Tibetan Buddhism. He was later confirmed by several lamas as the eighth Terchen Taksham Rinpoche — the first was born in 1655.

Jalue Dorje's parents took him to meet the Dalai Lama in 2010 when Tibetan Buddhism's spiritual leader visited Wisconsin. The Dalai Lama cut a lock of Dorje's hair in a ceremony. He advised the parents to let their son stay in the U.S. to perfect his English and then send him to a monastery.

"From my parents' end, educating me was a really big one," Dorje says. "They followed the words of his holiness; he laid the foundation, and they took that gamble."

As a child, he often wondered why he couldn't sleep later on weekends and watch cartoons like other kids. One day, it would pay off, his dad would tell him, "like planting a seed that one day would sprout."

He remembered the early mornings of recitation and memorization. He recalled people who posted messages online doubting that he was a reincarnated lama, and how that troubled his parents. And how they both worked hard cleaning hotel rooms and doing laundry at hospitals while raising him.

"It wasn't all rainbows and unicorns every day," Dorje says. "We overcame a lot."

Fluent in English and Tibetan, Dorje excelled in public school. Although he was officially enthroned as a lama in a 2019 ceremony in India, his parents let him stay in the U.S. until graduation.

Growing up, he kept a photo of the Dalai Lama in his room above DVD collections of "The Simpsons," "South Park," and "Family Guy," next to the manga graphic novel series "Buddha."

On his bedside table, he kept a journal where he diagramed plays he'd like to try as a left guard with his school football team. On a wall in his living room he hung a poster with his senior year photo wearing sunglasses and his football uniform, touching thumb tips to index fingers in a meditation gesture.

He had a deal with his father, who would give him Pokémon cards in return for memorizing Buddhist scriptures. He collected hundreds, sometimes sneaking them in his robes at ceremonies. "I remember," he says, "when I first learned my Tibetan ABCs, when I was able to recite it all by memory, my dad was

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so happy.”

A love of sports

The days were long. Every morning he awoke to recite sacred texts. Then school, followed by football practice. He returned home for tutoring on Tibetan history and Buddhism. At night, he practiced calligraphy or listened to rappers. When he got his license, he drove around listening to Taylor Swift.

What would he have been if not a spiritual leader? “Sports journalist would have been cool,” he says. He loves to write. An avid fan, he roots for the Atlanta Hawks in basketball, Real Madrid in soccer, and the Atlanta Falcons in football.

His favorite athlete is U.S. figure skater Alysa Liu: “She brings so much swagger, but it doesn’t overshadow the sports.” In high school, he wrote an award-winning story about Tibet for the student newspaper.

On the football field, his teammates praised his positivity; he reminded them to have fun and keep losses in perspective. But in the final game of his senior season, he shed tears, realizing it would likely be his last game ever.

He often helped with events representing the local Tibetan community. For his 18th birthday, more than 1,000 people gathered at the Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota for the last party before joining the monastery in India.

Finding his groove

On the long plane ride, his mind wandered.

“I was like, ‘Dang! I’m missing the first week of NFL!’” He packed light: headphones, laptop, a fantasy football magazine and a book on Guru Rinpoche, the Indian Buddhist master who brought Tantric Buddhism to Tibet.

His parents flew with him to New Delhi and then drove north to Dehradun, near the Himalayan foothills, in the equivalent of a college dropoff. They bought him a larger bed. They painted his monastic room and erected a shrine where he could pray at dawn and dusk.

He is an only child, and his parents cried when saying goodbye. The farthest and longest that he’d gone from home on his own previously was a three-day camping trip in northern Minnesota.

“Everything leading up to this point in the history of all your lifetimes — the billions and billions of lifetimes you accumulated — leads to your family,” Dorje says. “To have such great parents is a result of a great past life’s merit. But not only past life merit, but the connection of karma — and love.”

Early on, his mother, Dechen Wangmo, worried about her then-toddler son during long prayer sessions. “Would he be hungry? What if he fell asleep?” she recalled thinking. She kept worrying about him as a teenager: “He’s a tulku,” she says, using the Tibetan term for a reincarnated lama, “but he’s my son.”

To her relief, he thrived. While his friends attended history, science and literature classes in U.S. colleges, he took lessons on Buddhist philosophy, and practiced his calligraphy and chanting in India.

“He’s kind of found his groove at the monastery,” says Kate Thomas, one of his tutors in Minneapolis.

Becoming a ‘leader of peace’

Despite the 10-hour time difference, he kept in contact with friends back home through texts and WhatsApp. On time off, he built Legos, walked to an arcade to play the FIFA soccer video game and watched Marvel superhero films and NBA and NFL games on his laptop. He was especially psyched about the half-time Super Bowl show: “That was an incredible performance by Bad Bunny — I can’t lie!”

It was his first time experiencing a life of asceticism, eating a daily ration of rice and lentils and washing his own clothes by hand. But he adjusted, getting along with monks from all over Asia, discussing spirituality, popular culture and sports.

“Dudes are dudes!” he says.

It was the first time that he was hanging out with other “tulkus” — reincarnated spiritual masters around his own age. Among them was Trulshik Yangsi Rinpoche, 13. He’s believed to be the reincarnation of Kyabje Trulshik Rinpoche — the Tibetan Buddhist master who first recognized Dorje as a tulku at four months old.

At the monastery, they bonded over their love of Tintin comics. Dorje became his English teacher.

“I think of him as my spiritual teacher,” Dorje said after sharing a meal with the younger lama. “I’m profoundly grateful that I get to repay my debt to the one who found me and improving his English.”

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Yangsi Rinpoche smiled, then reflected: "He's my best friend."

Just hours after Dorje blessed thousands — including his parents — on the last day of the 12-day rituals, the family awoke before dawn to visit the ancient Maratika or Halesi Mahadev Caves, 100 miles (160 kilometers) southwest of Mount Everest. They drove for eight hours on dirt roads, crossing mountains and valleys, for a pilgrimage to caves sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists.

After exploring the caves in awe, Dorje sat cross-legged on the rocky ground next to his father, Dorje Tsegial. They prayed together, as they had done almost daily since his childhood.

Following several years of contemplation and asceticism, Dorje hopes to return to the United States to teach in Minnesota's Buddhist community at the Nyingmapa Taksham Buddhist Center. His goal: become "a leader of peace," following the example of the Dalai Lama, Nelson Mandela and Gandhi.

It's a long path that began soon after his birth. He feels ready. "This," he says, "is just the beginning."

War worsens Lebanon's economic crisis with job losses, price gouging and slow business

By MALAK HARB and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

CHIAH, Lebanon (AP) — Ayman al-Zain watched on a recent afternoon as a bulldozer cleared the rubble of what used to be his sports clothing store, which was one of dozens of buildings destroyed in Israeli strikes against the Hezbollah militant group.

With a nominal truce in place that has reduced but not halted the fighting, Al-Zain tried to assess whether to rebuild the shop in Beirut's southern suburbs that he once hoped to pass down to his kids. But it's unlikely he will be able to do so anytime soon, and not only because of the fear of more airstrikes.

"Everything is expensive," he told The Associated Press. "If I want to open a new store and get mannequins, hangers and some accessories, the prices are very different than before."

The U.S.-Israeli war with Iran, and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, have sent economic shock waves across the Mideast. In Lebanon, those woes have been compounded by the country's existing economic problems and by largely unregulated markets that are vulnerable to price gouging.

"This continues to be a major economic shock, one of honestly an existential nature," said Economy Minister Amer Bisat, who is part of the Lebanese Cabinet that came into office over a year ago on a reformist agenda.

Problems have piled up for years

Since 2019, the tiny Mediterranean country has been in the throes of an economic crisis that pulverized the value of its local currency and its banking system.

That's when Lebanese banks collapsed, which evaporated depositors' savings and plunged about half of the population of 6.5 million into poverty, after decades of rampant corruption, waste and mismanagement. The country suffered some \$70 billion in losses in its financial sector, further compounded by about \$11 billion in the 2024 war between Israel and Hezbollah, according to the World Bank. The Lebanese pound has since lost over 90% of its value against the U.S. dollar.

The cash-strapped state electricity company provides only a few hours of power a day, and most Lebanese rely on diesel generators to make up the difference. That makes the economy particularly vulnerable to fuel price increases.

Lebanon was already "grappling with multiple rounds of crises," said Mohamad Faour, professor of finance at the American University of Beirut. "So this round of war only made an already fragile situation more fragile."

With this new war, 1.2 million Lebanese have been displaced, largely from southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs. Many are sheltering in schools with no work or draining whatever money they have renting out apartments or hotel rooms.

Economy suffers job losses and crippling inflation

In an interview with the AP from his office, Bisat estimated that the country faces an economic loss of around 7% of its gross domestic product due to the war because "companies are closing, people are los-

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ing their jobs, tourists are not showing up.”

Evidence of inflation abounds.

In the usually bustling produce market in Sabra, south of Beirut, vendor Ahmad al-Farra looked dejected as an elderly woman shopping for watermelon, tomatoes and potatoes walked away without buying anything after checking the price tags.

Prices have spiked since the U.S. and Israel launched a war against Iran on Feb. 28, followed quickly by a resurgence of war between Israel and Hezbollah.

“We’re keeping our prices low so we can sell, and even then we’re not selling,” al-Farra said as the sound of an Israeli drone whizzed overhead.

Even consumers who can afford to spend are anxious and cutting back on nonessential purchases, leaving many businesses empty.

Riad Aboulteif, who runs several restaurants and bars in the capital, said his revenue has dropped by some 90% since the war began, as Lebanon’s shrinking middle class cuts costs.

People are saving more money for their survival and not making plans to celebrate birthdays or other special occasions, he said at one of his bars in the bustling Hamra district of Beirut, where the loud chatter of customers once overpowered the jazz music coming through the sound system.

That night, only a few tables were occupied. He’s had to downsize his staff and restructure his menus to offer more affordable items.

War fuels price gouging

Meanwhile, the country’s bankrupt government has struggled to crack down on unfair and illicit profiteering and the hoarding of fuel and other essential items.

Many agricultural areas in southern and eastern Lebanon are no longer accessible because of airstrikes and clashes, but al-Farra believes suppliers have raised prices beyond what is necessary to cover cost increases.

Some of the starkest increases have been in generator bills.

Families and businesses for years have paid multiple utility bills to cover privately supplied electricity and water in the absence of government services. Neighborhood generator owners charge a monthly fee, and some landlords have their own generators and charge the cost to tenants.

Frustrated business owners have said that generator bills have doubled at times, forcing them to shorten their hours of operation or even close on some days to cut costs.

“If we didn’t take these measures, we cannot continue,” Aboulteif said.

Bisat said his ministry has conducted over 4,000 inspections of private generators, gas stations and shops across the country since the start of the war in March and lodged dozens of complaints to the courts. But the issue will not be quickly resolved.

In the meantime, the government has little ability to crack down on the handful of companies that import and distribute fuel and other goods.

No sign of relief on the horizon

With no end to the war in sight, the economic situation shows no sign of easing.

A tenuous ceasefire is in place between the U.S. and Iran, but talks between Washington and Tehran are gridlocked. A nominal truce between Israel and Hezbollah has reduced but not stopped the fighting in Lebanon.

For now, Lebanese families and business owners are confronting the challenges day by day and hoping for the best.

“Only God knows how we’ve been trying to manage ourselves,” al-Farra said.

Supreme Court voting rights ruling fuels a new push to defend Black representation

By BILL BARROW and MATT BROWN Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Same fight. New generation.

That's the mantra of a multiracial group of civil rights leaders and activists organizing opposition to a mostly white conservative alliance dismantling the Voting Rights Act and political districts that allowed Black and other nonwhite voters to choose more of their elected leaders for the last half-century.

"We have to respond as quickly as possible," NAACP President Derrick Johnson said in an interview. "The real question," Johnson told The Associated Press, "is how do we as a country really address the effort to shrink us backwards into a 1950s reality?"

Johnson's 117-year-old association, which was at the forefront of legal and legislative fights for Black political rights in the 20th century, is among scores of groups coming together Saturday in Alabama for a rally and tribute to the Civil Rights Movement that helped bring about the 1965 Voting Rights Act. They plan events in Selma, where voting rights advocates were attacked by white law enforcement officers on Bloody Sunday, and Montgomery, where a rescheduled march concluded two weeks later.

Unlike 61 years ago, the Alabama events are not the pinnacle of a protracted movement. Instead, civil rights activists hope they serve as a catalyst for a renewed crusade after the U.S. Supreme Court, two weeks ago, further weakened the VRA by no longer allowing race to be considered in how congressional and other districts are drawn.

They acknowledge difficulty in countering a white-dominated conservative network entrenched in the White House, Capitol Hill, federal courts and many state legislatures of the Old Confederacy, where a majority of Black Americans still live.

The VRA "was the foundational nucleus of the Civil Rights Movement," said Jared Evans of the Louisiana-based Power Coalition for Equity and Justice. "They've taken that from us," he said, with the recent Louisiana v. Callais decision on congressional districts and the earlier Shelby v. Holder decision in 2013 that rolled back federal oversight of election procedures in states and localities with a history of discrimination.

Georgia Sen. Raphael Warnock, who is senior pastor of Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. once preached, said from his pulpit that the result is "Jim Crow in new clothes."

Warnock pointed to King and the last voting rights movement. "We need political power. We need economic power. We need personal power," he said, assuring parishioners that "your adversaries know that your voice matters" because they're "bending over backwards" to diminish it.

Evans reached further back into history to say what must happen next.

"Our response must be and will be a second Reconstruction period," Evans said.

Some Democrats want an answer from Congress

The ultimate goal, organizers said, is to win more elections, sway policy fights and protect diverse political representation at all levels.

U.S. Rep. Terri Sewell, a Black lawmaker who represents Selma, Alabama, said an immediate priority is to "reform and reintroduce" Democrats' flagship voting bill, the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act.

Sewell, whose seat ultimately could be threatened under redistricting, said Democrats want to "completely" eliminate partisan gerrymandering.

She also said the legislation would "bring back pre-clearance," the requirement for certain federal approvals that the court struck down in Shelby.

"We need to come up with a modern-day formula for showing just how egregious the behavior of these state actors is," Sewell said.

The Supreme Court ruled in Callais that states do not have to draw majority nonwhite districts under the Voting Rights Act and, in fact, should not consider race at all when drawing boundaries. By arguing that the law's remedies to combat discrimination had themselves become racist, the decision allows states to redraw heavily Black districts that have historically elected Democrats while arguing that the designs are based on party interests, not race.

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President Donald Trump praised the decision as “a BIG WIN for Equal Protection under the Law, as it returns the Voting Rights Act to its Original Intent, which was to protect against intentional Racial Discrimination.”

Groups mobilized for redistricting sessions

Many of the same groups who’ll be in Alabama on Saturday have already gone to Southern statehouses, where white Republican lawmakers moved swiftly to redraw congressional districts after Callais.

Alabama and Louisiana lawmakers reverted to a single majority-Black district, each scrapping a second district that had been ordered by lower federal courts under now-reversed VRA interpretations. Tennessee lawmakers gutted a majority Black district by splitting greater Memphis into three different sprawling districts — itself an obvious racial gerrymander the court had previously forbidden, Evans said.

Anticipating the Callais outcome, Florida and Texas proceeded with redistricting before it came down. Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, a term-limited Republican, has called a June session to redraw congressional lines for the 2028 cycle. Mississippi and South Carolina have delayed the matter for now.

South Carolina state Senate Majority Leader Shane Massey was among the few white Republicans who pushed back against GOP redistricting plans. He said that not even pressure from Trump could sell him on disenfranchising Black South Carolinians instead of doing what’s best for his state.

Other white conservatives are still talking openly about ousting Reps. Jim Clyburn and Bennie Thompson, the only Black U.S. House members from South Carolina and Mississippi, respectively.

Evans, the Louisiana activist, predicted the fight ahead won’t just be about congressional representation. “Look for them to go after state house and state senate seats — and then it will be the local level,” he said, adding that “it’s going to be an entire erasure of Black representation.”

The issue is more than a partisan Washington fight

Heavily minority districts drawn under the VRA before Callais nearly always elect Democrats. Black Americans have overwhelmingly aligned with the party since President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, sparking a decades-long migration of most white Southern politicians to the Republicans. Latino and Hispanic voters still lean Democratic in most places as well.

The immediate fight shapes the midterm campaign scramble for control of the U.S. House during the final years of Trump’s presidency. Trump initially pushed Republican-run states to redistrict to protect the party’s fragile House majority.

But Johnson, the NAACP leader, said all voters should see more than partisan warfare or a regional battle over race.

Beyond party allegiance, Johnson argued, white conservatives want to curtail a range of rights “depending on how you pray, depending on who you love,” while also pushing economic policies that punish workers across racial and ethnic lines. From legislation to the confirmation of federal judges who decide constitutional questions, those policy outcomes start with election results.

“It’s not a Black problem,” Johnson said. “That’s an American problem.”

There is no singular movement or leader yet

Evans, Johnson and others acknowledged the complexity in harnessing disparate organizations and galvanizing voters on issues like redistricting and gerrymandering. But they insist the brazen nature of Republicans’ course has spurred engagement.

Johnson said he was on an organizing call in Mississippi this week that had 8,000 participants. Evans pointed to packed hallways in the state Capitols in Baton Rouge and Nashville, respectively.

The NAACP and allies have challenged new maps in multiple states, despite Callais. Many groups want to spur midterm turnout among Black voters, and others are disenchanted with white conservatives’ maneuvers in racially diverse places.

Johnson stressed the need for perseverance.

The 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision was seismic, with a unanimous court declaring segregated public schools unconstitutional and reversing 19th-century precedents denying Black Americans’ fundamental rights.

But it took 17 years — and many more court battles — for it to be implemented in most Southern school districts. Fights over mandated student busing continued beyond the South. It was a decade after Brown before Congress and Johnson enacted the movement's seminal laws.

There's no clear leader of a modern movement.

Johnson said it's worth remembering that even with King at the helm before his assassination, "there was tension around strategy" in the 1950s and 1960s.

But even "through that tension, through many episodes, we were able to get directly in the right place."

Finland's hotly tipped Eurovision performance features flames, a valuable violin and a safety plan

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — At the Eurovision Song Contest, performers get three minutes to make a big impression.

Grabbing viewers' attention as one of 25 acts competing in quick succession in Saturday's grand final in Vienna means pulling out all the stops, both musically and visually.

In the case of this year's favorites to win, the Finnish duo of pop singer Pete Parkkonen and classical violinist Linda Lampenius, that involves jets of flame, a valuable 18th-century violin and a team of "ninjas" working to avert disaster.

The pair's song "Liekinheitin," or "Flamethrower," is a favorite with both fans and betting markets with its melding of pop and classical influences — and its spectacular staging.

Here's what it takes to create the eye-catching performance.

Permission to play

Parkkonen and Lampenius dub their sound "new pop with a classical touch." Their song of burning love is an explosion of energy in which Parkkonen's passionate vocals act as counterpoint to Lampenius' frenetic fiddling.

The Finnish delegation had to secure special permission for Lampenius to play live. Eurovision rules state that lead vocals must be performed live, but instruments are prerecorded, to help speed changeovers between songs.

Lampenius says "Flamethrower" was "written as a duet," and both performers need to be live for it to work.

"It's a woman and a man, it's a female voice and a male voice. So I do all my lyrics through my violin, by playing, and you (Parkkonen) are singing it with words. But we are talking. We are (equally) as important, both of us."

The pair were not certain when they arrived in Vienna that Eurovision organizers would allow the request. They were only given final approval after performing in front of an audience in a live rehearsal.

The European Broadcasting Union, which runs Eurovision, said contest rules allow that "live audio capture of instruments may exceptionally be permitted where artistically justified."

Lampenius had brought two violins just in case — a treasured Gagliano made in 1781 so live performance would "sound perfect," and a cheaper instrument to use if she had to rely on playback. That would remove any risk to the Gagliano from the slightly hazardous staging.

Practice makes perfect

Lampenius and Parkkonen say they have been rehearsing for this moment since November. They won Finland's national selection contest for Eurovision in February and say by now they have performed the song hundreds of times.

It is crucial to get it right. The performance builds to a climax that sees jets of flame spurt from a stage on which Lampenius, fanned by a leaf blower and wearing a flowing dress, is playing her precious violin.

Lampenius concedes it's "a bit scary when you think of it."

But she says she is secure in the knowledge she has black-clad stagehands who call themselves "ninjas" on hand to keep her dress away from the flames — an essential piece of the performance that goes unseen by viewers watching at home.

"They're running with me – first one guy carrying my dress when I'm running, then the other one catching me during my run," she said. "And he helps me also when I jump up on the stage and do the pirouette."

For the striking final pose in which Lampenius perches atop chairs in high heels, violin aloft, Parkkonen combines singing with his role as a security spotter, there to catch her if she topples over.

"That's my work," the singer said.

Florida court to consider whether new US House map violates state ban on partisan gerrymandering

By DAVID A. LIEB and MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

New U.S. House districts that could help Republicans win several additional seats in Florida are set to face their first test in court Friday against assertions that they violate a state constitutional ban on partisan gerrymandering.

Lawsuits filed on behalf of voters ask a state judge to block the districts from being used in the midterm elections. The move would create a significant wrinkle in President Donald Trump's attempt to hold on to a narrow House majority by redrawing voting districts to the GOP's advantage.

Republicans already hold 20 of Florida's 28 U.S. House seats. New voting districts signed into law by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis after a swift two-day special legislative session could improve the GOP's chances to win four additional seats in the November elections.

Florida's Legislature approved the new House map on April 29 — the same day the U.S. Supreme Court weakened federal Voting Rights Act protections for minorities while striking down a majority-Black congressional district in Louisiana. Since then, several Southern states have taken steps to try to eliminate minority districts that have elected Democrats.

Congressional districts typically are redrawn once a decade, after each census, to rebalance populations. But since Trump urged mid-decade redistricting last year, Republicans think they could gain as many as 15 seats from new House maps in Texas, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Florida, Tennessee and Alabama. Democrats, meanwhile, think they could gain six seats from new maps in California and Utah.

Democrats had counted on winning up to four additional seats in Virginia. But the Virginia Supreme Court last week struck down a Democratic redistricting plan approved by voters, ruling the legislature violated procedural requirements when placing it on the ballot.

Florida bans partisan map-making

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2019 that it has no authority to decide whether partisan gerrymandering goes too far. But it said partisan gerrymandering claims could continue to be decided in state courts under their own constitutions and laws.

Florida voters approved a state constitutional amendment in 2010 that prohibits U.S. House districts from being drawn with the intent to favor or disfavor a political party or incumbent. The amendment bars districts from diminishing the ability of racial or language minorities to elect the representatives of their choice. It also requires districts to be compact and, where feasible, use existing political and geographic boundaries.

Lawsuits filed on behalf of voters seek a temporary injunction against the new U.S. House map for violating that amendment. The suits focus heavily on political favoritism.

"The plan takes the state's partisan skew to an unprecedented extreme," said one of three lawsuits filed in Leon County.

A legal brief filed on behalf of the Florida Senate argues that partisan intent has not been proven and a temporary injunction against the new districts is not appropriate in advance of a fully developed trial.

Though DeSantis called lawmakers into session before the Supreme Court's ruling in the Louisiana case, he anticipated an eventual outcome weakening Voting Rights Act protections for minority districts. Among other changes, Florida's new map reshapes a southeastern Florida district that DeSantis' office said was created to help elect a Black representative in an attempt to comply with the federal Voting Rights Act.

DeSantis' office said no racial data was used to prepare the new map he presented to the Legislature.

In a memo to lawmakers, DeSantis' General Counsel David Axelman asserted that Florida's constitutional provision about racial redistricting violates the U.S. Constitution. If one element is invalid, Axelman wrote, then the entire 2010 amendment is void, including provisions barring partisan gerrymandering.

A Texas town may offer a preview of a Trump plan to force noncitizens from public housing

By VALERIE GONZALEZ Associated Press

PORT ISABEL, Texas (AP) — Until recently, young children ran in and out of their public housing homes in this Gulf Coast town, playing on sun-dappled lawns as mothers looked over their shoulders for the school bus to drop off their older kids. Suddenly, couches, dressers and refrigerators started appearing curbside for movers or garbage collectors.

Within weeks, the neighborhood was a ghost town and the playground was empty.

What prompted the mass exodus was a bungled message from the housing authority in Port Isabel, a South Texas community of 5,000 people, many of whom are immigrants working at hotels and restaurants on the beaches of nearby South Padre Island. The Port Isabel Housing Authority indicated a Trump administration proposal was about to take effect that would end housing assistance to families with at least one member in the country illegally. The events that followed provided a glimpse of what could happen in communities across the U.S. if the proposed rule is actually finalized.

"The impact was not limited to undocumented immigrants, but really to immigrants who are here legally as well as people within their families who are citizens," Marie Claire Tran-Leung, senior staff attorney at National Housing Law Project, said.

For decades, families with at least one legal or eligible resident have been allowed to live in public housing provided those who are here illegally or are otherwise ineligible due to their immigration status pay a full, unsubsidized share of rent. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Department wants to reverse that.

Advocates estimate up to 80,000 people would be kicked out of their homes nationwide under the measure that is part of President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown. They include U.S. citizens, many of them children born in this country but whose parents were not.

A message from the Port Isabel Housing Authority

On Feb. 3, the Port Isabel Housing Authority sent residents a letter saying that the Trump administration wanted every household member to prove legal status within 30 days or face eviction. Three weeks later, the agency sent a note of "clarification" that no such proof was required.

It was already too late.

Half of residents living in Port Isabel public housing left within a month of receiving the first letter. The occupancy rate plunged from 91% in January to 43% in May, far below the national average of 94%.

The proposed rule from HUD still has not taken effect.

The housing authority gave no explanation for the initial misunderstanding and officials did not respond to repeated requests for comment from The Associated Press.

Rumors and panic

Fears about eviction and rumors that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement might get involved prompted panic among some residents.

"My kids and I spoke and wondered what we were going to do, but then we said it's better to leave and avoid any retaliation," a single mother from Mexico raising two teenagers who are U.S. citizens told The Associated Press. She, like other former residents, spoke on condition of anonymity due to fears of being deported.

She turned to legal service organizations that told her and others they could stay in public housing. But she and her children decided it was too risky and left their home of nearly a decade, finding an apartment within the same school district that costs about \$500 more per month.

The move also added about 10 minutes to the commute to the island, where both the mother and her daughter work. The 18-year-old gets home from school at 4:30 p.m. and grabs a quick dinner before her

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mom drives her to a job that starts at 5 p.m. The daughter is a top student in her senior class and plans to go to college in the fall with help from scholarship offers, but she worries how her family will make ends meet. Her brother was laid off, and their mom underwent cancer treatment last year, depleting her energy and straining their finances.

Other families face even greater challenges.

A mother of three said she moved her family into a one-bedroom trailer home illegally parked between two other trailer homes. Her oldest son sleeps in the living room.

Another family of three sold beds and other furniture so they could squeeze into a small trailer home, only to find out the landlord wouldn't let them use the mailing address, affecting her children's school and health insurance.

"Since we got the letter, everything changed from one day to the next. It wasn't the same anymore. Before the letter, the kids were happy, playing outside," the mother of two said.

A preview of a Trump administration proposal

The Trump administration proposed in February that any household with one ineligible resident would disqualify an entire family, estimating that 24,000 recipients were ineligible in 20,000 households.

"We have zero tolerance for pushing aside hardworking U.S. citizens while enabling others to exploit decades-old loopholes," HUD Secretary Scott Turner said at the time.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, which advocates for low-income families, estimates that 79,600 people could be forced to leave their homes, with a disproportionate impact on children and Latinos.

The rule drew more than 16,000 public comments, many of them critical, including from city leaders across the U.S.

For example, the New York City Council told HUD that an estimated 12% of city of households have at least one member who lacks legal status. Some 240,000 children are in those homes.

"This proposed rule will unequivocally lead to increased displacement, homelessness, poverty, and decreased educational and health outcomes," the council wrote.

HUD is expected to publish a final version of the rule after considering public comments.

It is almost certain to face legal challenges.

CIA Director John Ratcliffe met with Raul Castro's grandson in Havana, US and Cuban officials say

By ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — CIA Director John Ratcliffe met with Cuban officials including Raúl Castro's grandson during a high-level visit to the island Thursday, Cuban and U.S. officials said.

Ratcliffe met with Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro, Interior Minister Lázaro Álvarez Casas and the head of Cuban intelligence services, and discussed intelligence cooperation, economic stability and security issues. A CIA official confirmed the meetings to the AP.

Ratcliffe was there "to personally deliver President Donald Trump's message that the United States is prepared to seriously engage on economic and security issues, but only if Cuba makes fundamental changes," the CIA official said.

An official statement from Cuba's government noted that Thursday's meeting "took place ... against a backdrop of complex bilateral relations."

While the U.S. stressed that Cuba cannot continue to be a "safe haven for adversaries in the Western Hemisphere," the Cuban delegation insisted that the island presents no threat to U.S. security. Cuban officials also took issue with the nation's continued inclusion on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Rodríguez Castro previously secretly met with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on the sidelines of a Caribbean Community summit in St. Kitts in February. While he's never occupied a government post, he served as his grandfather's bodyguard and later as head of Cuba's equivalent of the Secret Service.

U.S. and Cuban officials also met earlier this year in Cuba. The ongoing meetings between U.S. and Cuban officials mark the first U.S. government flights to land in Cuba other than at the U.S. Naval Base

at Guantanamo Bay since 2016.

Thursday's meeting comes weeks after the Cuban government confirmed that it had recently met with U.S. officials on the island as tensions between the two sides remain high over the U.S. energy blockade of the Caribbean country and as Cuba's power grid has collapsed and energy to its eastern provinces has been cut. The U.S. blockade of fuel to the island has heightened its economic woes, with reduced work hours and food spoilage as refrigerators stop working.

Earlier this week, the U.S. State Department reiterated that the U.S. will provide Cuba with \$100 million in humanitarian assistance and support for satellite internet "if the Cuban regime will permit it."

In late January, Trump threatened tariffs on any country that sells or supplies oil to Cuba. Though Trump also has threatened to intervene in the country, and Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel said recently that his country was prepared to fight if that should happen, sources told the AP earlier this month that military action is not imminent.

Russia hammers Ukraine for a 3rd straight day, flattening a Kyiv apartment block and killing 9

By SAMYA KULLAB and VASILISA STEPANENKO Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia on Thursday unleashed a third straight day of massive drone and missile attacks on Ukraine, demolishing an apartment building in Kyiv where nine people were killed and dozens injured, authorities said. More strikes elsewhere in the country wounded more than two dozen civilians.

As dawn broke on a clear day in Kyiv, a scene of devastation came into focus in the capital's leafy Darnytsia neighborhood, located between a suburban forest and the Dnieper River.

Wisps of smoke rose from the collapsed nine-story apartment block, where emergency workers dug under concrete slabs and took people away on stretchers. The building's entrance was smashed in the strike, preventing residents from escaping.

All 18 apartments in the building were destroyed, officials said. Among the dead was a 12-year-old girl, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said. Nine people were killed, according to Tymur Tkachenko, head of the Kyiv City Military Administration. About 20 were people believed to be missing.

Klitschko declared Friday to be a day of mourning for the victims.

Ukrainian officials noted that the attack coincided with U.S. President Donald Trump's trip to China. Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping have sufficient leverage to compel Russian President Vladimir Putin to end his 4-year-old invasion of Ukraine.

"At the very time when leaders of the most powerful countries are meeting in Beijing, and the world hopes for peace, predictability and cooperation, Putin launched hundreds of drones, ballistic and cruise missiles at the capital of Ukraine," Sybiha wrote on X.

"Only pressure on Moscow can make him stop," Sybiha said of Putin.

Massive aerial assaults on Ukraine this week

Russia fired ballistic and cruise missiles in the attack, Zelenskyy said, adding that Moscow had launched more than 1,560 drones against Ukrainian population centers since Wednesday. In all, some 180 sites across the country were damaged, including more than 50 residential buildings, he said.

British Defense Secretary John Healey called Thursday's attack "shocking" and said he had accelerated U.K. deliveries of air defenses.

Russia's Defense Ministry said the military aimed at Ukraine's military-industrial complex, including air bases and fuel and transport facilities, claiming it hit all its targets. Among the weapons deployed, it said, were Kinzhal missiles, which Moscow says can fly 10 times the speed of sound.

Russia has hammered Ukraine with large-scale aerial attacks following a May 9-11 ceasefire that Trump said he asked Zelenskyy and Putin to heed. Fighting continued over those 72 hours, although reportedly at a reduced intensity.

The attacks undercut recent suggestions from Trump and Putin that the war, which began with Moscow's all-out invasion of its neighbor in 2022, is nearing its end.

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Residents describe 'a terrible night'

More than 30 people were injured in the apartment building collapse, while emergency workers rescued 28 residents, Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said.

Lyudmila Hlushko, 78, said she heard explosions and the sound of rockets about 3 a.m. "Then the house shook violently and there was a loud bang, breaking the glass in my house," she told The Associated Press. The blast shattered windows throughout the neighborhood.

"It was a terrible night," said another resident, Nadiia Lobanova. "We're used to this. Well, it's impossible to get used to this, but somehow we held on."

Damage was reported in six districts of the capital, Tkachenko said.

The Kyiv office of defense contractor Skyeton, specializing in reconnaissance drones, was destroyed in the overnight attack, although the company said it had anticipated such a development and had relocated its production.

Russian drones also struck a vehicle carrying U.N. staff who were delivering aid to residents of Kherson in southern Ukraine, Sybiha said. The vehicle was marked and was attacked twice, in two different locations, but nobody was hurt, he said.

Russia's biggest attacks since its full-scale invasion

The Ukrainian cities of Kremenchuk, Bila Tserkva, Kharkiv, Sumy and Odesa also were bombarded, officials said.

"We are now experiencing the largest strikes since the start of the full-scale invasion," air force spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat told Ukrainian public broadcaster Suspilne.

Ukraine's air defense forces are under severe strain, he said. Even so, the interception rate of drones and missiles was over 93%, Zelenskyy said.

Air defenses shot down or jammed 693 Russian targets overnight, including 41 missiles and 652 drones of various types nationwide, the air force said.

Fifteen missiles and 23 drones scored direct hits across 24 locations, it said. Debris from downed drones fell in another 18 locations.

Strikes on energy infrastructure left customers in Kyiv and 11 other regions temporarily without power, national grid operator Ukrenergo said.

On Wednesday, a rare daytime attack on Kyiv killed at least six people, Zelenskyy said. That assault, which involved 800 drones, struck about 20 regions and was among the longest such attacks of the war.

In other developments Thursday:

— The Hungarian government summoned the Russian ambassador over a drone attack near Hungary's border with Ukraine. The step marked a stark shift in tone by new Prime Minister Péter Magyar toward Moscow after years of cozy relations with the Kremlin under former leader Viktor Orbán.

— Latvian Prime Minister Evika Silina resigned after her government's coalition partner withdrew its support and left her without a majority. The government has been under pressure over its handling of multiple incidents involving stray drones suspected to be from Ukraine crossing into Latvian territory.

Supreme Court preserves access to widely used abortion pill, while lawsuit plays out

By MARK SHERMAN, GEOFF MULVIHILL and MATTHEW PERRONE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Thursday preserved women's access to a drug used in the most common method of abortion, rejecting lower-court restrictions while a lawsuit continues.

The court's order allows women seeking abortions to continue obtaining the drug, mifepristone, at pharmacies or through the mail, without an in-person visit to a doctor. Access is likely to remain uninterrupted at least until into next year as the case plays out, including a potential appeal to the high court.

The justices granted emergency requests from makers of mifepristone, who are appealing a federal appeals court ruling that would require women to see a doctor in person and halt delivery of mifepristone through the mail. The federal Food and Drug Administration, which first approved mifepristone for use in

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abortion in 2000, stopped requiring in-person visits five years ago.

Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito dissented, with Thomas writing that the two companies, Danco Laboratories and GenBioPro, are not entitled to the court's action to spare them "lost profits from their criminal enterprise."

Anti-abortion groups, frustrated with President Donald Trump's administration, are pushing the FDA to move faster with a review that they hope will result in restrictions on mifepristone, including blocking its prescribing via telehealth platforms. The Republican administration says the work takes time.

Earlier this week, FDA Commissioner Marty Makary resigned after months of criticism from Trump's political allies, including abortion opponents.

Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America and similarly aligned groups had called on Trump to fire Makary over the slow pace of the mifepristone review.

The court is dealing with its latest abortion controversy four years after its conservative majority overturned *Roe v. Wade* and allowed more than a dozen states to effectively ban abortion outright.

The case before the court stems from a lawsuit Louisiana filed to roll back the Food and Drug Administration's rules on how mifepristone can be prescribed. The state claims that the policy undermines the ban there, and it questions the safety of the drug, which has repeatedly been deemed safe and effective by FDA scientists.

Alito, who wrote the opinion overturning *Roe*, agreed that the state's efforts have been thwarted by medical providers and private organizations that mail the pills to women in Louisiana, despite the abortion ban. Danco and GenBioPro "are obviously aware of what is going on yet nevertheless supply the drug and reap profits from its felonious use in Louisiana," he wrote.

Thomas said those who mail the pills are in violation of the Comstock Act, a 19th-century law that has long gone unenforced and bans mailing any "article, instrument, substance, drug, medicine, or thing which is advertised or described in a manner calculated to lead another to use or apply it for producing abortion."

Lower courts concluded that Louisiana is likely to prevail, and a three-judge panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that mail access and telehealth visits should be suspended while the case plays out.

The drug is most often used for abortion in combination with another drug, misoprostol. Medication abortions accounted for nearly two-thirds of all abortions in the U.S. in 2023, the last year for which statistics are available.

Telehealth prescribers were prepared to switch to sending abortion patients a regimen that uses only misoprostol.

While Thursday's ruling keeps the status quo in place for now, abortion-rights advocates warn that the case isn't settled forever.

"We are relieved that access to mifepristone remains protected for now, but this should never have been on the table in the first place," Serra Sippel, executive director of The Brigid Alliance, which helps coordinate and fund travel and other logistics to assist women traveling for abortion, said in a statement. "Patients and providers should not be forced to wait on court rulings to know whether people can access critical health care."

The decision is "extremely disappointing" but not a defeat, said Gavin Oxley, a spokesperson for the anti-abortion advocacy group Americans United for Life. "The Supreme Court still has the opportunity to hear the case in full and bring justice to Louisiana," he said.

The current dispute is similar to one that reached the court three years ago, when the justices blocked a 5th Circuit ruling in a suit filed by anti-abortion doctors and kept mifepristone widely available, over dissents from Alito and Thomas.

Then, in 2024, the high court unanimously dismissed the doctors' suit, reasoning they did not have the legal right, or standing, to sue.

In the current dispute, mainstream medical groups, the pharmaceutical industry and Democratic members of Congress have weighed in cautioning the court against limiting access to the drug. Pharmaceutical companies said a ruling for abortion opponents would upend the drug approval process.

Debate over the safety of mifepristone has churned for more than 25 years. The FDA has eased a number of restrictions initially placed on the drug, including who can prescribe it, how it is dispensed and what kinds of safety complications must be reported.

Despite those determinations, anti-abortion groups have filed a series of petitions and lawsuits against the agency, generally alleging that it violated federal law by overlooking safety issues with the pill.

Trump's administration has been unusually quiet at the Supreme Court. It declined to file a written brief recommending what the court should do, even though federal regulations are at issue.

The case puts the administration in a difficult place. Trump has relied on the political support of anti-abortion groups but has also seen ballot question and poll results that show Americans generally support abortion rights.

Both sides took the administration's silence as an implicit endorsement of the appellate ruling.

Scottie Scheffler part of 7-way tie for the lead at PGA Championship

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

NEWTOWN SQUARE, Pa. (AP) — Scottie Scheffler missed a 4-foot putt and laughed. Jon Rahm angrily swung his club after an errant shot and the grass divot hit a volunteer in the face. Garrick Higgo was 10 seconds late to the first tee and penalized two shots before he even swung a club.

Aronimink waited 64 years to host another PGA Championship and made up for lost time in a big way Thursday, including the biggest logjam in a major championship since 1969.

When the long day was over, most predictable was seeing Scheffler's name atop the leaderboard at 3-under 67, along with six other players. Another surprise: It's the first time the world's No. 1 player has at least a share of the lead after 18 holes of a major.

Scheffler wasn't buying it.

"Is it a really a lead when you're tied with like six guys?" he told ESPN with a laugh.

Scheffler took advantage of two long birdie putts and one big break on the 17th hole for his lowest start to a tournament since January. He was tied with six others — former PGA champion Martin Kaymer perhaps the most surprising — on a tough day in the Philadelphia suburbs.

Joining them at 67 were Aldrich Potgieter, Stephan Jaeger, Min Woo Lee, Ryo Hisatsune and Alex Smalley. The seven-way tie was the largest since nine players shared the lead in the 1969 PGA Championship at NCR Country Club in Dayton, Ohio.

"At this moment, it's anybody's tournament," Scheffler said. Indeed, 48 players were within three shots of the lead. The difference between missing the cut and being part of the lead was six shots.

And to think it could have been eight players. Higgo had a 69, which included a two-shot penalty before he even hit a shot for being 10 seconds late to the tee for his group's starting time.

Masters champion Rory McIlroy bogeyed his last four holes for a 74 that sent him to the practice range for most of the afternoon.

Not since Oakland Hills in 2008 — Jeev Milkha Singh and Robert Karlsson at 2-under 68 — has the low score to par after the first round of the PGA Championship been worse than 3 under. Aronimink with its severely sloped greens, fast fairways and plenty of wind that shooed away morning clouds was every bit a major challenge.

Scheffler has struggled with opening rounds for most of the year since opening with a 63 in his season debut at The American Express, his only victory. But this was quality work. He missed only one fairway, which cost him one of his two bogeys on the day.

"Definitely the best start I've gotten off to this year, maybe besides American Express," Scheffler said. "Your scores are definitely going to be lower if you hit the ball on the fairway, but it's still really, really difficult to make birdies."

He made one from just inside 40 feet on the par-4 seventh, and another birdie from just inside 30 feet on the par-4 10th. And even the No. 1 player in the world needed a little help.

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Scheffler was in the thick collar of rough to the right of the par-3 17th, facing a chip over a ridge and down toward the hole. But his golf ball was close enough to a sprinkler cap that he was given free relief, dropped on the fringe and putted it to close range for a par.

Kaymer won the PGA Championship in 2010 at Whistling Straits, giving him a lifetime exemption. Kaymer joined LIV Golf in 2022 and has yet to finish in the top 10 in the few European tour events he has played since then. He is No. 1,160 in the world ranking. He hasn't been in the top 10 after one round of any major since the 2020 PGA Championship.

During the champions dinner on Tuesday, he said one PGA of America officer asked the German if he planned to play this week.

"I said, 'Yeah, that's why I'm here. I'm not flying from Europe to here to have a New York strip with you guys, you know?' Of course, I'm playing. And that really motivated me."

Patrick Reed was the only player who made it around Aronimink without a bogey, his two birdies giving him a 68 and in the large group with Xander Schauffele and Shane Lowry, who played the two par 5s in 3 under.

Jordan Spieth, lacking only the PGA Championship for the career Grand Slam, bogeyed two of his last three holes — and did not birdie the par-5 ninth, the easiest hole at Aronimink — to join the group at 69 that included Brooks Koepka, Rahm and Justin Thomas.

"Just didn't quite finish the way I wanted to the last three holes, but under par was a good score," Spieth said. "It was blowing really hard, and it was cold this morning. The course played very, very difficult. It was a good start. I'm going to need to improve on it, I think, each day."

Rahm was headed for another rough start in a major until he holed out for eagle from the 11th fairway, chipped in for birdie on the tough par-3 eighth and shot 69. He was told some people thought scoring would be better in the morning. This surprised him.

"People thought it would be lower?" he replied. "Have you been out there? Have you seen this course?"

McIlroy had the toughest finish. He struggled out of the damp, dense rough. He struggled on the greens. He closed with four straight bogeys and described his round in one word that translates loosely to doo-doo.

No one struggled quite like Bryson DeChambeau, who didn't make a birdie until he ended on the par-5 ninth. That kept him from matching his highest score in the PGA Championship. He shot 76 and now has to work toward avoiding a second straight missed cut in a major.

Emails show FBI Director Kash Patel's Hawaii trip included 'VIP snorkel' at a Pearl Harbor memorial

By JIM MUSTIAN, ERIC TUCKER and MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Kash Patel visited Hawaii last summer, the FBI took pains to note the director was not on vacation, highlighting his walking tour of the bureau's Honolulu field office and meetings with local law enforcement.

Left out of the FBI's news releases was an exclusive excursion that Patel took days later when he participated in what government officials described as a "VIP snorkel" around the USS Arizona in an outing coordinated by the military. The sunken battleship entombs more than 900 sailors and Marines at Pearl Harbor.

The swim, revealed in government emails obtained by The Associated Press, comes to light amid criticism of Patel's use of the FBI plane and his global travel, which have blurred professional responsibilities with leisure activities. The FBI did not disclose the snorkeling session or that Patel had returned to Hawaii for two days after his initial stopover on the island.

"It fits a pattern of Director Patel getting tangled up in unseemly distractions — this time at a site commemorating the second deadliest attack in U.S. history — instead of staying laser-focused on keeping Americans safe," said Stacey Young, who founded Justice Connection, a network of former federal prosecutors and agents who advocate for the Department of Justice's independence.

With few exceptions, snorkeling and diving are off-limits around the USS Arizona. The battleship, now

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a military cemetery reachable only by boat, has stood as one of the nation's most hallowed sites since Japan bombed and sank it in 1941. Marine archaeologists and crews from the National Park Service make occasional dives at the memorial to survey the condition of the wreck. Other dives have been conducted to inter the remains of Arizona survivors who wanted to rest eternally with their former shipmates.

Still, since at least the Obama administration, the Navy and the park service have quietly allowed a handful of dignitaries, including military and government officials responsible for management of the memorial, to swim at the site. The Navy and park service declined to provide details of those permitted to take such excursions.

Former FBI directors have visited Pearl Harbor on official business, but none going back to at least 1993 has gone snorkeling at the memorial, according to those familiar with their activities and a former government diver who spoke to AP on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution. The diver said it was unusual for a director or anyone not connected to the memorial to be granted such access because the swims come with physical risks and present security, safety and logistical challenges.

Patel has faced scrutiny over his leadership for the past year, with his use of government resources emerging as a recurring storyline of his tenure. The issue flared in February when video surfaced of Patel partying in the locker room with members of the U.S. men's hockey team after their gold medal win at the Winter Olympics in Milan. Patel defended the trip as recently as this week as "purposely planned" in connection with a cybercrime investigation involving the Italian authorities.

Unanswered questions about exclusive outing

Patel's excursion was in August as he spent two days in Hawaii on his return to the United States from official visits to Australia and New Zealand. On his way to those countries, he stopped in Hawaii to visit the Honolulu field office. An FBI spokesman did not answer questions about the snorkeling session.

The FBI said in a statement that top regional commanders hosted Patel at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam "as they commonly do with US government officials on official travel." The Pearl Harbor visit, the spokesman said, "was part of the Director's public national security engagements last August with counterparts in New Zealand, Australia, our Honolulu Field Office, and the Department of War."

It was not clear how Patel's snorkeling session was arranged. A Navy spokesperson, Capt. Jodie Cornell, confirmed the outing but said the service was not able to track down who initiated it.

Participants in Patel's swim were told "not to touch/come into contact with" the sunken ship in any way, Cornell said. She added that the snorkelers were also briefed about "the historic significance of the Memorial as the final resting place/tomb for hundreds of service members."

A 'VIP Snorkel'

Government emails obtained by the AP through a public records request show military officials coordinated logistics and personnel for the "VIP Snorkel."

The National Park Service, which administers the site in coordination with the Navy, told AP it was not involved in Patel's swim and declined to comment on the excursion. It also declined to answer questions about any other such outings.

Among those afforded invitations to snorkel have been Navy admirals and secretaries of defense and the interior, according to the former government diver. The diver added that the swims were intended to provide officials with insights into the memorial and its operations.

The Navy declined to provide examples or numbers showing how frequently it organizes such excursions. It described Patel's outing as "not an anomaly."

Hack Albertson, a Marine veteran, is part of a select group from the Paralyzed Veterans of America trained to dive on the Arizona annually to check on the condition of the wreck. He said it was inappropriate for Patel and other political figures to snorkel or dive at the memorial.

"It's like having a bachelor party at a church. It's hallowed ground," he said. "It needs to be treated with the solemnity it deserves."

Some family members don't object to snorkeling

Some family members of Pearl Harbor survivors said they were not bothered by such official excursions, though some expressed a desire to also be permitted to snorkel at the site. They said they have not been

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permitted to do so.

"I have not heard of anyone who would object to these visits as they are very rare and there aren't any survivors of the Arizona left alive," Deidre Kelley, national president of the Sons and Daughters of Pearl Harbor Survivors, wrote in an email. "Their children might have some objections but I haven't heard any."

Patel visited Pearl Harbor several years ago during a trip he made to Hawaii while serving as chief of staff to Christopher Miller, then the acting secretary of defense, according to the former government diver.

Miller said he snorkeled over the Arizona during an official visit to the base, but Patel was not present for that excursion. Miller said he was invited to snorkel by regional military officials and was told such a tour was for "special occasions and for special visitors, of which you're one." He called it a "meaningful" experience.

"It was a very somber and meaningful event," Miller said in an interview. "It was a historical tour. It wasn't a recreational thing."

FBI will not discuss Patel's return to Hawaii

Beyond the snorkeling excursion, it is not clear what else Patel did during his second stop in Hawaii.

Flight tracking data for the Gulfstream G550 typically used by the FBI director show the jet remained on the island two nights during that stay before flying on to Las Vegas, Patel's adopted hometown. The jet has a published range of about 7,700 miles (12,391 kilometers), meaning the plane would have needed to refuel somewhere between New Zealand and Washington.

The snorkeling session happened one day after Patel stopped in Wellington to open the FBI's first stand-alone office in New Zealand. The visit sparked controversy after the AP revealed that Patel had gifted that country's police and spy bosses inoperable 3D-printed replica pistols that were illegal to possess under local gun laws.

Former Oklahoma death row prisoner freed from jail as he awaits retrial in 1997 killing

By JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

Former Oklahoma death row prisoner Richard Glossip was released from incarceration for the first time in nearly 30 years Thursday after posting bond while awaiting retrial for a 1997 killing that put him on the brink of execution three separate times.

Glossip wore a gray short-sleeved shirt and jeans as he walked out of the jail hand-in-hand with his wife, Lea Glossip.

"I'm just thankful for my wife and my attorneys. Just thankful," he said. "It's overwhelming, but it's amazing at the same time."

Earlier Thursday, Judge Natalie Mai issued an order setting bond at \$500,000. Glossip must wear an electronic monitoring device and will not be allowed to travel outside Oklahoma. He also must not contact any witnesses in the case, or consume any drugs or alcohol.

His attorney Donald Knight had suggested Glossip was counting on contributions to raise the money.

"Mr. Glossip has many supporters and we are hopeful those supporters can afford the bail," Knight said.

Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court threw out his conviction, and his longstanding claims of innocence have drawn support from Kim Kardashian and other prominent figures.

Glossip had been sentenced to death over the 1997 killing in Oklahoma City of his former boss, motel owner Barry Van Treese, who was beaten with a baseball bat in what prosecutors have alleged was a murder-for-hire scheme.

The Supreme Court ruled last year that prosecutors' decision to allow a key witness to give testimony they knew to be false violated Glossip's constitutional right to a fair trial.

Glossip has remained behind bars after Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond announced the state would seek to retry him on a murder charge but not pursue the death penalty again.

"The court fully expects that the state will rigorously prosecute its case going forward and the defense will provide robust representation for Glossip," the judge wrote in the order. "The court hopes that a new trial,

free of error, will provided all interested parties and the citizens of Oklahoma, the closure they deserve.”

During his time on death row, courts in Oklahoma set nine different execution dates for Glossip, and he came so close to being put to death that he ate three separate last meals. In 2015, he was even held in a cell next to Oklahoma’s execution chamber, waiting to be strapped to a gurney and die by lethal injection.

But the scheduled time for his execution came and went. Behind the walls of the Oklahoma State Penitentiary, prison officials were scrambling after learning one of the lethal drugs they received to carry out the procedure didn’t match the execution protocols. The drug mix-up ultimately led to a nearly seven-year moratorium on executions in Oklahoma.

“Mr. Glossip now has the chance to taste freedom while his defense team continues to pursue justice on his behalf against a system that the United States Supreme Court has found to be guilty of serious misconduct by state prosecutors,” Knight said.

Van Treese’s family had asked the Supreme Court to leave Glossip’s conviction and sentence intact. Attorneys for the family did not immediately respond to emailed requests for comment.

Glossip’s case attracted international attention after actress Susan Sarandon — who won an Academy Award for her portrayal of death penalty opponent Sister Helen Prejean’s fight to save a man on Louisiana’s death row in the 1995 movie “Dead Man Walking” — took up his cause in real life. Glossip’s case also was featured in the 2017 documentary film titled “Killing Richard Glossip.”

“Both Richard and I are grateful for the court’s decision,” Glossip’s wife, Lea, said in a text to The Associated Press. “We have been praying for this day.”

UK health secretary resigns, setting up a potential Labour leadership challenge to Keir Starmer

By DANICA KIRKA, BRIAN MELLEY and PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Efforts to unseat British Prime Minister Keir Starmer from within his own party broke into open rebellion Thursday, with one potential rival resigning from the Cabinet and two others positioning themselves for a future leadership challenge.

Health Secretary Wes Streeting became the first senior minister to quit Thursday in what was seen as a precursor to challenging Starmer’s leadership. He said he had lost confidence in Starmer, who should not serve out the rest of his term.

“You have shown courage and statesmanship on the world stage — not least in keeping Britain out of the war in Iran,” Streeting wrote in an excoriating resignation letter. “But where we need vision, we have a vacuum. Where we need direction, we have drift.”

But Streeting stopped short of saying he was the best candidate to lead the party at the next election due by 2029, suggesting Starmer should step aside to allow a “broad” field of candidates to debate the future of the party.

Starmer is under growing pressure to step down after disastrous results for his Labour Party last week in local and regional elections. The election drubbing cemented doubts among many party members about Starmer’s judgment, vision and leadership ability — a brutal indictment on a leader who returned Labour to power in July 2024 after 14 years in opposition.

Starmer responded in a generous letter to Streeting, saying he was “truly sorry” to see him leave the government and praised his stewardship of the state-run National Health Service.

Making no reference to Streeting’s criticisms, Starmer laid out his hope the two “can work together to show that Labour in power can address the problems our opponents exploit, can install hope where they want despair, and can bring people together where they want division.”

Starmer moved quickly to replace Streeting, appointing James Murray, formerly a Treasury minister, to the health portfolio.

If Starmer doesn’t step down, any challenger would need support from a fifth of Labour lawmakers, or 81, to trigger a leadership contest.

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For days, Streeting had been expected to launch a bid Thursday, but the wording of his statement stoked speculation he doesn't have enough votes yet, or that he is giving Starmer a chance to announce his resignation on his own terms.

Another likely challenger, former Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, said Thursday that she had reached an agreement with authorities to clear up questions about her taxes that forced her to leave the Cabinet last September. Rayner told the Guardian newspaper that Starmer should "reflect on" his position, adding that she was ready to "play my part" in any leadership election if Streeting triggered a contest.

A third rival, Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, is ineligible for the leadership because he doesn't have a seat in Parliament, but on Thursday afternoon a Labour lawmaker said he would step aside to make room and Burnham said he would seek permission from party to enter a special election. He could then mount a leadership challenge if elected.

"I grew up in this area and have lived here for 25 years," Burnham said on X. "I care deeply about it and its people. I know they have been let down by national politics."

Race to unseat Starmer heats up

Pressure for Starmer to step aside has intensified since Labour suffered heavy losses in local and regional elections last week, underscoring voter frustration with a government that has failed to deliver on pledges to boost economic growth and improve living standards for working people.

A stagnant economy and stubbornly high inflation have made it difficult for Starmer's government to deliver on the promises it made when winning a landslide election victory less than two years ago.

Starmer has vowed to remain in office, warning lawmakers that any leadership contest would destabilize the government when it should be focused on issues like the cost of living crisis and war in the Middle East.

The leadership wrangles overshadowed some positive news for the government.

Official figures showed the British economy grew 0.6% in the first three months of the year — more than had been anticipated and larger than the previous quarter, despite the negative impact from the Iran war. More growth means more tax revenues to fund Labour's priorities and potentially lower borrowing.

Treasury chief Rachel Reeves said the figures showed her policies were working and the party shouldn't put hard-won economic stability at risk "by plunging the country in chaos at a time when there is conflict in the world."

Streeting himself hailed figures showing that waiting lines for NHS appointments — one of his signature priorities — fell for the fifth straight month, an achievement he is likely to point to if he runs for leader.

Streeting comes from a faction of the left-leaning Labour Party that sees itself as the modernizing wing, as does Starmer. Rayner is a favorite of members who think the party has strayed too far from its working-class roots and those who want the party to do more to boost the minimum wage and raise taxes on the rich.

Efforts to depose a Labour leader are relatively rare

Unlike the Conservative Party, Labour has never ousted a prime minister in midterm.

"They don't do ruthless on their leader," said Jonathan Tonge, a professor of politics at the University of Liverpool. "They don't tend to depose their leader. The Conservatives, they readily do ruthless."

Even if Starmer survives this current bout of jitters, he will likely face another challenge in a few months given the level of fragmentation in British politics, he added.

"He's got a huge parliamentary majority, he's got more than 400 MPs, and yet his prime ministership may be on the brink of disintegration," Tonge said.

The NFL's 2026 season will kick off with a Patriots-Seahawks Super Bowl rematch

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

The 2026 NFL season will kick off with a Super Bowl rematch.

Mike Macdonald, Sam Darnold and the Seattle Seahawks will face off against Mike Vrabel, Drake Maye

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and the New England Patriots after raising their championship banner on Sept. 9 in the first of the NFL's 272 games.

The Seahawks dominated the Patriots in a 29-13 victory in February that secured the franchise's second NFL title.

The game will mark just the third time that the teams that played in the Super Bowl face off again in Week 1. The last time came in 2016, when the Broncos beat the Panthers. Overall, the Super Bowl opponents have met 11 times the following season, including each of the last three years. The defending champions are 8-3 in those games.

The Eagles followed up a Super Bowl victory with another win over the Chiefs in Week 2 last year.

"Yes, it was definitely a key data point for us," NFL executive Hans Schroeder said. "We saw what a big draw that was and so we just thought it was really fun. I think it's been a decade since we did Denver and Carolina in Super Bowl 50 and came back in Week 1 the next year. We thought it was a fun way to start the season again with New England in Seattle, coming off that Super Bowl, certainly a ton to play for. Let our fans see if they play again."

The NFL season will be opening on a Wednesday for just the second time in league history — the Giants hosted the Cowboys on Sept. 5, 2012.

The opener will be Vrabel's first game since the reigning AP Coach of the Year missed Day 3 of the NFL draft to seek counseling following the publication of photos of him and longtime football reporter Dianna Russini at an Arizona resort. The photos led to Russini's resignation from The Athletic less than a week later.

The Seahawks will play at least six other stand-alone games, including Christmas night at home against the Los Angeles Rams. The Patriots have five other stand-alone games.

Week 1

Other opening week highlights were announced before the full schedule release on Thursday night.

The San Francisco 49ers will face the Rams in Melbourne on Sept. 10 in the first of a record nine international games. The Cowboys and Giants meet in the first Sunday night game of the season while the Broncos and Chiefs go head to head in the first Monday night game.

Raiders fans get to see No. 1-overall pick Fernando Mendoza — probably on the sideline watching Kirk Cousins start — in Week 1 when Las Vegas hosts Miami.

Thanksgiving weekend

Josh Allen and the Bills host Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs on Thanksgiving night to complete a triple-header. The Bears-Lions and Eagles-Cowboys matchups were previously released.

Aaron Rodgers — maybe — and the Steelers host the Broncos on Black Friday.

The Packers and Rams are playing on Thanksgiving Eve.

Christmas week

Santa Claus has to go through Philadelphia on Christmas Eve when the Eagles host the Texans on "Thursday Night Football."

The Christmas Day tripleheader features the Packers-Bears, Bills-Broncos and Rams-Seahawks.

The two games on Saturday, Dec. 26, haven't been determined.

International games

The league will play across four continents, starting with the Week 1 game in Australia. Sixteen of the league's 32 teams will play at least one of their 17 regular-season games outside the United States.

The 49ers and Jacksonville each have two international games. San Francisco also faces Minnesota in Mexico City in Week 11. The Jaguars have consecutive games in London in Weeks 5 and 6 against the Eagles and Texans. The Colts and Commanders also face off in London in Week 4.

The Steelers play the New Orleans Saints on Oct. 25 in Paris in the NFL's first regular-season matchup in France.

The Cowboys and Baltimore Ravens go head to head in Rio de Janeiro in Week 3. The Bengals and Falcons are in Madrid in Week 8 and the Patriots and Lions play in Munich in Week 9.

Spotlight teams

Jalen Hurts, Saquon Barkley and the Eagles lead the way with eight stand-alone games. The Cowboys,

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Bills, Packers and Rams are tied with the Seahawks with seven. Teams could add or lose prime-time games depending on flex scheduling.

Familiar foes

Micah Parsons and the Packers will host the Cowboys this time around on Sunday night, Oct. 18. The two teams played to a 40-40 tie in Dallas in Week 4 last season, a month after Parsons was traded from Dallas to Green Bay.

Louisiana senators pass new US House map while South Carolina plans for extra redistricting work

By DAVID A. LIEB, JACK BROOK and JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

Two weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Louisiana's congressional map, state senators passed a plan Thursday that would eliminate a majority-Black district while giving Republicans a chance to win an additional seat in the midterm elections.

The new U.S. House districts, which still need House approval, would be used for primary elections poised to be postponed from Saturday until November.

The high court's ruling has led to a flurry of redistricting efforts in Southern states as Republicans seek to capitalize on a weakened federal Voting Rights Act. While most of those efforts are voluntary, Louisiana must redraw its U.S. House map in response to the ruling that it had illegally used race to gerrymander a majority-Black district.

The debate over the shape of Louisiana's new districts is playing out as South Carolina's governor ramps up pressure on lawmakers to also redistrict ahead of the midterms. Republican Gov. Henry McMaster on Thursday called a special session on redistricting to start Friday.

President Donald Trump has encouraged numerous Republican-led states to redraw House voting districts to their advantage in a bid to hold on to control of the closely divided chamber in November.

Republicans think they could win as many as 15 additional House seats in seven states that already have adopted new voting districts. Democrats think they could gain up to six seats from two other states because of new House districts. But there's no guarantee those seats will turn out as expected. Litigation is continuing in some states, and voters will have the ultimate say on who wins.

Democrats had hoped to win up to four additional seats from new House districts in Virginia. But Democratic Gov. Abigail Spanberger's office confirmed Thursday that the state will hold this year's elections under the current districts as it appeals last week's Virginia Supreme Court ruling invalidating a voter-approved amendment authorizing the new districts.

Louisiana map scraps snaking district

Legislation in Louisiana seeks to address the Supreme Court ruling by scrapping a district that snakes over 200 miles (321 kilometers) northwest from the capital, Baton Rouge, to Shreveport, creating a voting bloc with a majority of Black residents. Democratic U.S. Rep. Cleo Fields represents the current 6th District.

Under the new plan, that district would instead be clustered around predominantly white communities in the Baton Rouge area and southern Louisiana.

The new plan keeps a New Orleans-based, majority-Black district represented by Democratic U.S. Rep. Troy Carter while also adding a portion of Baton Rouge to it.

Fields, a Baton Rouge resident, said he won't decide whether to seek reelection until the maps are finalized. But he said he won't challenge Carter in a primary.

The newly proposed House map is similar to one used in 2022 that resulted in five Republicans and one Democrat winning election. Republican state Sen. Jay Morris said the new map packs Democrats into the 2nd District held by Carter to allow Republicans to prevail elsewhere.

"These maps are drawn to maximize Republican advantage for the incumbent Republicans that we have in Congress," Morris said.

Democratic state Sen. Sam Jenkins suggested Republicans are "using partisanship as cover for discrimi-

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natory practices against a group of people, particularly Black voters and Democrats.”

“If it looks like a duck and it quacks like a duck, it’s probably a duck,” Jenkins said.

“It’s not quacking,” Morris said.

“It’s quacking pretty loud, it’s quacking all over the state,” Jenkins replied.

Republican senators defeated an alternative from Democrats that would have kept two Democratic-leaning districts. Republicans opted not to pursue a 6-0 Republican map because it was infeasible, said Louisiana Senate President Cameron Henry, a Republican.

A federal judge struck down Louisiana’s 2022 map for violating the Voting Rights Act. Then in 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Alabama had to create its own second largely Black congressional district. In light of the Alabama ruling, the Louisiana Legislature passed a revised map, creating a second majority-Black district that was used in the 2024 elections. That map also was challenged, leading to an April 29 Supreme Court ruling that Louisiana’s districts relied too heavily on race.

Louisiana House primary could shift to November

After the Supreme Court ruling, Republican Gov. Jeff Landry postponed Louisiana’s U.S. House primaries, which were scheduled for Saturday.

A bill given final approval Wednesday by the Legislature would shift the election to an open primary on Nov. 3. All U.S. House candidates, regardless of their party affiliation, would be on the ballot for voters in their district. If no one wins a majority outright, the top two vote-getters would enter a run-off on Dec. 12.

A new qualifying period for House candidates would run from Aug. 5-7.

The system is similar to how Louisiana’s congressional elections previously occurred. Landry pushed the Legislature to end the state’s unique jungle primary system in 2024. Closed party primaries went into effect this year, and more than 250,000 votes already had been cast, according to the Louisiana secretary of state. The canceled congressional votes would be shielded from public records law.

Rep. Beau Beaulieu, the bill’s Republican sponsor, said that with congressional redistricting, there would not be sufficient time for closed primaries and a primary run-off before the Nov. 3 general election.

A closed primary remains in place for Louisiana’s U.S. Senate race, which has not been suspended and pits incumbent Sen. Bill Cassidy against Trump-backed challenger U.S. Rep. Julia Letlow.

South Carolina to work overtime on redistricting

South Carolina’s regular legislative session ended Thursday, but McMaster quickly called lawmakers back into session Friday to continue working on redistricting and other matters.

It could be next week before the House can finish the redistricting bill, which would also move congressional primaries to August, Republican House Majority Leader Davey Hiott said. All primaries are currently scheduled for June 9. Early voting begins May 26, and that’s likely the deadline to finish redistricting, he said.

The redistricting work “will be long. It will be boring. It will be confrontational,” Hiott told reporters.

If the proposal passes the House, it then heads to a more skeptical Senate, where Republican Judiciary Committee Chairman Luke Rankin has said he will “demand the process” without elaborating. During the last regular redistricting at the start of the decade, Rankin’s committee held a month of meetings across the state and encouraged the public to submit its own maps.

Only one of South Carolina’s seven U.S. House seats currently is held by a Democrat — longtime U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn. Some Republicans worry it is impossible to guarantee seven GOP districts in a state where the Democratic presidential candidate has gotten more than 40% of the vote every election this century. There are also concerns about holding two statewide elections in a little over two months. South Carolina’s elections leader said it may require employees to work 24 hours a day.

Lawyers urge judge to block Trump order that would create eligible voter list, limit mail ballots

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump exceeded his authority when he issued an executive order to restrict voters’ ability to cast ballots by mail, attorneys for Democrats and civil rights groups told

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a federal judge on Thursday.

U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols didn't rule from the bench on the plaintiffs' request for an order blocking officials from implementing Trump's March 31 order, his second related to elections since winning his second term in the White House. The case is one of multiple lawsuits filed to block the order on the grounds that only states and Congress, and not the president, are given power under the Constitution to decide how elections are run.

Trump's initial executive order to revamp elections by requiring documentary proof of citizenship, issued last year, was largely halted by multiple federal judges on similar grounds. He issued his latest order only after the voting bill he backed stalled in Congress. The current legal fight comes as the country is in the midst of primary elections and election officials are preparing for the intricacies of holding the fall's midterm elections.

"I understand the time pressure here," said Nichols, who questioned both sides but gave no clear indication of which way he's leaning.

The president can't rewrite election rules to give himself and the Republican Party a partisan advantage, the plaintiffs' attorneys said. They argued that the executive order's requirements are illegal and designed to coerce states into limiting voter registration and ballot access.

"It is harming our clients every day in the middle of an election season," said Orion Nevers, an attorney representing the NAACP.

Democrats are more likely to vote by mail. Since even before his 2020 loss, Trump has falsely implied there is mass fraud involved in the practice and fought to curtail it, even after his baseless claims led to the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol and were repeatedly debunked by audits and reviews, including some run by Republicans.

Since returning to office, Trump has said he wants Republicans to "take over" elections in Democratic areas and launched investigations of the 2020 vote.

His latest executive order calls on the Department of Homeland Security to make a list of eligible voters in each state and seeks to prohibit the U.S. Postal Service from sending absentee ballots to those not on each state's approved list.

The administration is asking the judge to dismiss the plaintiffs' claims. Justice Department attorney Stephen Pezzi on Thursday suggested that the litigation is premature, calling it "shadowboxing" for the plaintiffs to challenge a list that hasn't yet been created.

"It's a little hard to address these questions in the abstract," Pezzi said.

Nichols, who was nominated to the bench by Trump, asked Pezzi why it would be lawful to disseminate the list to states.

"I think it would be the plaintiffs' burden to explain why it's unlawful," Pezzi replied. "I don't mean to be cute with that answer."

Trump's executive order requires federal agencies to compile a list of adults the U.S. government has purportedly "confirmed" to be U.S. citizens and to share it with each state at least 60 days before each federal election.

"There isn't a way to lawfully compile it," said Lalitha Madduri, an attorney for Democratic Party plaintiffs.

Danielle Lang, who represents the League of United Latin American Citizens, said the executive order is aimed at creating "the maximum amount of chaos and confusion" for local election officials.

"They need clear direction," Lang said.

Lawyers for Elon Musk and OpenAI make their final case in a trial that could shape AI's future

By BARBARA ORTUTAY and MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writers

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Lawyers for Elon Musk and OpenAI made their final arguments Thursday in the landmark trial whose outcome could shape the future of artificial intelligence.

Musk, the world's richest man, was a co-founder of OpenAI, which started in 2015 and went on to cre-

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ate ChatGPT. His lawsuit filed in 2024 accuses OpenAI CEO Sam Altman and his top deputy of betraying a plan to keep it as a nonprofit and shifting into a moneymaking mode behind his back.

The trial's outcome could sway the balance of power in AI — breakthrough technology that increasingly has raised fears about its potential impacts on the economy, society and even humanity's survival. Scrutiny of Altman's leadership comes at a crucial time for the company and its competitors, Musk's own AI firm and Anthropic, formed by a group of seven ex-OpenAI leaders.

All three firms are moving toward planned initial public offerings that are expected to be among the largest ever. Musk is seeking damages and changes to OpenAI's business structure, as well as Altman's ouster from company leadership. If Musk wins, it could derail OpenAI's IPO plans.

Timing of lawsuit is key question

One of the jury's tasks is to decide if Musk filed his lawsuit in time. Much of the testimony has centered on OpenAI's early years after its founding, but there's a relatively short timeline to allege the claims Musk is making of breach of charitable trust and unjust enrichment.

OpenAI has argued that Musk waited too long and cannot claim harms that occurred before August 2021.

The judge wrote in a court filing last month that "if the jury finds that Musk failed to file his action within the statute of limitations, it is highly likely" that she will "accept that finding and direct verdict to the defendants."

If the jury decides the lawsuit was filed in time, it then has to decide if OpenAI had a "charitable trust" that was broken by OpenAI and its executives. Musk's other claim means jurors must determine whether Altman, Greg Brockman — co-founder and president — and OpenAI unjustly enriched themselves at Musk's expense.

For Microsoft, a co-defendant in the trial, the jury has to decide whether the company aided and abetted that breach. Musk invested \$38 million in OpenAI during its first years, and Microsoft became OpenAI's biggest investor after Musk's departure.

Musk lawyer focuses on Altman's credibility

Altman and Brockman were in the courtroom Thursday, while Musk was in China with President Donald Trump and other prominent tech executives.

Musk's attorney, Steven Molo, told jurors the Tesla CEO was "sorry he could not be here."

In his closing arguments, Molo doubled down on claims of Altman's untrustworthiness, pointing to testimony from witnesses who called the OpenAI CEO a "liar."

"I confronted Sam Altman with the fact that five witnesses in this trial, all people that he's known for years and worked with, called him a liar under oath. Liar's a very powerful word in a courtroom," Molo said.

Those five people were Musk and another co-founder Ilya Sutskever, who was OpenAI's chief scientist, as well as OpenAI's former chief technology officer Mira Murati and two ex-board members, Helen Toner and Tasha McCauley.

"Sam Altman's credibility is directly at issue in this case. He's the defendants' main witness. The defendants absolutely need you to believe Sam Altman. If you cannot trust him, if you don't believe him, they cannot win. It's that simple," Molo said.

Because Musk, Altman and Brockman never signed a contract that could show they had a charitable trust that OpenAI then broke, Musk's side has made the case that jurors should consider emails and other communication between them — along with everything from OpenAI's website to press interviews — as constituting such a trust.

A question of money

In a terse exchange while jurors were out of the room, U.S. District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers sharply criticized Musk's attorney for suggesting to jurors Thursday that Musk wasn't seeking any money in the lawsuit.

While Musk, before the trial, abandoned a bid for damages for himself, he is still seeking an unspecified amount of money to be paid to fund the altruistic efforts of OpenAI's charitable arm.

Musk is seeking "billions of dollars of disgorgement," the judge said, ordering Molo to either retract his statement or "drop your claim for billions of dollars." They later agreed that the judge would correct the

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statement to jurors.

OpenAI says Musk has no evidence

Sarah Eddy, a lawyer for OpenAI, said it was Musk who has misrepresented details surrounding OpenAI's nonprofit founding and his subsequent falling out with the other co-founders.

"Mr. Molo says that Sam Altman can't be trusted," she said. "Mr. Musk is the one whose testimony is contradicted by every other witness."

As OpenAI has argued throughout the trial, Eddy said Musk knew of and supported plans for OpenAI to form a for-profit company that would still support its mission to benefit humanity.

"Mr. Musk, he has tried to persuade you that his years-ago donations to OpenAI came with specific strings attached, that these strings were strong enough to last forever to tie OpenAI up in knots as it tries to pursue its mission, and that these strings gave Mr. Musk perpetual rights over OpenAI," Eddy said. "But Mr. Musk has come nowhere close to making that case."

She brought up testimony that Musk had discussed his children inheriting control of OpenAI.

"He wanted dominion over AGI," she said, referring to artificial general intelligence, a term for advanced AI technology that surpasses humans at many tasks. "That's why this was such a high stakes conversation. Mr. Musk wanted total control. Maybe, maybe he'd give it up over time, or maybe not. But it was up to him and that was the problem."

Protesters outside court bash both sides

Outside the courthouse, more than a dozen protesters bashed both parties as billionaires who were eroding the environment, workforce and people's mental health and whose industry would wipe out humanity.

There were signs that read "Stop replacing healthcare workers with chatboxes!" and "No future for workers in Musk-Altman fascist world."

It doesn't matter which side wins in court, said Saru Jayaraman, who is part of a campaign to push a \$30 hourly wage on election ballots this fall.

"The thing is, we're all losing, that's the main point. Who's really winning? The two of them," she said, referring to Altman and Musk.

Phoebe Thomas Sorgen, a peace activist from nearby Berkeley, said there needs to be a global ban on artificial intelligence and used a slang term to say everyone is awful here, except for the jurors and activists.

"Both parties in this trial are completely hypocritical. They both claim that they're developing AI for the benefit of humanity and that's a lie. They're developing it for greed."

Cisco leads Wall Street to more records and the Dow back to 50,000

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. stock market rose to more records Thursday after Cisco Systems joined the parade of U.S. companies reporting fatter profits for the start of 2026 than analysts expected.

The S&P 500 climbed 0.8% to set an all-time high for a second straight day. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 370 points, or 0.7%, and finished above the 50,000 level for the first time since the war with Iran began, while the Nasdaq composite added 0.9% to its own record.

Cisco helped lead the market after reporting better profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected. The tech giant's stock leaped 13.4% for its best day in nearly 15 years, and CEO Chuck Robbins said it saw "very strong, broad-based demand for our products."

Big Tech behemoths in particular are pouring cash into artificial-intelligence technology, and Cisco gave a forecast for profit in the current quarter that easily topped analysts' expectations.

Such voracious demand for AI, and the big profits it's producing, have been major reasons the U.S. stock market has set records throughout this year. Cerebras Systems, an AI processor company, raised \$5.55 billion after selling its stock in an initial public offering, and its shares surged 68.1% in their debut on the Nasdaq Thursday.

Corporate earnings reported so far this season have "reinforced that this is still an AI-led market, but one

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where the impact is broadening quickly," according to Gargi Pal Chaudhuri, chief investment and portfolio strategist at BlackRock.

"What started with a handful of companies is now driving earnings growth across semiconductors, infrastructure, and even parts of the industrial economy," she said.

Outside of AI, other stocks rallying after delivering better-than-expected profit reports included StubHub Holdings, up 13.7%, Viking Holdings, up 5.5% and Yeti Holdings, up 6.2%.

All three companies sell products that aren't day-to-day essentials, such as concert tickets, river cruises and insulated water bottles. Strong results from them could be an indicator that customers are still willing to spend even though U.S. consumers have been telling surveys they're feeling discouraged about the economy.

Whether U.S. households will keep spending and support the economy is a big question because pressure has been bearing down on them due to high oil prices and inflation created by the Iran war. A report released Thursday said that shoppers overall spent less at U.S. retailers last month than economists expected. But the deceleration after factoring out gasoline and automobile sales wasn't quite as bad as economists thought it would be.

A separate report, meanwhile, said more U.S. workers filed for unemployment benefits last week, which could be an indication of more layoffs. The number, though, remains relatively low compared with history.

Treasury yields flitted up and down in the bond market immediately after the reports, but they largely remained steady. The yield on the 10-year ticked up to 4.47% from 4.46% late Wednesday.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 rose 56.99 points to 7,501.24. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 370.26 to 50,063.46, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 232.88 to 26,635.22.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose in Europe following a mixed finish in Asia. Japan's Nikkei 225 fell 1%, while South Korea's Kospi jumped 1.8% to another record thanks to gains for AI-related stocks.

Stocks were virtually flat in Hong Kong and down 1.5% in Shanghai as Chinese leader Xi Jinping met with U.S. President Donald Trump in Beijing.

Some investors hope Trump could encourage Xi to use China's close economic ties with Iran to get it to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. The strait's closure because of the war has kept oil tankers pent up in the Persian Gulf instead of delivering crude to customers worldwide, which has driven up prices.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude oil, the international standard, rose 0.1% to settle at \$105.72 Thursday, and it remains well above its price of roughly \$70 from before the war.

Vance promotes Trump administration's work to counter fraud while criticizing Democrats in Maine

By PATRICK WHITTLE and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

BANGOR, Maine (AP) — A day after Vice President JD Vance said the Trump administration's endeavor to combat fraud in government programs would not be political or partisan, he touted the effort in a campaign-style stop in Maine while promoting a Republican candidate as a fraud fighter and portraying Democrats as enablers of scammers.

Vance, dubbed the "fraud czar" by President Donald Trump, made an appearance in the state's politically competitive 2nd Congressional District to stump for former Gov. Paul LePage, a Trump ally who is vying to flip the U.S. House seat being vacated by Democratic Rep. Jared Golden.

He compared LePage to the current governor, Democrat Janet Mills, who has sparred with the Trump administration over the issue of transgender athletes in high school sports. Mills is prevented by term limit laws from running again and recently dropped out of a heated Democratic primary race for the Senate seat held by Republican Susan Collins, one of the most vulnerable candidates in the chamber.

"Let's kick Janet Mills to the curb and let's send Paul LePage to Washington to help us fight the fraudsters and protect all of you," Vance told the crowd of a few hundred people at Bangor International Airport.

While Vance has mentioned the anti-fraud efforts in his stops around the country in recent weeks on behalf of Republican candidates, Thursday's visit was the first expressly billed as a stop to talk about the

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fraud-fighting efforts rather than the economic-focused message he's delivered in other visits.

The event showcased how the vice president is leveraging his high-profile role leading Trump's anti-fraud task force for Republicans as they face crucial midterm elections this year, especially as the administration's economic message has been clouded by rising costs from the Iran war. Early voting is already underway in Maine for the state's June 9 primary elections for offices including governor, the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House.

The state has supported Democratic presidential candidates in consecutive elections going back to 1992, though Trump carried Maine's 2nd Congressional District in the last three elections, capturing one of the state's four electoral votes.

Vance could make fraud a centerpiece of a 2028 run

Vance's message also provided a preview of how the vice president, seen as a likely 2028 GOP presidential candidate, could use the fraud crackdown as a central piece of his own political message in a future campaign.

"You are the first victim of fraud," Vance told attendees as signs hung nearby that read "PROTECTING TAXPAYER DOLLARS" and "FIGHTING FRAUDSTERS."

Vance went on and added a few minutes later, "My friends, this has gone on for far too long. You have been fleeced by your own government for far too long, and we are stopping it every single day."

Mills said in a statement that Vance's attacks were an attempt to distract from surging costs and the unpopular Iran war.

"Maine people deserved to hear about how the Trump Administration is making their lives better by lowering costs, improving health care, building housing, and fixing child care — but we got none of that because the President and Vice President don't actually care about these issues or the hardships they are causing our state and people," Mills said.

The visit to Maine came after the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz said earlier in the year that he was calling for corrective action on alleged fraud in government health programs in Maine, a request characterized by Mills as a "political attack."

Mills recently dropped out of the Democratic primary race to challenge Republican Sen. Susan Collins, effectively ceding the nomination to progressive activist and oyster farmer Graham Platner. The seat is critical to Democratic hopes of reclaiming control of the chamber in this year's midterms.

Vance, however, didn't mention Platner and instead focused much of his attention on Mills and LePage, the sole Republican vying for the nomination in Maine's 2nd Congressional District.

Republicans are bullish about their chances of the seat, which encompasses Bangor and which backed Trump for president in the last three elections even as the state itself supported the Democratic presidential candidate.

Vance portrayed LePage as a partner-in-arms with his anti-fraud effort and told the crowd Thursday: "Fraud has festered in Maine because this guy is no longer the governor of Maine."

Collins draws praise from Vance for her independence

While Collins is not always a reliable vote for the Trump administration, Vance took pains to praise the longtime senator for her independence and lack of partisanship.

"Sometimes I get frustrated with Susan Collins. I almost wish she was more partisan," Vance said. "If she was as partisan as I wish she was, she would not be a good fit for the people of Maine."

Collins was in Washington on Thursday and not among the candidates who joined Vance for the trip.

Before Vance arrived, LePage told the crowd that if elected to represent Maine's 2nd Congressional District, he would work with the Trump administration to crack down on fraud in social safety programs, which he characterized as rampant in his state.

"The American people are done being taken for a ride. It's time for the Maine people and the Maine taxpayer to be put front and center," he told the crowd.

Maine Center for Economic Policy, a left-leaning policy group that advocates for low- and middle-income residents, said in a statement that the Trump administration's characterizations of fraud and social programs in the state were inaccurate.

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"Fraud should always be investigated and stopped. But Mainers deserve facts, not political fearmongering designed to undermine health care for hundreds of thousands of people," the statement said.

In the governor's race, seven Republicans, five Democrats and several independents are vying to replace Mills. Vance noted that some of the candidates were in attendance at the rally but declined to endorse any of them when a reporter asked whether he would.

A few dozen demonstrators stood across the street from the airport holding signs denouncing Vance and the Trump administration. One held a giant caricature of the vice president's head that has become a popular meme.

Nirav Shah, the former Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention director who is running for governor, said in an email to supporters and the media that Vance is visiting Maine as the costs of necessities such as heating oil and gas surge in the state.

"That is the record JD Vance is bringing to Maine on Thursday. That is the record the Maine Republicans hosting him are 'honored' to celebrate," Shah said.

What to know about a Tennessee man known for making racist videos now charged with attempted murder

By TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A Tennessee man who goes by the moniker Chud the Builder and is known for posting racist videos is charged with attempted murder after shooting a man outside a Clarksville courthouse on Wednesday.

Dalton Eatherly, who is white, posts videos to social media where he tries to provoke Black passersby by using racial slurs and racist dog whistles. He was arrested on Wednesday after an altercation with another man. This is what we know.

'Did I shoot myself ...?'

At about 1:20 p.m. on Wednesday, police responded to a report of shots fired outside the Montgomery County Courthouse. Deputies detained two people who were involved in a "physical altercation that escalated to gunfire," according to a news release from the sheriff's office. Both people sustained gunshot wounds and were taken to separate hospitals where they were both listed as being stable.

District Attorney General Robert Nash, in a separate news release, identified one of the people involved as Eatherly. Authorities declined to answer questions about the second man; however, a witness who said she saw him loaded into an ambulance described him as Black.

Neither Nash nor the sheriff's office have said what exactly led to the confrontation. It was not immediately clear if Eatherly has an attorney in the case who could speak for him. The courthouse was closed on Thursday because of the shooting, and online records were not updated. An attorney representing Eatherly in a different case did not return a call seeking comment.

In an audio stream from just after the shooting that Eatherly posted to social media, Eatherly says he shot a man in self-defense after the person started hitting him. Eatherly speaks with paramedics in the clip, one of whom takes note of a bullet wound's entry and exit point in his arm.

"Did I shoot myself or did it graze it?" Eatherly asks.

After leaving the hospital on Wednesday, Eatherly was taken to the Montgomery County jail. He is charged with attempted murder, employing a firearm during a dangerous felony, aggravated assault and reckless endangerment with a deadly weapon.

Authorities on Thursday did not provide an update on the condition of the other man, and a hospital spokesperson said medical privacy laws prohibit them from disclosing information about victims of violence.

The free speech defense

In an online fundraiser Eatherly posted for himself at some point prior to the shooting, he complains that he cannot get jobs for his contracting business because people object to the videos he makes. He claims to make "mild jokes" and admits that he uses racial slurs while calling it "harmless humor." It is unclear when the fundraiser was first posted. He addresses it to "friends, supporters, and champions of free speech."

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Although Eatherly repeatedly references free speech in his social media posts, what he does in those posts may actually be crimes under Tennessee law, said David Raybin, a criminal defense attorney and former prosecutor who is an expert in the state's criminal law. Because Eatherly was known to openly carry a pistol while berating people, the combination could constitute assault, Raybin said.

"You don't have to touch someone," he said. Assault can be charged if you "create fear of imminent harm."

Meanwhile, merely coming at someone with "fighting words" constitutes disorderly conduct under local Nashville ordinances.

Well known in the community

Claire Martin works in a law office across the street from the courthouse and said she saw the aftermath of the shooting. She said Eatherly is well known in the community for yelling racial slurs at Black people while filming them. Eatherly also regularly does the same in downtown Nashville, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) to the southeast.

Just the previous Saturday, Eatherly was kicked out of a Nashville steakhouse after he refused to stop livestreaming from inside the restaurant. An affidavit filed by police said he started yelling, screaming and "making racial statements" before leaving without paying a nearly \$400 bill. He was arrested the following day and charged with theft of services, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest. He was released on \$5,000 bond.

On the morning of the shooting, he had been scheduled to appear in court in Clarksville over a \$3,300 debt allegedly owed to a credit company, according to Montgomery County court records. The civil case was filed in February on behalf of Midland Credit Management. Court records didn't indicate whether Eatherly showed up for the status hearing. Online records list the case as open. The shooting occurred several hours later.

Next steps

Eatherly was not listed in online court records as of Thursday afternoon, but if the case proceeds as ones normally do in Montgomery County, he will be arraigned on Friday. That is when a judge will decide on bond.

While police have not said what happened prior to the shooting, if Eatherly is found to have provoked the other person, it would be very difficult to prove self-defense, said Raybin, the criminal defense expert. Regardless, a person only has the right to use deadly force if threatened with death or great bodily harm.

"I think a prosecutor would give very little weight to claims of self-defense," Raybin said.

US Border Patrol chief Michael Banks is resigning, in latest DHS leadership change

By GISELA SALOMON Associated Press

The head of U.S. Border Patrol, the agency tasked with securing the nation's frontiers and increasingly tapped by the Trump administration for immigration operations in American cities, announced his resignation Thursday.

Michael Banks' decision, announced in a Fox News interview and later confirmed by the Department of Homeland Security, is the latest leadership shake-up of officials implementing President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown and comes as the Republican administration appears to be recalibrating its approach to its centerpiece policy of mass deportations.

"It's just time," Banks was quoted as saying in a report on the Fox News website, which said the resignation was effective immediately. "I feel like I got the ship back on course," he said, referring to what he described as previous chaos at the southern border. Banks said it was "time to enjoy the family and life."

In a statement, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection commissioner, Rodney Scott, thanked Banks for his service "during one of the most challenging periods for border security."

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

It was not clear who will replace Banks. He led an agency at the forefront of Trump's high-profile immigration enforcement efforts but kept a lower profile than some other officials such as Gregory Bovino,

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a now-retired commander who became a public face of the immigration crackdown.

Border Patrol participated in immigration enforcement operation in US cities

CBP is one of the federal agencies that participated since last year in a series of immigration enforcement operations, carried out primarily in cities governed by Democrats — an effort that triggered a spike in arrests and led to the fatal shooting of two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis this year at the hands of federal immigration officers.

Banks' resignation takes place two months after Markwayne Mullin, a former Republican senator from Oklahoma, became homeland security secretary. DHS oversees CBP and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, commonly known as ICE.

Banks is stepping down at the same time that ICE is also going through a leadership transition. Todd Lyons, the acting ICE director, is leaving later this month and will be replaced by David Venturella, who worked for years for private contractors before returning to government service.

CBP was established in 2003 and handles customs, immigration, and agricultural regulations to secure U.S. borders. It has a workforce of over 20,000 agents assigned to patrol the more than 6,000 miles of land borders, and an operating budget of \$1.4 billion, according to information from its website.

As head of CBP, Banks became a pivotal figure in the Trump administration's hardline policy to reconfigure immigration law enforcement in the United States. He oversaw the expansion of prosecutions for illegal border crossings, intensified coordination between the Border Patrol and ICE, and supervised the implementation of broader internal enforcement operations within the country's borders.

Banks had a long career at Border Patrol

Banks returned to the Border Patrol last year after a long agency career that had never landed him in its senior ranks. His star had risen as border czar to Gov. Greg Abbott, R-Texas, during a period when illegal crossings reached record highs and the state launched a multibillion-dollar enforcement surge that led to turf battles with the Biden administration.

Banks kept a relatively low public profile as arrests for illegal crossings that have plunged to their lowest levels since the mid-1960s, a trend that began toward the end of that Democratic administration.

Banks did not appear publicly at the Border Security Expo this month in Phoenix, an annual conference at which government officials update contractors on the state of the border. Scott, who was Banks' supervisor, is a close ally of Trump border czar Tom Homan and has acted more as the agency's public face.

Banks, who grew up in a small town in Warner Robins, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) southeast of Atlanta, Georgia, has said his first job was picking peaches at an orchard when he was 14 years old. He worked with migrant farm workers and learned "compassion and humility," he said, in an interview published last year on the CBP website.

Banks, in the interview, said he was "honored" to have returned to the agency.

"The United States Border Patrol will be unapologetic in its enforcement of our nation's laws," he said.

Senators approve withholding their own pay during government shutdowns

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senators unanimously approved a resolution Thursday to withhold their pay during government shutdowns, an attempt to make federal closures financially painful for lawmakers after a string of record-breaking impasses in the past year.

The bipartisan support for the measure comes at a time when federal closures have become longer and more frequent, frustrating lawmakers who say there should be punishment when Congress fails at its most basic legislative duty.

Under the resolution, senators' pay would be withheld by the secretary of the Senate whenever a government shutdown affects one or more agencies, then released once funding is restored. It will take effect the day after the Nov. 3 general election and does not apply to the House.

"Shutting down government should not be our default solution to our refusal to work out our issues and

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our differences," said Sen. John Kennedy, the bill's sponsor, in a floor speech Wednesday.

"This is about putting our money where our mouth is," said Kennedy, R-La.

Two shutdowns in the past year created significant financial hardship for tens of thousands of federal workers, particularly at the Department of Homeland Security. The department reopened last month after a 76-day partial shutdown, the longest agency funding lapse in history.

The DHS shutdown came just a few months after a 43-day lapse of the entire federal government, which was the longest such closure on record.

The Constitution stipulates that lawmakers must be paid so they have received salaries during shutdowns even as federal workers went without paychecks. When the full government shutdown began in October amid a dispute over health care subsidies, Sen. Lindsey Graham proposed a constitutional amendment to require members to forfeit their paychecks when the government is closed.

"If members of Congress had to forfeit their pay during government shutdowns, there would be fewer shutdowns and they would end quicker," Graham, R-S.C., said at the time.

Graham said his legislation was the most "constitutionally sound" way to deal with the problem, but the process would have been much more laborious as three-fourths of states must ratify an amendment.

Lawmakers in previous shutdowns have often pledged to forgo their paychecks while federal workers went unpaid. Senators earn an annual salary of \$174,000, but many are independently wealthy.

Kennedy told reporters Wednesday that he pushed his measure to ensure there is "shared sacrifice" during shutdowns. He added that it does not go as far as he would like, but that it's a start.

Asked why it does not extend to the other chamber of Congress, Kennedy said "the House's business is the House's business" while also touching on the tensions between the Senate and House.

"There's a very strong undercurrent of animosity among some of my friends in the House," Kennedy said.

"It's quickly becoming like two kids fighting in the back of a minivan," he said.

Muskets like those from 1776 are mostly exempt from today's gun laws

By ALLEN G. BREED AP National Writer

HALIFAX, N.C. (AP) — With 165 grains of black powder in the barrel, a .75-caliber Brown Bess flintlock musket like the ones the redcoats carried in 1776 can hurl a lead ball at a velocity of around 1,000 feet (305 meters) per second.

Imagine what that can do to a human body. Now, imagine that it's almost completely exempt from gun regulations.

How can that be? Well, under federal and most state laws, many antique or replica guns aren't technically considered firearms. In most places, even convicted felons can own them.

"I suspect the average judge would be surprised to find that out," says Second Amendment scholar and gun-rights attorney Dave Hardy, himself the proud owner of two Civil War-era long guns.

During a National Rifle Association event back in 2000, the late actor Charlton Heston famously hoisted a flintlock — the single-shot weapon that won the Revolution and was still in wide use a half century after Congress debated the Second Amendment — into the air and said the Democrats would have to take it "from my cold, dead hands."

He needn't have worried.

A blast from the past

During debate over the Gun Control Act of 1968, Sen. John Goodwin Tower argued that flintlocks and many other antique or replica guns should be exempt from regulation.

The Texas Republican said it was needed "to relieve an unnecessarily burdensome problem for serious collectors of antique firearms and for historians and museums." Treating all weapons the same, he argued, would unfairly target collector items "which have little, if any, practical use as a firearm in the modern connotation."

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The provision defines an antique as any weapon “with a matchlock, flintlock, percussion cap, or similar type of ignition system” manufactured “in or before 1898” — as long as it hasn’t been modified to fire modern ammunition. This generally means muzzleloaders that use black powder or a black powder substitute, though some early cartridge guns are included.

You can even own and fire a cannon.

Don’t go off half cocked

Most states have adopted that language either verbatim or by direct reference to the federal provision. But, as military historian Patrick Luther says, “it’s a patchwork.”

“I live in NY (New York) and bought a civil war musket,” Luther, a Marine veteran with the website mil-surpia.com, said in an email. “It was very similar to buying a regular firearm. Buying the blackpowder for the rifle felt not much different than buying a T-shirt.”

At least three states — Hawaii, Ohio and North Dakota — treat a smoothbore musket the same as an AK-47 or AR-15. Reenactor Jason Monhollen, an officer in the U.S. Army, says that’s “comparing apples and oranges.”

“It seems silly to put restriction on something that would be such a terrible weapon if you wanted to, you know, kill people,” says Monhollen, who portrays a private and carries a French Charleville musket in the 2nd North Carolina Regiment. “There’s just much better things. You can kill more people quickly with a car than you can with a musket.”

But these weapons are still deadly.

Not just a toy

Maryland changed its law after a convicted sex offender killed his ex-girlfriend with a six-shot, .44-caliber cap and ball revolver purchased on the internet.

“It may have loaded like an 1851 weapon, but it fired like a 2017 manufactured modern handgun that was capable of lethal force,” Montgomery County State’s Attorney John McCarthy told reporters at the time.

Shadé’s Law, passed in 2019, now prohibits people convicted of certain violent crimes from buying or possessing such weapons. But many states allow convicted felons to have these weapons; West Virginia makes an exception for people under an active protective order.

Some states’ laws are confusing or vague.

Montana law mentions “antique or replica arms” in a code regulating firearms and ammunition manufactured in the state. But nowhere in the code are those weapons defined.

Wisconsin uses the federal definition, but the only reference comes in a law regarding “look-alike” firearms.

And, of course, many local ordinances, like the one in Wake County, North Carolina, prohibit the firing of any “barreled weapon capable of discharging projectiles.” In many jurisdictions, it’s illegal to brandish even a toy gun at someone.

“Federal law does not exclude antique firearms from location-based restrictions,” Austin Gunderson, counsel for the North Dakota Legislative Council, said in an email.

Stray bullets

Sometimes, attempts to strengthen gun laws have had unintended consequences.

The attorney general of New Jersey, one of the 13 original states, recently had to offer guidance when a new law targeting ghost guns seemed to require all firearms — including antiques and even air guns — to have serial numbers.

When New York toughened its gun laws in 2022, it required background checks for transfers and purchases of antique guns, and barred firearms of any kind from certain “sensitive places” like parks and museum sites — just the kinds of places reenactors appear most.

An exemption was later carved out for people “lawfully engaged in historical reenactments, educational programming involving historical weapons of warfare, or motion picture or theatrical productions.” But that hasn’t stopped out-of-state reenactors from worrying their muskets will be confiscated at the George Washington Bridge, says Justin Costantino, adjutant of the Long Island Companies of the 3rd New York Regiment.

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"If the New York State Police department wants to charge me with weapons possession while I'm wearing a cocked hat and carrying around a Charleville '66," says Costantino, a graduate student in history, "then please, don't call my lawyer. Call the New York Post!"

Then again, Costantino hates to hear a mother at a reenactment tell her child, "Oh, no. Don't worry, sweetie. It's not real."

"It's not really loaded, but it is really a weapon," he says. "It's really gunpowder. And if you stand close to it, you'll feel the kind of breath of hot air ... They're still things that we have to take very seriously, and you have to be safe with."

China's Xi warns Trump that differences over Taiwan could lead to conflict

By WILL WEISSERT and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China's Xi Jinping warned President Donald Trump on Thursday that their two countries could clash over Taiwan if the issue is not handled properly, an unusually harsh admonition that stood in contrast to the American leader's praise for his counterpart.

The exchange at a highly anticipated summit in Beijing underscored just how far apart Trump and Xi still are on thorny issues, including the war in Iran, trade disputes and Washington's relations with Taiwan, which is self-ruled but which China claims as part of its territory.

It also suggested that Trump's three-day visit to China is likely to be longer on pageantry and symbolism than substantive political or economic breakthroughs.

The pair met for about two hours behind closed doors at the Great Hall of the People after an elaborate welcome ceremony featuring booming cannons, a band playing "The Star-Spangled Banner" and China's national anthem, and hundreds of schoolchildren jumping and waving flowers and American and Chinese flags.

According to a post on X by Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning, Xi told Trump that "the Taiwan question is the most important issue in China-U.S. relations."

"If it is handled properly, the bilateral relationship will enjoy overall stability. Otherwise, the two countries will have clashes and even conflicts, putting the entire relationship in great jeopardy," she wrote.

That comment followed a brief public exchange before the meeting began in which Trump told Xi: "You're a great leader. Sometimes people don't like me saying it, but I say it anyway, because it's true."

"It's an honor to be your friend," Trump said before promising that the U.S.-China relationship "is going to be better than ever before."

Trump later told Fox News' Sean Hannity in an interview that Xi said during their conversations that he "would like to be of help" in negotiating an end to the Iran war and reopening the Strait of Hormuz to oil shipments.

Xi was far more stark in his opening public remarks, expressing hope that the U.S. and China could avoid conflict and asking "whether the two countries can transcend the 'Thucydides Trap' and forge a new model for relations between major powers."

That's a term, popular in foreign policy studies, referring to the idea that when a rising power threatens to displace an established one, the result is often war. Xi has used the term for years, but using it as Trump offered optimism was noteworthy and foreshadowed his closed-door comments on Taiwan.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio later said U.S. policy toward Taiwan was "unchanged" but warned that it would be "a terrible mistake" for China to take Taiwan by force.

"They always raise it on their side. We always make clear our position, and we move on to the other topics," Rubio, who is traveling with the president, said in an interview with NBC News.

Both emphasized the importance of China-US relations

After their meeting, Xi took Trump on a tour of the Temple of Heaven, then hosted a state banquet for him. The Chinese leader used his evening toast to note that he and Trump had kept U.S.-China relations

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"generally stable" in a turbulent world.

"Achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and making America great again can go hand in hand," Xi said, referring to Trump's political movement. "We can help each other succeed and advance the well-being of the whole world."

In his toast, Trump said his visit had been "a great honor" punctuated by a "fantastic" day. He said matters "all good for the United States and China" were discussed.

Trump also said Xi would make a reciprocal visit to the White House on Sept. 24 — a date not previously announced.

The positive tone was reflected in the White House assessment of the earlier meetings, which said both leaders had touched on ways to enhance economic cooperation, including expanding market access for American businesses in China and increasing Chinese investment into U.S. industries.

The White House readout did not mention Taiwan directly, but, in relation to Iran, said both sides had agreed that the strait must remain open. The strait's closure has stranded tankers and caused energy prices to spike, threatening global economic growth.

The war is dominating Trump's domestic agenda and stoking fears about the prospect of a weakening U.S. economy as November's midterm elections — when Republicans hope to maintain control of Congress — approach.

China is the largest purchaser of Iranian oil, and Rubio said in an interview with Fox News that Trump would make the case for Beijing to exert its influence on Iran, noting that administration officials would underscore that "economies are melting down because of this crisis," which means consumers are "buying less Chinese product."

It's not clear if Trump persuaded Xi to wield his influence. The White House instead said Xi opposed any implementation of tolls on vessels crossing the strait — as Iran has proposed — and expressed interest in China potentially purchasing more U.S. oil to reduce Chinese dependence on Gulf oil in the future.

When asked Thursday at a congressional hearing whether China is providing intelligence to Iran to help it target U.S. forces, Adm. Brad Cooper, head of U.S. Central Command, would not discuss intelligence but said the Iranian military "is largely made up of Russian and Chinese equipment."

Taiwan issues remain contentious

Xi's warning about Taiwan reflects China's displeasure with a U.S. plan to sell weapons to the island. The Trump administration has approved an \$11 billion arms package for Taiwan, but has yet to begin fulfilling it.

The U.S. has a longstanding commitment to help the island defend itself if attacked, but Trump has shown greater ambivalence toward Taiwan, fueling speculation about whether the president could be persuaded to dial back American support.

Taiwan said after the Xi-Trump meeting that it was grateful for Washington's "long-term support."

"The government views all actions that contribute to regional stability and the management of potential risks from authoritarian expansion positively," Michelle Lee, a spokesperson for Taiwan's premier, told reporters. She added that the U.S. "has also repeatedly reiterated its firm and clear position of support for Taiwan."

US still hopes to secure trade wins

The White House has insisted that Trump would not be making the trip without an eye toward securing concrete results, suggesting there could be coming announcements on trade.

That likely includes a Chinese commitment to buy U.S. soybeans, beef and aircraft. Trump told Fox News that Xi had indicated a commitment to buying 200 jets from Boeing.

Trump administration officials also want to work toward establishing a board of trade with China to address commercial differences between the countries.

Trump and Xi discussed trade on Thursday, with Xi saying that China's door of opportunity will open wider. Xi also met with a collection of U.S. business leaders who accompanied Trump.

The U.S. and China reached a trade truce last year that calmed each side's threats to impose steep tariffs on the other. The White House says there have been ongoing discussions and mutual interest in

extending the agreement.

The leaders also discussed further stemming the flow of fentanyl precursor chemicals into the United States and increasing Chinese purchases of U.S. agricultural products, according to the White House.

Oklahoma executes a man convicted of killing his ex-girlfriend and her 7-month-old daughter

By JUAN A. LOZANO and SCHUYLER DIXON Associated Press

McALESTER, Okla. (AP) — Oklahoma has executed a man who was convicted of killing his ex-girlfriend and her 7-month-old daughter nearly 20 years ago.

Raymond Johnson, 52, was pronounced dead at 10:12 a.m. Thursday following a three-drug injection at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester, prison officials said.

He was sentenced to death for killing 24-year-old Brooke Whitaker and her 7-month-old daughter, Kya, in June 2007.

"To Brooke and Kya and your family, I want to apologize for my actions and the pain I caused you," Johnson said while strapped to a gurney inside the death chamber. "I hope people can speak your names without my name attached to it. I hurt you. One day, I hope you can forgive me."

Johnson's spiritual advisor, Kurt Borgmann, read Scripture in the chamber during the execution, which lasted about 11 minutes. A tear rolled out of Johnson's left eye as Borgmann began to speak. A doctor entered the room and declared Johnson unconscious about six minutes after the first drugs began to flow.

Oklahoma uses the sedative midazolam, followed by vecuronium bromide to halt breathing and potassium chloride to stop the heart.

Angie Short, one of Whitaker's aunt, criticized the delays in an execution originally scheduled for May 2024, saying Whitaker's mom died about five months after that.

"Because of the delays, my sister didn't get to witness justice," Short said. "This couldn't bring them back. But we'll no longer have to see his face on TV. He's no longer associated with Brooke and Kya. Now I think we can finally begin to heal after 20 years."

Prosecutors said Johnson and Whitaker had been arguing at her home in Tulsa before he repeatedly hit her over the head with a metal claw hammer. Whitaker's skull was fractured and she had more than 20 lacerations on her face and scalp. But she was still conscious and begged Johnson to spare her and Kya, who was sleeping in a bedroom, prosecutors said in documents prepared for Johnson's clemency hearing in April.

"She begged him to call 911. She begged him to let her mom come get baby Kya. She begged him to think of her children," the Oklahoma Attorney General's Office said. Whitaker had three other children.

Johnson retrieved a gas can from a tool shed in the backyard, doused Whitaker and the house with gasoline, lit a dish towel on fire, threw it at Whitaker and left, the attorney general's office said. Whitaker died from head injuries and smoke inhalation while her daughter died from severe burns.

"I pray that Brooke's and Kya's family find some measure of peace today after enduring unimaginable pain and grief for nearly two decades," Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond said in a statement.

Johnson's attorneys did not file a last-minute appeal with the U.S. Supreme Court to stop his execution. His attorneys unsuccessfully argued in earlier appeals that Johnson's arrest was illegal, police coerced his confession from him and that his trial lawyer conceded his guilt in Whitaker's death without his permission.

In April, Oklahoma's five-member Pardon and Parole Board voted unanimously to deny Johnson clemency. During that clemency hearing, Johnson apologized to the victims' family and asked for forgiveness, saying he was a changed person.

"I apologize. No excuses, no justifications, a sincere apology. And to know that it's sincere, look at my actions. Look at my life. Look how I've changed. I'm living a remorseful life. I'm living it," Johnson said in an interview with Death Penalty Action, a national anti-death penalty group.

Whitaker's family members asked for the lethal injection to proceed.

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"Executing him will not give me my mom or sister back, it will not take away almost 20 years of pain. What it will do is finally stop him from continuing to hurt us," Logan Kleck, Whitaker's oldest daughter, said in a letter to the board. Kleck did not witness the execution.

In addition to his first-degree murder conviction, Johnson also served nine years of a 20-year sentence after being convicted of manslaughter in 1996.

Johnson was the second person put to death this year in Oklahoma and the 11th in the country.

Retail sales growth slowed in April from March as higher gas cost leaves less room for nonessentials

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Shoppers tempered their spending in April as higher gas prices fueled by the Iran war meant less money left over for some nonessentials like clothing and furniture. But they're still buying, thanks to more generous government tax refunds.

Still, economists worry that spending will fall off more dramatically in the coming months as benefits from the refunds dissipate, and shoppers continue to grapple with the cumulative impact of rising gas prices at the pump.

Retail sales rose 0.5% in April, a slowdown from the revised growth level of 1.6% in March, according to Commerce Department data released Thursday. March marked the largest one-month increase in retail spending in more than three years, largely because gas prices spiked higher rapidly.

Excluding sales at gas stations, retail sales in April were up 0.3%. That's a slowdown from the 0.7% pace, excluding business from gas stations, in March.

Elsewhere, shopping was uneven.

Sales at department stores fell 3.2%, while sales at furniture and home furnishings stores slipped 2%. Business at building material and garden equipment had a modest 0.1% increase. But online retailers and electronics and appliance stores both posted solid sales gains.

The snapshot offers only a partial look at consumer spending and doesn't include things like travel and hotel stays. The lone services category — restaurants — registered a solid 0.6% increase.

The so-called control group—which excludes food services, autos, building materials and gas station sales and is used to calculate economic growth—rose 0.5%. That offered a good sign of solid spending by consumers, economists said.

The Iran war that began in late February has led to the shutdown of the Strait of Hormuz, cutting off one-fifth of the world's daily oil supply. The average price for a gallon of regular gasoline rose again overnight to \$4.53 on Thursday. That's \$1.35 more than it cost a year ago, according to motor club AAA.

Economists had believed that larger tax refunds from President Donald Trump's tax cut legislation would kick start spending at the start of the year. But soaring gas prices are taking a bigger slice out of American paychecks, leaving less for things like dining out, new clothes or other treats.

Oliver Allen, senior economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, estimated in a report published Thursday that individual income tax refunds in April were \$22 billion higher than in the same month in 2025, equivalent to around 3% of monthly retail sales and slightly bigger than the hit to households from the jump in gas prices over the same period.

"Some of this money will have been saved, but much of it has been spent," he wrote. "But the flow of refunds will taper dramatically in May, leaving consumers far more exposed to the surge in fuel costs."

Allen expects a "meaningful pullback" in discretionary spending in the second half of the second quarter.

Michael Pearce, chief U.S. economist at Oxford Economics, estimates that higher tax refunds have offset the impact of gas prices by a ratio of around 2 to 1.

"With refund season behind us and gas prices still creeping higher, that will flip in the months ahead, putting downward pressure on spending growth," he wrote Thursday.

Still, U.S. employers have so far defied the economic shock from the war and last month added a

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surprisingly strong 115,000 jobs. And Thursday the Labor Department reported weekly applications for unemployment benefits of 211,000, within a historically low range.

But concerning data about rising prices has arrived in waves this week.

The Labor Department reported Wednesday that the U.S. producer price index — which tracks inflation before it hits consumers — shot up 1.4% in April, the biggest monthly gain in more than four years. A day before that, the closely watched consumer price index jumped 3.8% from April 2025 — the biggest year-over-year increase in more than three years. Those price hikes, again, largely do to soaring energy prices, have begun to show up in everything from plane tickets and baggage fees, to soap and toothpaste.

A clearer picture of how inflation is impacting Americans may arrive next week when major U.S. retailers like Walmart and Target begin to release quarterly financial results.

Some companies are already seeing warning signs.

Coulter Lewis is the co-founder of Sunday Lawn and Garden, a Boulder, Colorado-based vendor of lawn care products like fertilizer. Lewis noted that from January through the end of April sales soared 70% compared to a year ago. But underneath that growth, he's seeing growing financial strain from customers dealing with higher prices from the gas pump and elsewhere.

Its wholesale business is faring well, but shoppers are leaning away from committing to the company's subscriptions, which cost \$300 a year. At the same time, Sunday Lawn and Garden is benefiting from shoppers trading down from professional lawn services, which could cost \$1,000 a year, to its products and services for do-it-yourself projects.

"They're spending more money on fewer things," he said. "That trade-down from pro service is like, 'okay, well we've got to make room for these other increases in our life, and so I'm going to try to do this myself.'"

What to know about Xi's warning to Trump over the 'Taiwan Question'

By KANIS LEUNG and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — China on Thursday stepped up its tough stance on Taiwan, an island democracy it deems its territory, warning the United States that Beijing and Washington will "have clashes and even conflicts" if the issue is not handled properly.

China's President Xi Jinping stressed during his summit with U.S. President Donald Trump that the "Taiwan question" is the most important issue in ties between Beijing and Washington, according to a readout from the Chinese foreign ministry.

"Taiwan independence' and cross-Straits peace are as irreconcilable as fire and water," Xi told Trump, according to the statement.

Xi's stern tone reflected China's growing pressure on the U.S., Taiwan's largest unofficial ally. The U.S. is required by law to ensure Taiwan can defend itself but officially maintains a position of what has been called strategic ambiguity — leaving the question of whether it would get involved militarily if China decided to reclaim Taiwan by force.

"If it is handled properly, the bilateral relationship will enjoy overall stability. Otherwise, the two countries will have clashes and even conflicts, putting the entire relationship in great jeopardy," Xi said, according to the ministry.

Beijing has already ramped up a campaign over the past few years to lure away Taiwan's diplomatic allies and increase military pressure on the island.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Thursday that U.S. policy toward Taiwan was "unchanged" but warned that it would be "a terrible mistake" for China to take Taiwan by force.

"U.S. policy on the issue of Taiwan is unchanged as of today," he said in an interview with NBC News.

Xi wants China to be unified with Taiwan

China and Taiwan have been governed separately since 1949, when the Communist Party rose to power in Beijing following a civil war. Defeated Nationalist Party forces fled to Taiwan, which later transitioned

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from martial law to multiparty democracy.

China sees self-ruled Taiwan as its own breakaway province, to be retaken by force if necessary.

Relations between Beijing and Taipei have been tense since Taiwan first elected Tsai Ing-wen as president in 2016. Her Democratic Progressive Party says Taiwan is functionally independent and its own sovereign state. China cut off most of its official dialogue with Taiwan's government. In recent years, Beijing has sent warships and fighter jets closer toward the island on a nearly daily basis.

The Chinese leader previously said China would "surely be reunified" with Taiwan, an island of about 23 million people.

Beyond politics, Taiwan is a major manufacturer of AI servers, computer chips and precision instruments. The AI boom has propelled Taiwan's leading technology companies to record profits and revenues.

Rhetoric on Taiwan reflects Chinese worries

Analysts say Xi's comments reflect China's anxieties over a defense relationship that has grown closer between Taiwan and the U.S.

"If China had secured any meaningful concession on Taiwan from Trump, it would have been reflected" in Beijing's official readout of the leaders' meeting, said William Yang, a senior analyst for Northeast Asia for International Crisis Group.

"The lack of such mention and the relatively stern tone suggest Trump may not have budged on Taiwan in principle," he said.

In December, Trump's team announced an \$11 billion weapons package for Taiwan, the largest ever. Trump has also demanded that Taiwan increase defense spending.

Ma Chun-wei, an expert in China-Taiwan relations at Taiwan's Tamkang University, said China could also be worried the Trump administration has veered away from standard diplomatic language on Taiwan. The U.S. position has long been to acknowledge China's position on Taiwan but maintain unofficial relations with the island.

The latest version of the national security strategy from the Trump administration issued last December simply reads: "We will also maintain our longstanding declaratory policy on Taiwan, meaning that the United States does not support any unilateral change to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait."

The U.S. usually has very standardized language on its relationship with Taiwan.

"For Xi Jinping, he must show that the Taiwan issue is in China's hands. He must demonstrate this image, or else he would be criticized," Ma said.

The world's reaction to hantavirus is tinged by echoes of something else: COVID

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The lingering impact of COVID-19, a few years out from the declaration that the pandemic was over, is scattered across how we live today — the work-from-home jobs, the way some have decided wearing masks is their new normal, the hand sanitizer dispensers that remain ever present.

Some of the other ripples, though, aren't as obvious. They're the ones we carry inside us — grief over lost loved ones, chronic health conditions, the sense of lives interrupted. And in recent days, another one has made itself known in the wake of a rare hantavirus outbreak aboard a cruise ship: the fear, despite official reassurances, that it might be happening again.

But the flourishing of fear, whether on a personal or societal level, can also be an indicator that something else is missing. Perhaps there's no post-pandemic reality more entrenched than the damage done, in the U.S. and globally, to the bonds that in the before times, many would have considered secure — science, government, information itself.

"COVID undermined our trust in what most of us used to trust," said Elisa Jayne Bienenstock, a research professor and sociologist at Arizona State University. "When general trust goes down, when there's a lot of cynicism, who are people looking to, to explain what to do and how the world works?"

What it used to be and what it is now

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Before 2020, the outbreak of some illness somewhere didn't usually cause massive concern outside of the specific areas impacted, even as some epidemics caused significant numbers of deaths.

Some of that was complacency in the face of a world where widespread travel wasn't as accessible to the masses as it has become, which was a key part of COVID-19's spread.

In fact, there have been outbreaks of the current strain of hantavirus in some South American countries through the decades, like one in 1997 in Chile. Other countries have had epidemics of a range of illnesses from cholera to dengue to SARS, and the U.S. has seen West Nile, Legionnaire's and more.

But in a post-COVID-19 world, it didn't take long before questions and concerns surfaced about disease spread in the days immediately following the first reports that three people had died from hantavirus on the ship. Since then, there have been reports of 11 hantavirus cases around the world linked to the cruise, according to the World Health Organization, and that includes the deaths. Lab testing has confirmed eight of the cases.

Health experts have repeatedly emphasized that even though the virus can cause serious illness in those infected, the risk of spread in the general public is low. Despite that, when ship passengers were taken to the Spanish island of Tenerife to disembark, residents like Samantha Aguero were concerned.

"We feel a bit unsafe. We don't feel as there are 100% security measures in place to welcome it," she said. "This is a virus, after all, and we have lived this during the pandemic."

Institutions are diminished for many

Bienenstock points to three institutions that have suffered from the public's loss of trust: government, media and science itself. But government officials and journalists were dealing with issues of public mistrust well before the pandemic.

The mistrust of science got ammunition not because scientists were making mistakes in their processes but because nonscientists didn't have the same understanding, she said.

"Most people don't think of science as a process. In their mind, science is an answer, it's a fact. And so when those facts showed that they weren't 100% reliable and assured, it started undermining trust in the science," she said.

"One of the problems with COVID is it undermined that confidence in science for people who don't understand how science works. It showed the process. And it showed that scientists don't always have the answer," Bienenstock said. "A lot of people in crisis, when they fear things, don't care what the answer is, as long as there's a definitive answer. And science doesn't provide that when it doesn't know."

Now what?

It's not just about the issue at the forefront of people's attention at the moment. There are ripple effects as well.

"COVID ... didn't just heighten people's sensitivity to health threats. It did so unevenly, in ways often disconnected from actual risk," said Michele Gelfand, professor of organizational behavior at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. "As trust in institutions has weakened, people have lost a key way to navigate uncertainty together. Without trust, people rely more on rumor, fear, and emotion, which can lead them to overreact to small risks and underreact to serious ones."

Karlynn Morgan, a 76-year-old retired nurse-anesthetist in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, has seen that heightened attention, with more people without a medical or science background talking about health issues than before the pandemic.

She has also been disturbed by the increase in what looks to her like a lack of trust in science, as seen in falling vaccination rates and rising instances of diseases like measles.

"I think people are far less trusting because people used to take their children and just get the vaccine," she said. "When I was a kid, there was no question you were going to go get your shot."

If trust is going to be rebuilt, Gelfand said in an email, then leaders have to get involved.

"They set the threat signal. They determine whether people get accurate information about the level of danger or distorted information that serves a political agenda. When leaders send clear, honest signals, people can calibrate in the face of threat. When leaders manipulate threat for their own purposes, norms erode and trust collapses," Gelfand said.

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"Strong, reliable institutions have historically been our superpower as a society. They're what allow millions of people to coordinate under uncertainty without knowing each other personally," she said. "Without that institutional backbone, we lose the very capacity for collective action that has helped human groups survive for millennia."

Trump's talk of 51st US state met with near-silence in Venezuela

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and JUAN PABLO ARRAEZ Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Twice this week, U.S. President Donald Trump has expressed interest in turning Venezuela into his country's 51st state. The latest came via a Truth Social post Tuesday with a map showing the South American country filled with the U.S. flag.

Previous statements doubting Venezuela's sovereignty over the past 25 years have been met with immediate derision from senior government officials, including the president. The ruling party even organized demonstrations in the capital, Caracas, as recently as Jan. 3, hours after then-President Nicolás Maduro was captured by the U.S., that included chants of "Gringo go home." This time around, however, the government has mostly kept quiet, save for a brief statement to reporters Monday from acting President Delcy Rodríguez.

The approach demonstrates the balance Rodríguez must strike between external and internal politics following the January U.S. military attack in Caracas. The Trump administration has since implemented a phased plan to try to turn around the crisis-wrecked country and has forced Rodríguez's political movement, Chavismo, to abandon the anti-U.S. sentiment that long accompanied its teachings.

"This is probably the most public and sharp manifestation of the government's transactional, self-survival approach above everything else right now, above even that sort of basic tenet of Chavismo," said Christopher Sabatini, senior fellow for Latin America at the London-based Chatham House think tank. "It's better that they hold their tongue, not offend the U.S. right now. Why overreact to a ridiculous claim by Donald Trump?"

Rodríguez on Monday told journalists that Venezuela had no plans to become the 51st U.S. state, but her comments were much more reserved than past presidential addresses deriding these types of U.S. remarks. They came after Trump said he was "seriously considering" the move. Trump has made similar comments about Canada.

"We will continue to defend our integrity, our sovereignty, our independence, our history," Rodríguez said. Venezuela, she added, is "not a colony, but a free country."

The Trump administration stunned Venezuelans by choosing to work with Rodríguez, instead of the country's political opposition, following Maduro's ouster. She has since led cooperation with the administration's phased plan, pitching her oil-rich nation to international investors and opening its energy sector to private capital and international arbitration. Rodríguez has also replaced senior officials, including Maduro's faithful defense minister and attorney general.

Trump has praised her work, and his administration has lifted economic sanctions against her personally and eased sanctions against the country, though some still remain in place. The U.S. now also recognizes her as the "sole" head of state of Venezuela.

The U.S. stopped recognizing Maduro as Venezuela's legitimate leader in 2019, the year after he claimed reelection victory in a contest widely considered a sham as opposition parties and candidates were barred from participating.

Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, were taken to New York to face drug trafficking charges after their Jan. 3 capture. Both have pleaded not guilty and remain jailed at a Brooklyn detention center.

In Caracas, some residents on Wednesday viewed the government's response as submitting to Trump, but they also acknowledged that Rodríguez is not in a position to unleash Chavismo's characteristic anti-U.S. propaganda.

"She knows that it's wise not to engage in direct confrontation because she knows she's bound to lose," college student Adonai Osoria said. "Now, are there some who disagree, who don't like it? Well, yes, of

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course. But I consider her reaction right now to be a common, understandable reaction."

Government supporters last showed their inflammatory attitude against the U.S. in the days after Maduro was captured, burning U.S. flags and carrying signs that read "Gringo go home."

Among the government's strongest supporters across the country are the armed groups known as colectivos. The groups are a staple of pro-ruling party demonstrations. Local leader Jorge Navas characterized Trump's comments as "irresponsible acts of provocation" and praised Rodríguez for her diplomatic response.

"We are bending, strategically, but we will not break," Navas said of Chavismo's current approach to U.S. pressure. "We continue to resist, that is, realistically, given the country's economic situation."

Today in History: May 15

Police kill two students during Jackson State protests

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, May 15, the 135th day of 2026. There are 230 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On May 15, 1970, less than two weeks after the National Guard shooting at Kent State University, two Black students at Jackson State College in Mississippi were killed and 12 were injured when police opened fire during student demonstrations.

Also on this date:

In 1800, President John Adams ordered government offices to relocate from Philadelphia to the newly-constructed city of Washington, in the federal District of Columbia.

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed an act establishing the Department of Agriculture.

In 1928, the Walt Disney cartoon character Mickey Mouse appeared for the first time in front of a public audience in a test screening of the short "Plane Crazy." (Mickey made his formal screen debut with the release of "Steamboat Willie" six months later.)

In 1940, brothers Richard and Maurice McDonald opened the first McDonald's fast-food restaurant, in San Bernardino, California.

In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court, in its *In re Gault* decision, ruled that juveniles accused of crimes were entitled to the same due process afforded adults.

In 1972, Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace was shot and left paralyzed while campaigning for president in Laurel, Maryland, by Arthur H. Bremer, who would serve 35 years in prison for the attempted murder.

In 1972, the U.S. returned administrative control to Japan of the island of Okinawa, which had been seized by American forces near the end of World War II in 1945. (The U.S. maintained a significant military presence on Okinawa.)

In 2015, a jury sentenced Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (joh-HAHR' tsahr-NEYE'-ehv) to death for the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing that killed three and left more than 260 wounded.

In 2020, President Donald Trump formally unveiled a coronavirus vaccine program called "Operation Warp Speed," to speed development of COVID-19 vaccines and quickly distribute them around the country.

Today's Birthdays: Artist Jasper Johns is 96. Counterculture icon Wavy Gravy is 90. Actor-singer Lainie Kazan is 86. Basketball Hall of Fame coach Don Nelson is 86. Musician Brian Eno is 78. Actor Chazz Palminteri is 74. Baseball Hall of Famer George Brett is 73. Rapper Melle Mel is 65. Baseball Hall of Famer John Smoltz is 59. Football Hall of Famer Emmitt Smith is 57. Football Hall of Famer Ray Lewis is 51. Actor Jamie-Lynn Sigler is 45. Tennis player Andy Murray is 39. French soccer player Ousmane Dembele is 29. Pop singer Haerin is 20.