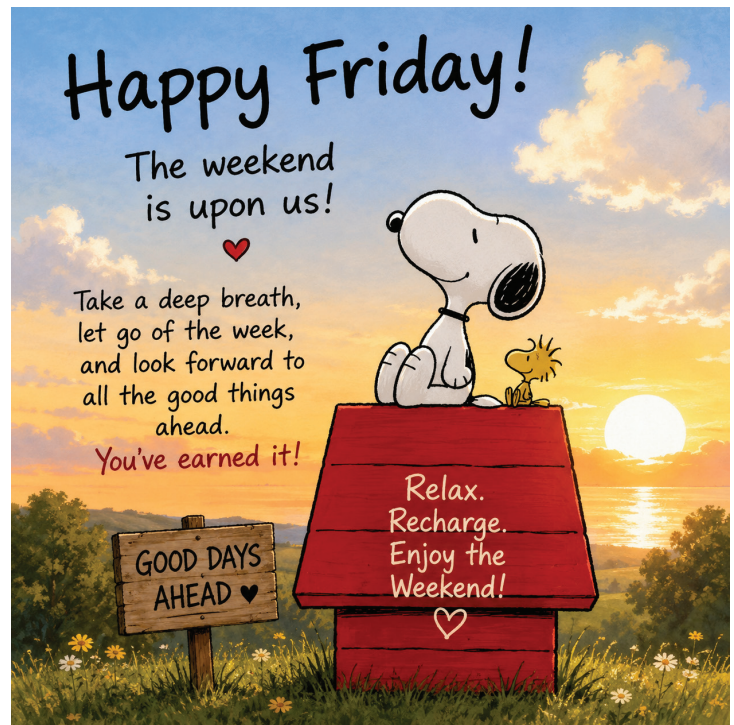


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Friday, May 22

Senior Menu: Breaded chicken on bun, oven roasted potatoes, California blend, fruit.
Cheer Tryouts, 10 a.m., Arena

Saturday, May 23

Pickleball, 9:30 a.m., Elementary Gym

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

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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.

Starship Test Flight

SpaceX today will attempt to launch an uncrewed test flight of Starship Version 3, its largest and most powerful rocket yet. The announcement comes after the company canceled a planned test flight yesterday at the last minute.

The Elon Musk-owned company is competing with Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin to create the spacecraft that will carry NASA astronauts to the moon's surface—a mission currently planned for 2028. SpaceX launched a combined 11 test flights of its first and second Starship versions from April 2023 to October 2025, with mixed results. Version 3, which features lighter engines, will deploy 22 mock satellites and relight an engine in space before splashing into the Indian Ocean. Musk ultimately aims to make Starship fully reusable and catch it with mechanical arms—a feat that would dramatically reduce launch costs.

The test flight comes days after SpaceX confirmed plans to go public next month, with a potentially record-setting valuation between \$1.75T and \$2T.

Minnesota Fraud Sentencing

The ringleader of a multimillion-dollar fraud scheme in Minnesota, Aimee Bock, was sentenced to over 41 years in prison yesterday. Bock siphoned more than \$240M in pandemic-era food assistance via her Feeding Our Future network.

Officials have called the scheme the US' largest case of pandemic-era fraud; collectively, the amount of stolen taxpayer money—including Bock's food aid scheme, daycares, and other social service programs—reportedly exceeds \$1B. Citing the fact that most of the defendants are of Somali descent, President Donald Trump launched an immigration enforcement operation this year that led to the deaths of two US citizens. He also froze roughly \$10B in federal funding to Minnesota and four other Democratic-led states.

More than 100 people have been indicted in ongoing investigations. That includes 15 people charged yesterday for allegedly defrauding more than \$90M, much of it from Medicaid, via autism and home health clinics.

New Weight-Loss Drug

Eli Lilly said its experimental obesity drug retatrutide helped patients lose up to 30% of their body weight after 80 weeks in a Phase 3 trial, results approaching those seen with bariatric surgery.

In the study of 2,339 adults with obesity or overweight-related conditions, patients receiving the highest dose lost an average of 28% of their body weight, or about 70 pounds. About 65% taking the highest dose achieved a body mass index below 30, the threshold for obesity. The intervention may prove helpful in severe cases of obesity, surpassing what can be treated by existing weight-loss drugs. However, some participants dropped out, citing severe gastrointestinal side effects—about one-third experienced nausea or diarrhea—or feeling they had lost too much weight.

Unlike existing obesity injections, retatrutide targets three hormone pathways: GLP-1, GIP, and glucagon. The study has not been peer-reviewed or approved by the FDA.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Two-time NASCAR champion Kyle Busch dies at age 41 after being hospitalized with a severe illness; no cause of death had been given as of this writing.

Banksy painting sells for \$18M in first major auction since Reuters claims to have divulged his identity this spring.

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Legal records indicate he goes by one of England's most common names: David Jones. "Emily in Paris" to end after Season 6, now filming in Greece. Netflix to launch first live morning show next month, hosted by TV and radio personality Charlamagne tha God.

Science & Technology

President Donald Trump postpones executive order on AI oversight hours before planned signing, citing worries the measure could stifle US innovation.

Rare exoplanet with earthlike temperatures revealed to have an atmosphere rich in methane, a finding that could deepen astronomers' understanding of Earth's atmosphere.

Smartwatch and phone data on moods and daily habits help researchers personalize interventions for depression; 55% of participants no longer met depression criteria after six weeks.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.2%, Dow +0.6%, Nasdaq +0.1%) on reports of promising peace talks between the US and Iran.

Spotify shares rise 13% on news of AI-generated music deal with Universal, ticket reservation system for artists' top fans, and more.

Walmart shares fall 7.3% after retailer warns it may raise prices to offset rising fuel costs.

Quantum shares soar—some by over 20%—after US government pledges over \$2B to nine firms in exchange for minority stakes.

Samsung to distribute average \$340K bonus to chip employees after labor union deal averts strike.

Politics & World Affairs

Federal arts commission approves President Donald Trump's proposed 250-foot-tall, white-and-gold Triumphal Arch near Washington, DC.

Democratic National Committee releases unfinished, 192-page autopsy report it commissioned analyzing the 2024 presidential election failure amid pressure from party members; DNC chair says report includes unverified information.

Turkish court unseats the leader of Turkey's opposition; Özgür Özel stands accused of corruption, including vote buying and securing kickbacks.

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Members of HOSA were busy working at the Groton Dairy Queen on Thursday raising money for Groton Area HOSA students competing at the nationals in June. Dale and Joyce Grenz will be donating 50% of the profits up until 8 p.m. on Thursday towards the cause. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Jan Seibel helped put up flags on the Veteran's Graves at the Groton Cemetery. (Photo by Brian Gravatt)

Secretary of State Seeks to Clarify Information Regarding Federal-Only Ballots and Absentee Requests

(Pierre, S.D.) – Secretary of State Monae L. Johnson would like to provide accurate information regarding absentee voting and federal-only ballots for the June 2, 2026, Primary Election.

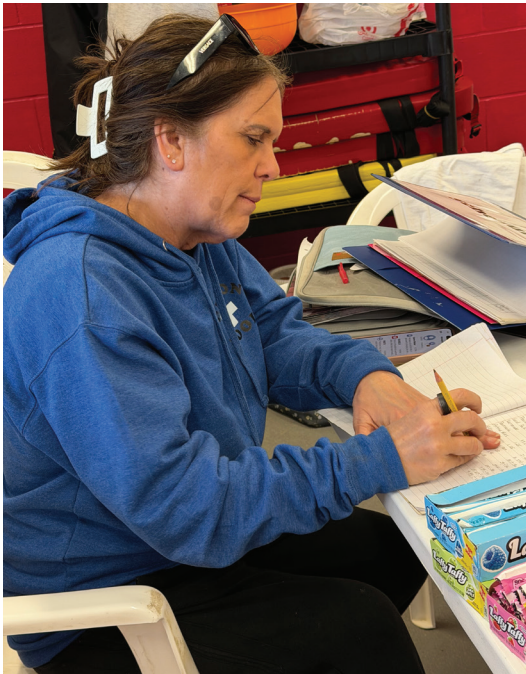
The Secretary of State's office NEVER said we support the auditor in Minnehaha County and what she does concerning Federal-Only ballots, nor did we say anything about "foreign-only ballots" which do not exist.

To request an absentee ballot, voters must submit an absentee ballot application to the county auditor. Pursuant to HB 1208 (2025 session) 12-4-1.3 was amended by the legislature to add a stipulation that if a voter put a postal mailbox address as their residence address on an absentee ballot application that voter would be changed to a Federal-Only voter which allows them to only vote a federal ballot. This law change went into effect January 1, 2026.

Our office implements the laws regardless of whether we agree with them or not.



You remember the old concession stand at the ball park? This is the same building now converted into a pilot's lounge at the Groton Municipal Airport.



Getting the Groton Swimming Pool Ready

Pool co-manager Kami Lipp was busy working on the schedule. The pool is scheduled to open on Monday.



Karla Pasteur, Laila Roberts and Tricia Keith were busy reviewing and change the signs at the pool.



Talli Wright was putting finishing touches on the window art on the windows at the pool.

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Sydney Locke was doing window art on the pool building windows on Thursday.



Hannah Sandness was also doing window art on the pool building windows on Thursday.



Rylie Rose and Kinsley Rowen were planting flowers at the pool on Thursday.

MEMORIAL DAY

HONORING ALL WHO SERVED

GROTON POST #39 MEMORIAL DAY SCHEDULE



7:30 A.M. HUFTON



8:15 A.M. JAMES



8:45 A.M. VERDON



9:15 A.M. BATES-SCOTLAND



10:00 A.M. FERNEY



11:00 A.M. ANDOVER CATHOLIC

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GUEST SPEAKER AT GROTON

— GUEST SPEAKER —

AARON WALBERG,
THE BROWN COUNTY
VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER.



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AT THE POST HOME.

Tigers Shine at Webster Last Chance Meet With Record-Breaking Relay Performance

WEBSTER — The Groton Area track and field teams turned in another strong performance Thursday at the Webster Last Chance Meet, with the Tiger boys finishing third in the team standings and the girls placing second.

The Groton boys totaled 89 points, trailing only Britton-Hecla with 93 and host Webster Area with 91. The Tiger girls piled up 97 points to finish behind only Webster Area, which won the meet with 128.33 points.

Groton's boys were fueled by several event victories and a record-breaking relay performance that highlighted the meet.

Members of the Groton Area boys' 1600-meter sprint medley relay team of Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, Keegen Tracy and Jayden Schwan celebrated after breaking both the meet and school records. The Tigers posted a winning time of 3:37.18, surpassing the previous Groton Area school record of 3:38.49 set in 2025 by Brevin Fliehs, Lincoln Krause, Keegen Tracy and Blake Pauli. The performance also moved Groton Area into the top four in South Dakota Class A.

Keegen Tracy sprinted to a first-place finish in the boys' 100-meter dash in 11.20 seconds, while Kyson Kucker added a runner-up finish in the 400 meters in 54.31.

In the distance events, Riley Shellenberger placed second in the 1600 meters with a time

of 5:00.81 and added a fourth-place finish in the 800 meters in 2:15.01. Jace Johnson was right behind in the 800, taking fifth in 2:15.39.

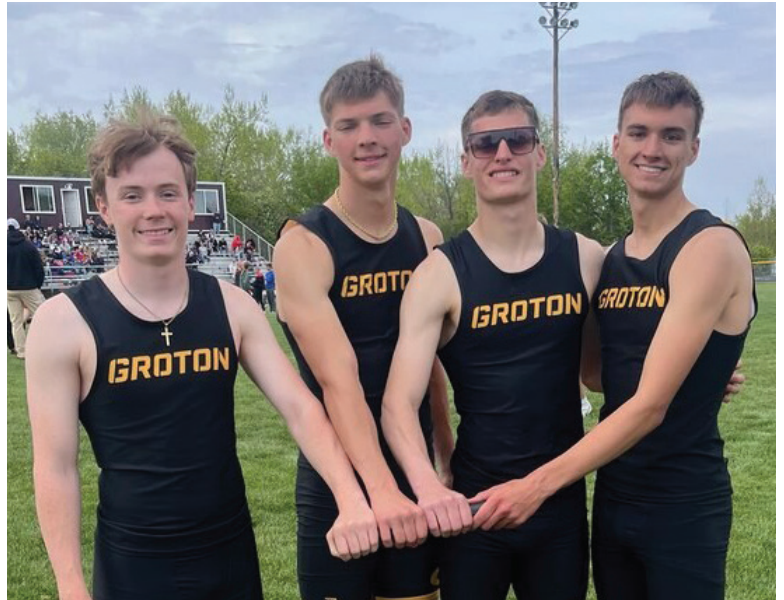
Groton's relay teams also had a huge day. The Tigers won the 4x200-meter relay as Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, Ethan Kroll and Ryder Schwan crossed the line in 1:35.43. Groton added a second-place finish in the 4x400 relay as Keegen Tracy, Jayden Schwan, Jordan Schwan and Kyson Kucker posted a time of 3:33.57.

Groton also picked up a third-place finish in the 4x100 relay from the team of Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, J.J. Muller and Ryder Schwan in 46.10.

Ethan Kroll swept the horizontal jumping events for the Tigers. He won the long jump with a leap of 20 feet, 1.25 inches and captured the triple jump title at 40-3.50.

For the Groton girls, Ryelle Gilbert led the way with a pair of distance victories. Gilbert won the 800 meters in 2:28.62 and later added another title in the 1600 meters with a time of 5:48.24.

McKenna Tietz continued her standout season by winning the 300-meter hurdles in 46.47. Groton also received strong hurdle performances from Emerlee Jones and Teagan Hanten, who finished fourth and



Members of the Groton Area boys' 1600-meter sprint medley relay team of Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, Keegen Tracy and Jayden Schwan celebrate after breaking both the meet and school records Wednesday at the Webster Last Chance Meet. The Tigers posted a time of 3:37.18, surpassing the previous school record of 3:38.49 set in 2025 by Brevin Fliehs, Lincoln Krause, Keegen Tracy and Blake Pauli. The performance also moved Groton Area into the top four in South Dakota Class A. (Photo from Groton Area Facebook Page)

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fifth respectively in the 100 hurdles, while Hanten added a fifth-place finish in the 300 hurdles.

The Tigers dominated the girls' relays, winning three events.

Raquel Tracy, Taryn Traphagen, Rylee Dunker and Makenna Krause won the 4x100 relay in 51.90. The 4x200 relay team of McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy and Makenna Krause claimed first in 1:46.87. Groton capped the relay sweep in the 4x400 as McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Makenna Krause and Kella Tracy finished first in 4:11.16.

Makenna Krause added an individual runner-up finish in the 100-meter dash with a time of 13.26, while Ashlynn Warrington took fourth in both the 400 and 800 meters.

In the field events, Avery Crank led the Tigers with a fourth-place finish in the discus at 98-0.

Boy's Division

Team Scores: 1. Britton-Hecla 93, 2. Webster Area 91, 3. Groton Area 89, 4. Sisseton 70, 5. Leola 64, 6. Redfield 62, 7. Frederick Area 61, 8. Aberdeen Roncalli 56, 9. Waubay/Summit 43, 10. Wilmot 33, 11. Tri-State 29, 11. Waverly-South Shore 29, 13. Langford Area 16, 14. Northwestern 7, 15. Warner 5, 16. Tiospa Zina 1.

100 Meters: 1. Keegen Tracy, 11.20; 11. JJ Muller, 12.17; 34. Tate Johnson, 13.52; 35. Wesley Borg, 13.79; 37. Sam Crank, 14.10.

200 Meters: 29. Tate Johnson, 26.97; 37. Sam Crank, 28.47; 39. Wesley Borg, 28.51.

400 Meters: 2. Kyson Kucker, 54.31; 13. Wesley Borg, 1:03.19.

800 Meters: 4. Riley Shellenberger, 2:15.01; 5. Jace Johnson, 2:15.39.

1600 Meters: 2. Riley Shellenberger, 5:00.81.

4x100 Relay: 3. Groton: (Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, JJ Muller, Ryder Schwan), 46.10.

4x200 Relay: 1. Groton: (Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, Ethan Kroll, Ryder Schwan), 1:35.43. 9. Groton: (JJ Muller, Wesley Borg, Tate Johnson, Sam Crank), 1:46.74.

4x400 Relay: 2. Groton: (Keegen Tracy, Jayden Schwan, Jordan Schwan, Kyson Kucker), 3:33.57.

SMR 1600m - [200-200-400-800]: 1. Groton: (Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, Keegen Tracy, Jayden Schwan), 3:37.18.

Long Jump: 1. Ethan Kroll, 20-01.25.

Triple Jump: 1. Ethan Kroll, 40-03.50.



4x100m Relay – NEW MEET RECORD
Raquel Tracy, Taryn Traphagen (Kella Tracy is pictured), Rylee Dunker, and Makenna Krause: 51.90

Breaking the previous meet record of 53.10 set by Webster in 1982! (Photo from Groton Area Facebook Page)



4x200m Relay – NEW MEET RECORD
McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy, and Makenna Krause: 1:46.87

Breaking the previous meet record of 1:50.7 set by Britton-Hecla in 2005! (Photo from Groton Area Facebook Page)

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Girl's Division

Team Scores: 1. Webster Area 128.33, 2. Groton Area 97, 3. Britton-Hecla 74, 4. Langford Area 64, 5. Sisseton 60.66, 6. Tri-State 51, 7. Aberdeen Roncalli 46, 8. Wilmot 41.5, 9. Northwestern 40, 10. Redfield 38.5, 11. Waverly-South Shore 34, 12. Waubay/Summit 26, 13. Warner 19, 14. Leola 4.

100 Meters: 2. Makenna Krause, 13.26; 8. Raquel Tracy, 14.27; 22. Suri Jetto, 16.00.

400 Meters: 4. Ashlynn Warrington, 1:06.72; 13. Suri Jetto, 1:17.46.

800 Meters: 1. Ruelle Gilbert, 2:28.62; 4. Ashlynn Warrington, 2:43.67; 10. Suri Jetto, 2:59.83.

1600 Meters: 1. Ruelle Gilbert, 5:48.24.

100m Hurdles - 33" / 0.838m: 4. Emerlee Jones, 19.61; 5. Teagan Hanten, 19.67.

300m Hurdles - 30" / 0.762m: 1. McKenna Tietz, 46.47; 5. Teagan Hanten, 53.82.

4x100 Relay: 1. Groton: (Raquel Tracy, Taryn Traphagen, Rylee Dunker, Makenna Krause), 51.90.

4x200 Relay: 1. Groton: (McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy, Makenna Krause), 1:46.87.

4x400 Relay: 1. Groton: (McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Makenna Krause, Kella Tracy), 4:11.16.

Shot Put - 4kg: 19. Avery Crank, 24-08.00

Discus - 1kg: 4. Avery Crank, 98-00

High Jump: 13. Emerlee Jones, 4-03.00

Triple Jump: 19. Teagan Hanten, 26-10.50



4x400m Relay – NEW MEET RECORD
McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Makenna Krause, and Kella Tracy: 4:11.16

Breaking the previous meet record of 4:15.0 set by Webster in 1987! (Photo from Groton Area Facebook Page)



The Warner Dial-A-Move Last Chance Track Meet is underway and the Tigers are already making headlines! Senior Rylee Dunker broke her own school record in the Javelin with a winning throw of 112'7" — improving her previous record by more than 6 feet and moving herself into the Top 5 in Class A! She broke the record at the Warner Dial-A-Move Track meet held Wednesday. (Photo

from Groton Area Facebook Page)

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Groton Area Girls Continue Strong Push Toward State Track Meet

With the South Dakota State Track and Field Meet approaching, the Groton Area girls continue to position themselves among the top Class A programs in the state, led by standout performances from McKenna Tietz, Rylee Dunker and several Tiger relay teams.

Under South Dakota High School Activities Association rules, the top 24 verified performances in each event qualify for the State Meet once all entries are finalized. In running events with preliminaries, ties for the 24th and final spot do not advance, while all ties in field events and running finals-only events qualify.

Groton Area currently has several athletes and relay teams safely inside the Class A qualifying field.

McKenna Tietz continues to lead the way for the Tigers in the hurdle events. The junior is currently ranked fourth in Class A in the 300-meter hurdles with a time of 45.78, recorded May 14. Earlier this season, that performance broke both the Groton Area school record and the Northeast Conference record.

Tietz also sits 10th in the Class A girls 100-meter hurdles at 15.66, giving the Tigers a pair of top-10 rankings in one of the state's toughest event groups.

Groton Area's relay teams have also emerged as major postseason contenders.

The Tigers are currently ranked fifth in the Class A girls 4x200-meter relay with a season-best time of 1:47.29. That performance, turned in May 14, broke the previous Northeast Conference record held by Redfield-Doland.

Groton Area also ranks seventh in the girls 4x400 relay at 4:11.14 and 10th in the girls 4x100 relay with a time of 51.24.

In the field events, senior Rylee Dunker has climbed to fifth in the Class A girls javelin rankings with a throw of 112 feet, 7 inches recorded May 20.

Sophomore Makenna Krause has also cracked the statewide rankings in the girls 100 meters. Krause is currently tied for 20th in Class A with a time of 12.96.

Because the 100 meters is a running event that includes preliminaries at the State Meet, ties for the 24th qualifying spot do not advance under SDHSAA rules, making every fraction of a second critical during the final week of qualifying competition.

Distance runner Ryelle Gilbert is also in the qualifying discussion in two events. Gilbert currently ranks 25th in the girls 1600 meters with a time of 5:36.39 and 28th in the girls 800 meters at 2:28.26. Both events are running events with preliminaries, meaning only the top 24 verified entries will advance to the State Meet field.

As the final qualifying meets take place this week, Groton Area appears well-positioned to send multiple relay teams and several individual athletes to the state meet, while others continue battling for remaining qualifying spots.

Current Groton Area Class A girls rankings include:

McKenna Tietz — 4th in 300 hurdles (45.78)

McKenna Tietz — 10th in 100 hurdles (15.66)

Rylee Dunker — 5th in javelin (112-7)

Girls 4x200 relay — 5th (1:47.29)

Girls 4x400 relay — 7th (4:11.14)

Girls 4x100 relay — 10th (51.24)

Makenna Krause — tied for 20th in 100 meters (12.96)

Ryelle Gilbert — 25th in 1600 meters (5:36.39)

Ryelle Gilbert — 28th in 800 meters (2:28.26)

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Groton Area Boys Positioned Well for State Track Meet Qualification

With the final week of the regular season underway, the Groton Area boys track and field team has placed itself among the top programs in South Dakota Class A, highlighted by elite sprint performances from Keegen Tracy, strong distance running from Jayden Schwan and multiple relay teams currently sitting inside the state qualifying field.

Under South Dakota High School Activities Association rules, the top 24 verified performances in each event qualify for the State Meet following the close of entries. In running events with preliminaries, ties for the 24th spot do not advance, while all ties in field events and running finals-only events qualify.

Groton Area currently has numerous athletes and relay teams ranked well inside the Class A field.

Senior sprinter Keegen Tracy has established himself as one of the state's top all-around sprint athletes. Tracy is currently ranked second in Class A in the 400 meters with a time of 50.44.

He also sits seventh in the 200 meters at 22.73 and eighth in the 100 meters with a time of 10.99, giving the Tigers three top-10 individual rankings in the sprint events.

Groton Area's relay teams have also turned in a strong season.

The Tigers are currently eighth in the Class A boys sprint medley relay with a time of 3:41.58, a performance that earlier broke the school record.

Groton Area also ranks 17th in the boys 4x800 relay at 8:45.71, 18th in the boys 4x400 relay at 3:35.13 and 18th in the boys 4x200 relay at 1:34.13.

The Tigers' 4x100 relay team currently sits 19th in Class A with a time of 45.33.

Distance standout Jayden Schwan has also placed himself among the top runners in the state in multiple events.

Schwan currently ranks fifth in the boys 800 meters after running 2:00.34 on May 20. He is also sixth in the 1600 meters at 4:35.89 and ninth in the 3200 meters with a time of 10:04.87.

In the field events, Ethan Kroll moved into the top 20 in the boys triple jump. Kroll currently ranks 19th in Class A with a jump of 41 feet, 1 inch recorded May 20.

Because many of the Tigers' relay teams are positioned near the middle or lower end of the top 24 qualifying field, the final week of competition will be important for securing and improving their State Meet standing.

Current Groton Area Class A boys rankings include:

Keegen Tracy — 2nd in 400 meters (50.44)

Keegen Tracy — 7th in 200 meters (22.73)

Keegen Tracy — 8th in 100 meters (10.99)

Jayden Schwan — 5th in 800 meters (2:00.34)

Jayden Schwan — 6th in 1600 meters (4:35.89)

Jayden Schwan — 9th in 3200 meters (10:04.87)

Boys sprint medley relay — 8th (3:41.58)

Boys 4x800 relay — 17th (8:45.71)

Boys 4x400 relay — 18th (3:35.13)

Boys 4x200 relay — 18th (1:34.13)

Boys 4x100 relay — 19th (45.33)

Ethan Kroll — 19th in triple jump (41-1)

Groton Area appears poised to send a strong group of athletes to the State Track and Field Meet, with several Tigers already holding top-10 rankings and others continuing to battle for qualifying positions during the final last-chance meets of the season.



New SD law congests local elections; races to watch

By Molly Wetsch, South Dakota News Watch

A new South Dakota law about municipal election dates is adding to an already-heavy ballot for many voters this June.

Hotly contested primaries for governor and other statehouse and federal seats in South Dakota have largely been the focus of the ballot that Republican voters will see on election day, June 2. At the local level, elections also have crowded tickets for primary races. That includes positions like county commissioners, auditor, sheriff and the register of deeds.

And even Independents and Democrats across the state, who will in many places not be voting for primary candidates, will want to head to the polls next month to elect positions like city council, mayor and school board members.

The packed races reflect an election year with high political involvement across the state, especially in the Republican Party.

Julia Hellwege, associate professor of political science and current director of the Chiesman Center for Democracy at the University of South Dakota, told News Watch that years with prominent elections, like gubernatorial or national races, often fuel more competition at the local level.

"Anytime there's that larger level of salience, meaning how important something is – as much as people want to say, 'I don't like national politics,' there's attention being paid, whether that's by the people or the media," Hellwege said. "So there's attention being spent, and that breeds competition and competition breeds (voter) engagement."

New municipal election date law hopes to boost voter engagement, with extra work for auditors

Some cities and towns will also see municipal elections this June as a new election law comes into effect.

HB 1130 requires municipalities to hold elections either on statewide primary election day in June or general election day in November. Legislators approved the measure in 2025, and it officially took effect Jan. 1, making this the first election year to see the new date requirements.

South Dakota Searchlight reported that auditors across the state, who are responsible for election administration, are enduring arduous ballot creation processes, partially because of the increased number of races on primary day due to HB 1130. Minnehaha County auditor Leah Anderson said her office will print 324 different ballot styles for the June election.

A survey from the South Dakota Municipal League indicated that around 61% of cities are holding their elections in June, rather than in November.

The bill, which was introduced by former Rep. Will Mortenson, a Republican from Fort Pierre, is intended to increase voter engagement in municipal elections.

"Whenever there's a conflict of administrative ease and voter convenience, I try to put the voter first," Mortenson told Searchlight.

Sioux Falls, the state's largest city, will hold its election on the June 2 primary. Previously, the city's municipal elections were held in April. Voters will be choosing a new mayor, city council members and school board members.

Hellwege said it is important that voters understand even though municipal elections occur on the same day as primaries, they are open to all voters – not just those registered with a specific party.

"If we talk about this as the gubernatorial primary election, you're both sending a message about what the important ticket is, but you're also sending a message about who can vote," Hellwege said. "If you are not a Republican, even if you are allowed to vote for several of the (municipal) offices, you might not even know or realize that because you just think of it as the primary."

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Here are some local races to watch.

Brown County Sheriff: Incumbent faces 3 challengers amid county commission conflicts

In Brown County, current Sheriff Dave Lunzman is being challenged by three other Republican candidates: Dan Kaiser, Linn Kamin and Rob Weinmeister. Kaiser formerly served as a District 3 representative in the state House of Representatives.

Kamin is a deputy at the Brown County Sheriff's Office, Kaiser is a sergeant at the Aberdeen Police Department and Weinmeister is the director of the State Office of Highway Safety.

The winner of the June primary will meet Democrat Anthony "Tony" Sorenson in November.



Rob
Weinmeister

Dan Kaiser

Linn Kamin

Dave Lunzman

A forum hosted by the Aberdeen League of Women Voters saw more than 50 questions submitted by voters for the candidates, some of which revolved around issues like the county's purchase of a new jail building and how to remain professional when working with county commissioners.

Lunzman's tenure as sheriff has been marked by high-profile clashes with other county officials. That includes a federal lawsuit his wife filed against several county commissioners and employees claiming discrimination, which was dismissed, and a disagreement about the control of jail staffing.

Lunzman, in the forum, said that there has been "a lot of publicity" about his disagreements with county commissioners but maintained that he had done the right thing when it comes to jail staffing issues.

"When the commission tries to do something that is not legal, I have to look out for you guys ... because you are actually my boss, not them," Lunzman said of commissioners.

Fall River County Auditor: 5 vying for role in packed race left open by longtime auditor's retirement

In Fall River County, the retirement of longtime Auditor Sue Ganje created an opening that five candidates look to fill.

Four Republicans will be on the ballot in June: Cindy Burns, Everett Dossey, Bobbie J. Janis and Carol Boche. Lily Heidebrink, an independent, will face the primary winner in November.

Heidebrink formerly served as director of equalization for the county, while Dossey is the current director.

Burns, Janis and Boche have also been county employees at some point in their careers – Burns and Janis in the auditor's office and Boche at the state's attorney's office.

The election is unusually contested for an auditor's race, especially in Fall River County: Ganje has served as auditor since 2005 and worked in the auditor's office since 1983. She rarely had opposition when running for re-election.

Hellwege said that ongoing concerns about property taxes in Fall River County may be a reason that the auditor's race drew more candidates. In 2024, some residents in the county said taxes on their property had increased up to 65%. The South Dakota Department of Revenue describes the county auditor as "the watchdog of the county for property taxes."

"That has severely impacted them and has been a serious issue in Hot Springs. And so it doesn't really surprise me that auditor is one of the offices that becomes them so highly contested. Because everybody wants to do something to fix it," Hellwege said.

Oldham-Ramona-Rutland school board: After narrowly avoiding dissolution, candidates seek to lead district in new era

Four candidates are running to fill two non-partisan spots on the Oldham-Ramona-Rutland school board – one two-year term representing Oldham-Ramona and one single-year term representing Rutland. It

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comes as the district faced several shakeups in the past year.

A vote was held in December for a special school board election that decided the future of the Oldham-Ramona-Rutland School District. Just four votes divided those for reorganization, which would have dissolved the school district and allocated students to surrounding districts, and those against. Oldham-Ramona-Rutland's tumultuous several months also included the appointment of a new superintendent after former superintendent Dawn Hoeke resigned in February.

"Over the past two years, I have witnessed and been the target of hatred, control and entitlement that contradict the principles of faith and decency I hold dear. My heart aches for the division and harm caused by those who seek to dismantle this district, regardless of the impact on students and staff," Hoeke said in the school board meeting where she resigned.

Candidates Jennifer Lebahn and Ashlee Roling, who are running for the Oldham-Ramona seat, and Mitchell Maher, who is running for the Rutland seat, have not previously served on the school board. Amber Malisch is currently serving a one-year term on the board representing the Rutland community and is running for re-election.

Local elections represent local concerns but can have statewide impact

Hellwege said that heavily contested local races can indicate what voters are most concerned about in their counties.

"At the local level, when things are going well, you don't really think about it, right? Like, 'My electricity is on, my streets are working' and you don't think of those as political issues necessarily. Local elections, in particular, you tend to think of when something goes wrong. And so that's when you need to go and do something about it," Hellwege said.

"With national government, you're like, 'We can change the trajectory and let's move this direction. Let's move that direction.' At the local stage we as voters don't necessarily think about local politics in that same way."

Election to these offices, though, can also allow for representation in statewide issues.

Hellwege said that because of statewide intergovernmental organizations like the South Dakota Municipal League, local representatives can wield power on issues that have an effect on all South Dakotans, especially when officials collaborate.

"Local officeholders do have quite a bit of political power, just to share with state legislators about what's going on in the local governments. And so the kind of person that you elect, not only their partisanship, not only their ideology, but also their process of procedures, the kind of person they are. The more these elected officials communicate with each other, they actually can exert greater lobbying power at the state Legislature," Hellwege said.

"Now, obviously Sioux Falls and Rapid City can exert greater power more directly because of their size. But even small town sheriffs, small town school boards and so on, right? They do have an impact on what happens at the state."

Other races to watch

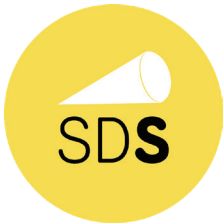
Here are a few other local races to watch:

The Britton-Hecla School District has three school board seats up for election, with six candidates running. Incumbents Angela Grupe and Heather Landreth are challenged by Jeff Christenson, Amy Jo Vietor, Jeanne Ahlgren and Heidi Eimers.

Stanley, Perkins and McCook counties all have three candidates running for sheriff. In all three races, all of the candidates are Republicans and will be on the ballot in June.

In Day County, three county commission spots are up for grabs. In all of those elections, two Republicans and one Democrat are running for each seat. That means the Republicans who win in the June 2 primary will face the Democratic candidates in November for the role. Brothers David and Paul Dulitz may square off in November for a seat – David as a Republican and Paul as a Democrat. David will look to unseat longtime county commissioner Derek Sinner.

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Company seeks permit for \$174 million battery energy storage facility in South Dakota

BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF

A Florida-based company is seeking approval from South Dakota regulators to build a \$174 million battery energy storage system that would capture excess energy from the electrical grid and release it at times of increased demand.

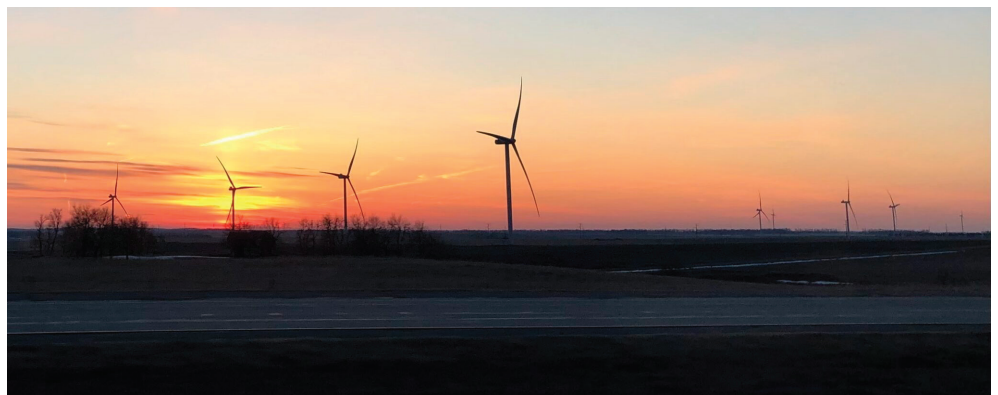
The project would be located on 53 acres within the existing Crowned Ridge wind energy project, 13 miles northeast of Watertown.

The permit application to the Public Utilities Commission was filed this month by Crowned Ridge Energy Storage, a subsidiary of NextEra Energy Resources.

The facility would consist of lithium-ion battery cell modules housed in up to 150 "cabinets," which bear a resemblance to shipping containers, according to a photo included in the permit application. The application says each "cabinet" would not exceed 25 feet in height. The site would also include a 20-foot-high sound wall along 860 feet of the northwest corner.

The Public Utilities Commission will hold a public input meeting about the project at 6 p.m. Central time on July 1 at the Waverly South Shore School gymnasium, at 319 Mary Place in Waverly.

The company hopes to have the project in operation by May 2028.



Wind turbines spin against the setting sun just north of Watertown along Interstate 29 in 2023. (Photo by Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

New poll shows Doeden overtaking Johnson in governor race, though within margin of error

BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF

A new poll shows Aberdeen businessman Toby Doeden overtaking U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson in the race for the Republican nomination for governor of South Dakota, but the gap between the two is within the poll's margin of error.

The poll commissioned by KELO-TV and conducted by Emerson College Polling in Boston shows Doeden at 26%, Johnson at 23%, Gov. Larry Rhoden at 19% and state House Speaker Jon Hansen at 16%, with 15% of respondents undecided. The poll's margin of error is 3.2 percentage points.

The poll was conducted May 18-19. Emerson surveyed 452 registered Republicans in the state, including 432 who said they were either very or somewhat likely to vote.

March results from the same source were Johnson 28%, Doeden 18%, Rhoden 17%, Hansen 14% and 23% undecided.

Separately, South Dakota News Watch and the Chiesman Center for Democracy commissioned polls by Mason-Dixon Polling. Those results in April showed Johnson with 34% support, Hansen at 18%, and Rhoden and Doeden each at 17%, with 14% undecided.

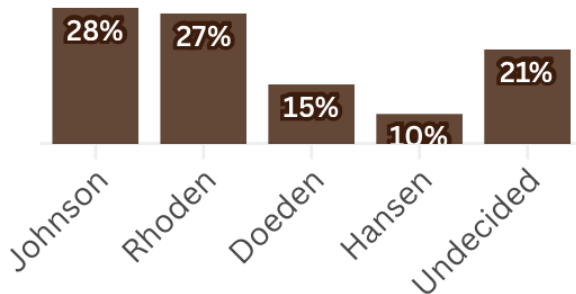
In October, those same groups released results of Johnson 28%, Rhoden 27%, Doeden 15% and Hansen 10%, with 21% undecided.

The winner of the race needs 35% support in the June 2 primary election to advance to a Nov. 3 general election contest against presumptive Democratic nominee Dan Ahlers. If no Republican receives 35% support in the primary, the top two will advance to a runoff eight weeks later on July 28.

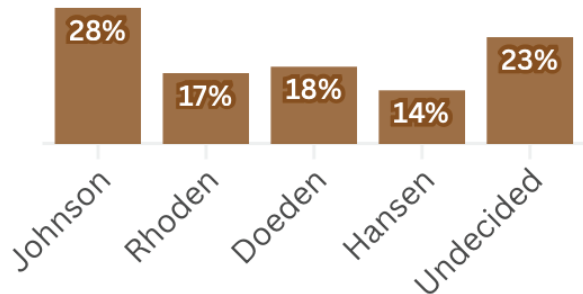
Poll results in SD Republican governor primary

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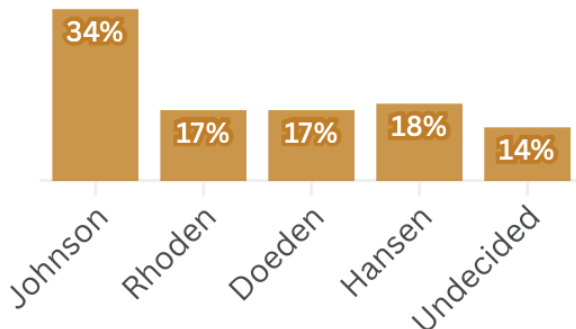
October SD News
Watch-Chiesman/Mason-Dixon



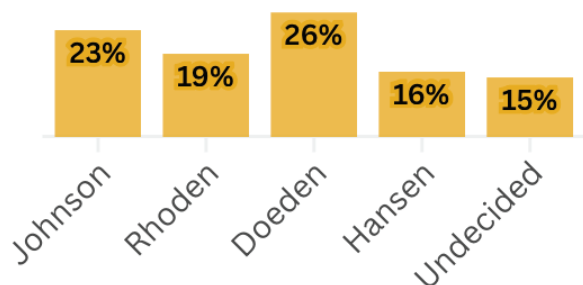
March KELO/Emerson



April SD News
Watch-Chiesman/Mason-Dixon



May KELO/Emerson



Sources: [SD News Watch-Chiesman Center/Mason-Dixon Polling](#), [KELO/Emerson College Polling](#)

Republican candidate for governor of South Dakota puts \$4 million of his own money into his campaign

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

A new campaign finance report says a Republican candidate for governor of South Dakota, Toby Doeden, has put \$4 million of his own money into his campaign.

In written statements responding to South Dakota Searchlight questions, Doeden said he is motivated by a desire to give his children and grandchildren "the opportunity to grow up and raise their families in the same South Dakota I did. One that is safe, affordable and free from big government overreach."

"There is no amount of money I wouldn't risk to protect the future of South Dakota," Doeden said.

Doeden had previously reported loaning his campaign \$2 million. His latest report, filed pursuant to a Monday deadline, showed another \$2 million. His campaign has raised less than \$120,000 from other sources. After subtracting the campaign's spending, it has about \$214,000 left on hand.

Searchlight asked whether his campaign would raise money to repay him or whether he will forgive the loans.

"I am not interested in taking money from donors or special interest groups," he said. "The majority of them want some sort of favor or direct access in return for the money. I am not interested in playing those games."

Prior to Thursday, the highest showing for Doeden in any independent, publicly released polling so far had been second. He trailed the leader, U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, by 10 percentage points in that March survey commissioned by KELO-TV and conducted by Emerson College Polling. But in new May 18-19 poll results from the same source released Thursday, Doeden led with 26% support, followed by Johnson with 23%. The gap was within the poll's 3.2-point margin of error.

The other candidates for the Republican nomination are Gov. Larry Rhoden, who was at 19% in the latest KELO-Emerson poll, and state House Speaker Jon Hansen, who was at 16%. The remaining 15% of poll respondents were undecided. The pollsters surveyed 452 registered Republicans in the state, including 432 who said they were likely to vote.

The winner needs 35% support in the June 2 primary election to advance to a Nov. 3 general election contest against presumptive Democratic nominee Dan Ahlers. If no Republican receives 35% support in the primary, the top two will advance to a runoff eight weeks later on July 28.

Doeden said he intends to come out on top.

"I am laser-focused on winning this race, getting to Pierre and making a difference for the hard-working people who have built this state, not the powerful few who are trying to control it."

Doeden, of Aberdeen, is a vehicle dealership owner and has said he's been involved in multiple other businesses and rental properties. He told South Dakota Searchlight that he "worked very hard throughout my life and as a result, I have amassed a respectable nest egg."

"As mentioned, I am willing to risk that money in an effort to save this state from becoming the next Colorado or Minnesota," Doeden said, referring to states with Democratic governors.

Doeden's own candidate committee is not the only one that has been indebted to him. He formed the Dakota First Action political action committee in 2024 with himself as its chairman, but has since stepped away from management of the committee. Campaign finance reports indicate the PAC owes him more than \$200,000 in loans.

Total fundraising in the Republican primary race for governor so far this election cycle is over \$11 million,



Toby Doeden announces his candidacy for the Republican nomination for governor of South Dakota during an event on May 28, 2025, in Aberdeen. (Photo by Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

and total spending is about \$10 million.

The new pre-primary campaign finance reports show Johnson in the best financial position. Since the beginning of the year, his campaign took in \$3.7 million and spent \$3.8 million, leaving a balance of \$931,000.

Rhoden reported raising about \$572,000 since the beginning of the year, spending \$914,000, and ending with about \$170,000.

Hansen reported raising about \$355,000, spending about \$245,000 and ending with about \$164,000.

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.

Jan. 6 police officers sue Trump over \$1.77B 'taxpayer-funded slush fund'

BY: JACOB FISCHLER



Donald Trump supporters clash with police and security forces in the attack on the US Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021 in Washington, D.C.

(Photo by Brent Stirton/Getty Images)

Two police officers who defended the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, sued the Trump administration Wednesday to block the creation of a nearly \$1.8 billion fund to pay people said to be victims of judicial weaponization, saying the fund would aid and encourage the pro-Trump rioters who attacked that Capitol that day and still harbor desire to harm the officers.

Retired U.S. Capitol Police Officer Harry Dunn and Metropolitan Police Officer Daniel Hodges said in a complaint in federal court that Jan. 6 rioters, nearly all of whom received a pardon from President Donald Trump on his first day back in office last year, could benefit from the fund and

use the money to organize more violent activity.

"In the most brazen act of presidential corruption this century, President Donald J. Trump has created a \$1.776 billion taxpayer-funded slush fund to finance the insurrectionists and paramilitary groups that commit violence in his name," the first paragraph of the complaint reads.

The complaint lists Trump, acting Attorney General Todd Blanche and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent as defendants.

The Justice Department, which Blanche has led since last month, announced the creation of the fund on Monday in conjunction with Trump dropping a \$10 billion lawsuit against the IRS.

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Claims by victims of 'weaponization'

The fund would use money from a pool designated for settling legal claims against the federal government to compensate people who were "victims of lawfare and weaponization," Blanche said in a press release.

Trump has long complained that the Biden administration targeted him, his allies and supporters for prosecutions that were not supported by facts on the ground. That claim was part of his rationale for pardoning people convicted of crimes on Jan. 6.

The press release explicitly says there is no partisan test to benefit from the fund, but the structure gives Trump and Blanche, who was Trump's criminal defense attorney before joining the government, near total control.

Payments from the fund would be decided by a five-member panel, which the attorney general would appoint. Only one appointment would require "consultation" with Congress and the president would be able to fire any member. The fund would dissolve in December 2028, the month before Trump's term ends.

Dunn and Hodges said in Wednesday's challenge that Trump's IRS lawsuit was frivolous from the start because the president was suing a government agency that he controlled. The suit also came after the statute of limitations expired, they said.

The settlement "is a corrupt sham," they said.

Jan. 6 injuries

Dunn and Hodges both deployed to the Capitol during the 2021 attack. The lawsuit describes the danger they faced and injuries they incurred. Hodges said a rioter tried to gouge out his eyes and that he thought he would die while crushed between metal doors.

Investigations of the attack showed that it was a "planned insurrection" by paramilitary groups like the Proud Boys, the suit says.

Many of the people Trump pardoned for crimes connected to the attack, including former Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio, who was sentenced to 22 years in prison for sedition, have expressed a desire to exact revenge, according to the suit.

On Jan. 6 of this year, Tarrio said on the podcast of right-wing conspiracy theorist Alex Jones that after his pardon, he was "searching for ... retribution, retaliation."

Fund called 'stupid on stilts'

The fund is illegal, Dunn and Hodges' lawsuit says. No law authorized its creation, and the appropriation creating the judgment fund that is used to pay out other settlements does not apply when no settlement has been reached, they said.

Members of Congress, including Republicans, have major reservations about the fund.

Blanche pitched a group of Senate Republicans during a two-hour meeting Thursday, but didn't appear to change many minds.

Sen. Rand Paul, a Kentucky Republican, said the meeting was a "spirited discussion."

Shortly after the meeting, the chamber's GOP leaders told members they would not vote this month on a \$72 billion bill to fund immigration enforcement and security upgrades to Trump's proposed White House ballroom. Senators sought to insert guardrails on the DOJ fund into the bill.

In a Wednesday interview with Spectrum News, retiring GOP Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina called the fund "stupid on stilts."

"It will invariably put us in a position where your taxpayers dollars and my taxpayer dollars could potentially compensate someone who assaulted a police officer, admitted their guilt, got convicted, got pardoned, and now we are going to pay them for that," he said. "That's absurd."

Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Susan Collins, a Maine Republican, has also voiced her objection. Blanche testified at a Senate Appropriations hearing Tuesday, when Collins questioned him about the fund. She later said his answers did not win her support.

"After my exchange with Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche, I do not support the creation of the proposed Anti-Weaponization Fund," she said in a written statement that also noted no court had approved it.

Dunn also a candidate

A White House spokesperson deferred a message seeking comment Thursday to the Justice Department. Spokespeople for the department did not return messages.

Dunn, who is running as a Democrat for a Maryland U.S. House seat, told Maryland Matters the fund did not come as a surprise.

"This was a promise to his supporters," Dunn said. "When it was finally announced, there was no doubt in our minds to stop this."

Ashley Murray and Will Ford contributed to this report.

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

US Senate GOP punts immigration bill amid big split with Trump over settlement fund

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY AND SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — A multibillion-dollar package to fund immigration enforcement for the rest of President Donald Trump's term faced new delays Thursday as Senate Republicans showed a rare split with the president over his new "anti-weaponization" fund.

The administration dispatched Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche to Capitol Hill to meet with Senate Republicans as many fought to add restrictions to Trump's \$1.776 billion fund as a condition for passing a proposed \$72 billion for the departments of Homeland Security and Justice.

Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., said the hours-long closed-door meeting with Blanche included "spirited discussion."

The Department of Justice announced Monday the fund for "victims of lawfare" in exchange for Trump dropping his \$10 billion lawsuit against the IRS. Both agencies are under his purview.

"It's unprecedented to see a settlement between two parties that seem to be the same person," Paul said.

Ultimately, senators left their meeting with Blanche with no immediate path forward for the budget reconciliation bill that requires a simple majority to pass. Senate Majority Leader John Thune can only afford to lose a handful of votes in the GOP-led Senate that is split 53-47, as all Democrats vow to oppose the package.



Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche appears at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., on May 21, 2026. (Photo

by Shauneen Miranda/States Newsroom)

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"We're going home," Sen. John Kennedy, R-La., said as he made flight arrangements with his staff while standing outside the meeting room.

Thune told reporters "we will pick up where we left off."

Asked whether he thinks a resolution can be reached, the South Dakota Republican said "that's what I'm counting on."

The Senate has adjourned except for pro forma sessions until the afternoon of June 1, the date Trump set to have the finished bill on his desk.

Among the sticking points in the Blanche meeting: whether Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot defendants who assaulted police officers would qualify for the financial relief.

"I did raise that issue," said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine. "But we haven't seen (bill) language yet."

The administration maintains the fund will be nonpartisan, and not only open to Trump supporters. A five-seat commission — four to be appointed by Blanche and the fifth in consultation with Congress — will issue decisions on financial claims.

Further details emerged Tuesday from the Department of Justice, revealing that Trump and his family will be forever immune from tax audits as part of the settlement.

Ballroom battle

Before debate erupted over Trump's "anti-weaponization" fund, Republicans had already fractured over a \$1 billion Secret Service security earmark in the bill, \$220 million of which was set to be used to "harden" Trump's White House ballroom project.

The funds for the "East Wing Modernization Project" would have paid for bulletproof glass, drone detection technologies and filtration systems designed to detect chemical or other contaminants.

Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La., who lost his primary Saturday after Trump supported another candidate, told reporters he would not vote for ballroom funds.

Democrats claimed credit for getting the \$1 billion tossed from the bill after challenging whether the provision fit within the strict parameters of reconciliation. Ultimately, the Senate parliamentarian ruled it out, sparking a social media attack from Trump Tuesday.

Trump told reporters Thursday if Senate Republicans didn't find a way to pass the extra security money, "Then the White House won't be a very secure place."

Senate Dems vow to stop 'slush fund'

Democrats pounced on the opportunity to spotlight the Republican division.

"This afternoon, Republicans — so divided, so dysfunctional, so disorganized — are fleeing Washington," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer told reporters at a press conference after movement on the package stalled.

"Republicans are divided over things that Americans don't want, but Democrats are united around things that the people do want — for us to lower their costs, rein in the chaos, fight the corruption that is endemic to this administration," the New York Democrat added.

Schumer added that "we'll do everything we can to stop this slush fund, whether it's in the courts, whether it's legislative, whether it's through reconciliation, or any other legislative means."

Senate Democrats still plan to offer up a handful of painful amendments for GOP senators to vote on during a marathon voting session when and if the bill finally reaches the floor.

War powers vote postponed

On the other side of the Capitol, House Republicans abruptly delayed an Iran War Powers Resolution vote moments before it was scheduled to open on the floor.

This would have been the fourth time Democrats brought the privileged motion to the floor. The 1970s-era War Powers Resolution sets reporting procedures and limitations on a president's military campaigns abroad.

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An effort to curtail Trump's campaign in Iran failed in a tied House vote just one week ago. Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., shouted on the floor as the presiding officer moved procedures forward, skipping the War Powers Resolution.

"Are we not voting on it because the American people are sick and tired of this illegal war that's costing tens of billions of dollars? Gas prices are through the roof. People can't afford their groceries," McGovern said, alleging the Republicans lacked the "guts" to vote on it.

The House now also leaves for the Memorial Day break and will not return until June 1.

House Speaker Mike Johnson's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Jennifer Shutt contributed to this report.

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

Army Corps grants final approval for Dakota Access Pipeline, 9 years after oil began flowing

BY: MARY STEURER

A federal agency officially granted the Dakota Access Pipeline a permit to cross under the Missouri River's Lake Oahe reservoir, ending a six-year environmental review to determine whether the pipeline could continue operating.

The decision, issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on Thursday, authorizes the pipeline crossing with additional conditions the agency says will make the pipeline safer. It follows the Army Corps' December release of a 464-page report



Lake Oahe just outside of Fort Yates on the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Reservation is pictured on October 9, 2024. The Dakota Access Pipeline crosses underneath the reservoir just north of the reservation. (Photo Mary Steurer/North Dakota Monitor)

analyzing the environmental impacts of the pipeline crossing, which is in south-central North Dakota less than one mile upstream from the Standing Rock Reservation. The Army Corps was required by law to wait a minimum of 30 days before it could finalize its findings with the record of decision.

The Dakota Access Pipeline has been carrying crude oil from northwest North Dakota to southern Illinois since June 2017. The pipeline's owner, Dakota Access, was required to seek the easement from the Army Corps, which manages Lake Oahe, to build the pipeline under the reservoir roughly 10 years ago.

The Army Corps initially granted the easement in 2017.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe sued the agency in federal court, arguing the Army Corps approved the easement without completing the full environmental review required under federal law. The tribe claimed the easement was invalid and that the pipeline must be shut down.

A federal judge in 2020 sided with the tribe and vacated the easement. The judge ordered the Army Corps to conduct the environmental review before it could decide whether it was appropriate to re-authorize the permit.

The conditions added to the easement would mostly be the responsibility of Dakota Access to implement. The requirements are meant to prevent an oil spill and minimize the impacts of a spill, such as implementing new leak detection technology, monitoring groundwater and testing surface water. It would also require Dakota Access to provide an alternate water supply and to develop a food distribution plan

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for communities that rely on Lake Oahe for food in the event of an oil spill.

The Corps also said this option protects environmental resources and responds to comments raised by Tribal Nations.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe said in a December statement the Army Corps' proposal "does not remedy" any of its concerns related to the pipeline safety or tribal sovereignty.

"At every turn, our rights and the health and safety of our people and the environment are ignored," Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Chairman Steve Sitting Bear said in the statement. "We will continue to fight for our homelands and the promises the United States made to our Tribe in Treaty."

The tribe was not immediately available Thursday morning to comment on the decision.

Interior Secretary Doug Burgum announced the development Thursday morning while presenting to the Williston Basin Petroleum Conference in Bismarck, drawing applause from the oil industry attendees.

Burgum, who became North Dakota governor in 2017 while Indigenous-led protests against the pipeline were ongoing, called the drawn-out environmental study "a cloud of uncertainty over the whole Bakken."

"No more uncertainty," Burgum said. "We're all good."

Adam Telle, assistant secretary of the Army for Civil Works, said in a statement that the Corps through the decision is "decisively putting years of delays to rest."

"The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are delivering the clear, consistent regulatory decisions required to provide certainty to the American economy and advance President Trump's American energy dominance agenda, while protecting our natural resources," he said in the statement.

When the federal judge pulled the easement in 2020, he initially also ordered the pipeline to be shut down. However, that part of his decision was reversed by an appellate court.

The Army Corps allowed the pipeline to continue operating while it was working on the environmental impact statement. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in late 2024 brought another federal lawsuit against the agency, arguing the pipeline could not continue carrying oil under Lake Oahe without the easement, among other claims. The judge concluded it was up to the Army Corps' discretion whether to allow the pipeline to stay open while the environmental impact statement was pending. He noted the tribe could bring another legal challenge against the agency once the study was complete. Standing Rock appealed the dismissal.

Vicki Granado, vice president of corporate communications for Dakota Access Pipeline developer Energy Transfer, said in a statement that the company is "pleased" with the Army Corps' decision.

"We want to thank the Corps for the tremendous amount of time and effort put in by so many to bring this matter to a thoughtful close," Granado said in a statement.

Energy Transfer maintains the pipeline has always complied with regulations. The pipeline crosses at minimum 95 feet below the riverbed of Lake Oahe.

"The Dakota Access Pipeline is built to be one of the safest, most technologically advanced pipelines in the world," a website affiliated with Energy Transfer states.

North Dakota officials have supported the pipeline's continued operation. The project transports just under half of the state's oil production.

North Dakota Monitor reporter Mary Steurer can be reached at msteurer@northdakotamonitor.com

North Dakota Monitor Editor Amy Dalrymple contributed to this story.

This story was updated with comments from Energy Transfer.

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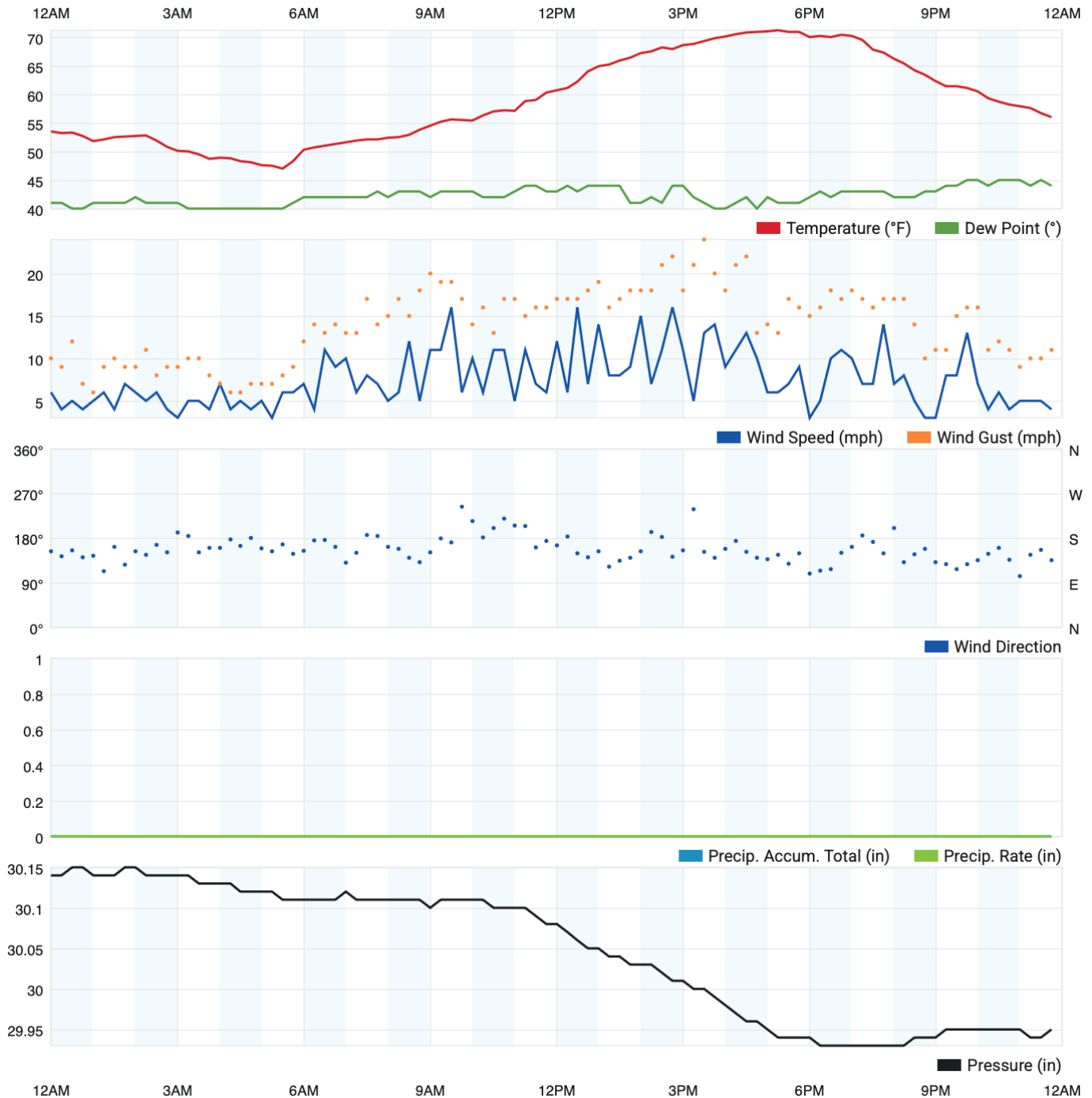
Mary Steurer is a reporter based in Bismarck for the North Dakota Monitor. A native of St. Louis, Steurer previously worked as the local government reporter for the Casper Star-Tribune newspaper in Wyoming.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

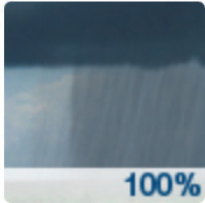
May 21, 2026



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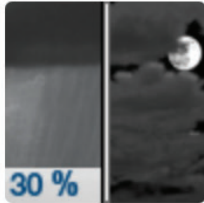
Today



High: 57 °F

Showers

Tonight



Low: 40 °F

Chance
Showers then
Mostly Cloudy

Saturday



High: 70 °F

Decreasing
Clouds

Saturday Night



Low: 43 °F

Mostly Clear

Sunday



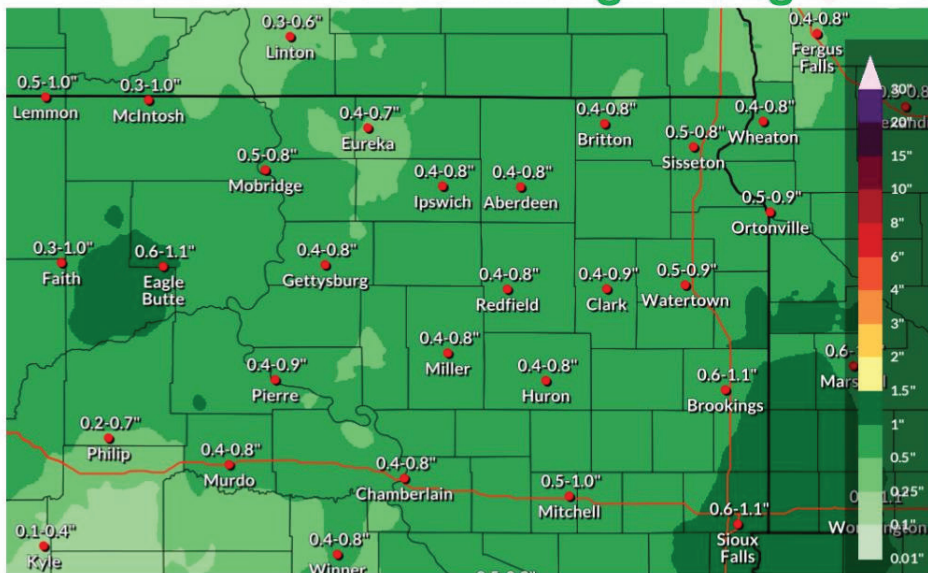
High: 81 °F

Sunny

Showers Today



Rainfall Amounts through Tonight



- Showers over south central and western South Dakota early this morning.
- Shower expanding over northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota mid morning into early afternoon.
- Shower ending later tonight.

There is a 20% chance for afternoon thunderstorms.

**Total Rainfall expected
0.4 to 1.0"**

weather.gov/aberndeen

National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

A broad area of moisture will cross the region today, bringing widespread rainfall. The rainfall may be heavy at times. There is a 20% chance of thunderstorms this afternoon, with lightning the main threat.

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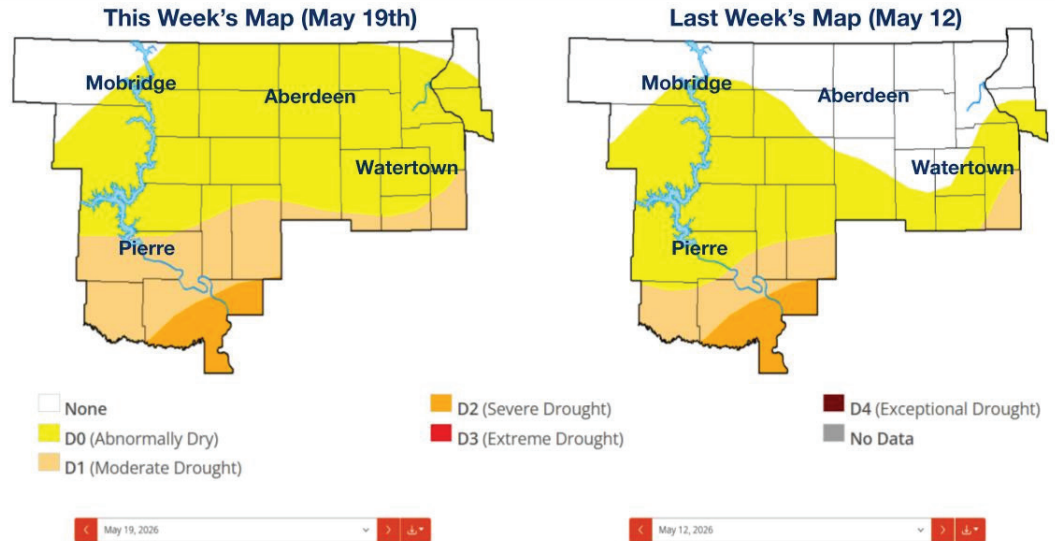
Abnormally Dry Conditions Continue To Expand

May 21, 2026

10:48 AM

Key Messages

- **Abnormally Dry (D0) and Moderate Drought (D1)** have expanded
- Widespread 0.10-0.50in rainfall expected Friday
- Additional chances for rain may be possible heading into the Memorial Day Holiday weekend



County Warning Area images courtesy of the U.S. Drought Monitor (<https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>)



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

The first half of May has been quite dry. And, when it has rained, amounts have not been as high as needed to help mitigate the soil moisture deficit being felt by many. The most recent Drought Monitor map (released today, May 21st) shows this with the area of abnormally dry conditions and moderate drought conditions expanding northward over the forecast area. However, the second half of May could end up chipping away at the current overly dry conditions.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 72 °F at 5:21 PM

Low Temp: 47 °F at 5:29 AM

Wind: 25 mph at 3:25 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 92 in 1928

Record Low: 22 in 1963

Average High: 73

Average Low: 47

Average Precip in May.: 2.42

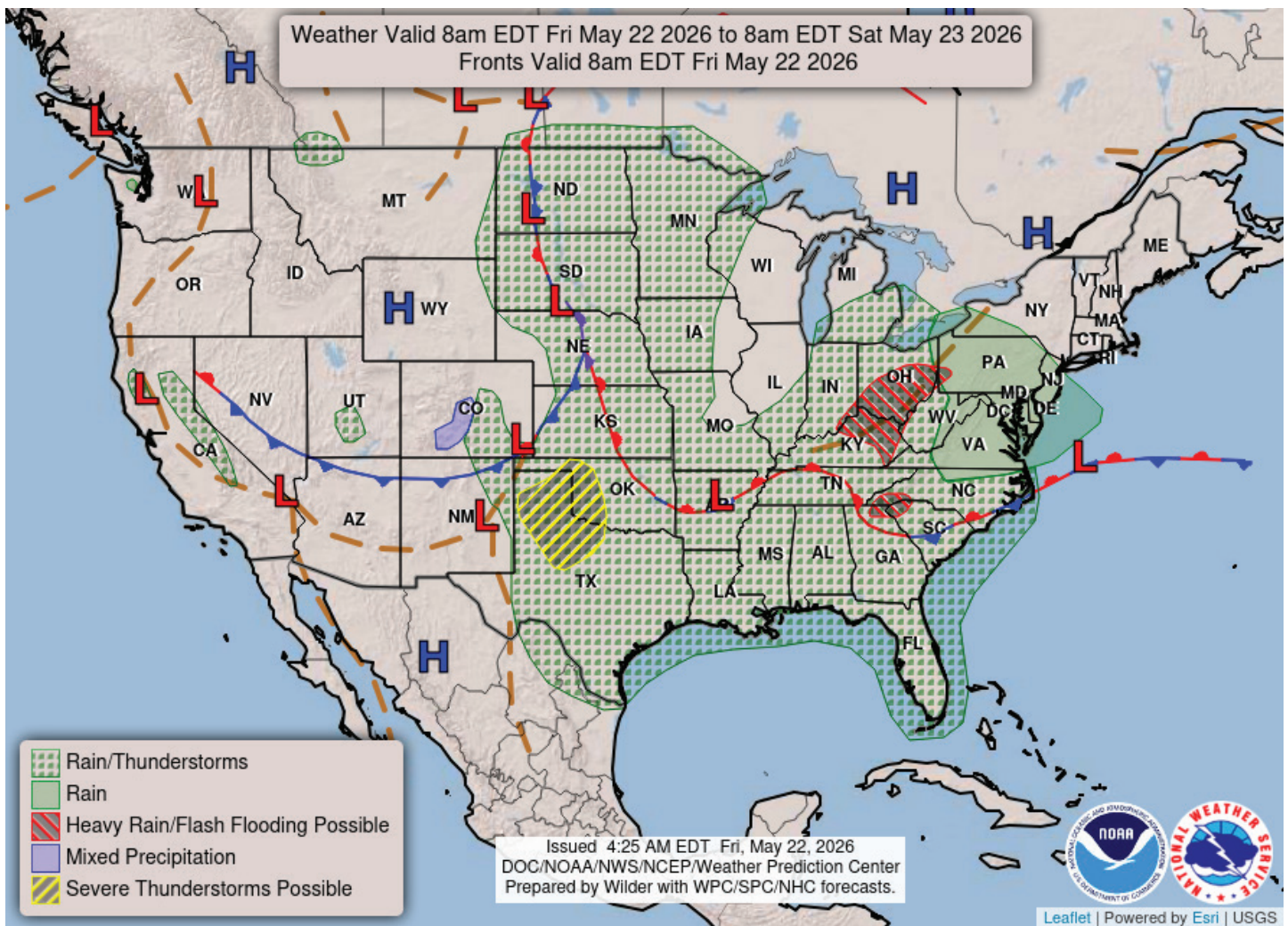
Precip to date in May.: 0.72

Average Precip to date: 6.39

Precip Year to Date: 3.84

Sunset Tonight: 9:03 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:53 am



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Today in Weather History

May 22nd, 1963: A late spring freeze impacted many locations, reporting lows in the lower 20s. Some low temperatures include: 18 degrees in Andover; 20 degrees in Britton, 4 NW of Gann Valley, Leola and Roscoe; 21 degrees Castlewood, Ipswich, Kennebec, Redfield, 2 NW of Stephen, and one west of Summit; 22 degrees in Aberdeen, Eureka, one west of Highmore, McLaughlin, and four west of Mellette.

May 22nd, 1993: Nearly stationary thunderstorms dumped five to seven one-half inches of rain and hail within three hours on the southwest side of Sioux Falls, causing major urban flooding and a flash flood on an area creek. Water and sewage flooded at least 200 basements as the storm and sewer systems backed up. Water came up to the rooftops of many cars in the Empire Mall area. Power was knocked out at the Empire Mall and to 2600 other customers in southwest Sioux Falls. Rainwater came through the roof of the Empire Mall, causing damage to some stores. Hail up to an inch in diameter fell continuously for up to one-half hours in parts of southwest Sioux Falls, causing considerable damage to hundreds of roofs, trees, and gardens. Thousands of cars received damage from hail or water in Sioux Falls. A flash flood in the Silver Glen area turned a typically three-foot wide creek to a hundred feet wide in places. At least five houses near this creek had severe damage caused by the rushing waters. The flash flood also tore out a section of a road adjacent to the creek, buckled sidewalks, ripped away 100-year-old trees, and floated a 5500 lb truck down the road.

May 22nd, 2010: An EF2 tornado in eastern Walworth County crossed into western Edmunds County and intensified into a massive EF4 tornado as it struck several farms. Several large cottonwood trees were uprooted at the first farm, and several trailers were damaged. Three grain bins were also destroyed, with debris located several hundred yards to the northeast. The residence suffered some shingle and antenna damage. The tornado then tracked northeast to a second farm where several outbuildings were damaged or destroyed, along with widespread tree damage. The primary residence at this location suffered no damage. Several grain cars were also rolled about 100 yards into the trees behind the house. The massive tornado continued to track northeast to a third farm north of Bowdle. The primary residence suffered significant damage to walls, with part of the roof structure removed. Widespread tree damage was sustained, with many of the trees completely debarked and only the stumps of the largest branches remaining. Two large garages were destroyed, with the concrete slab wiped clean. The vehicles in one garage were rolled or tossed from 25 to 100 yards away. It is estimated that one car flew through the air 75 to 100 yards, resting in the tree shelter belt north of the residence. Several other outbuildings were destroyed. The tornado then toppled six to eight metal power transmission towers as it moved north of the farm. One tower was sheared off from the concrete footings and traveled an estimated 400 yards. Ground scouring was visible along the path of these towers. The large tornado continued to track east, crossing over State Highway 47, where a state radio tower was toppled. The tornado lifted shortly after that. The highest wind speeds were estimated to be from 166 to 200 mph.

1876 — Denver CO was drenched with 6.53 inches of rain in 24 hours, an all-time record for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1911 — The temperature at Lewiston ME soared to 101 degrees. It was the hottest temperature ever recorded in New England during the month of May. (David Ludlum)

1987 — A powerful tornado virtually wiped the small southwest Texas community of Saragosa off the map. The twister destroyed eighty- five percent of the structures in the town killing thirty persons and injuring 121 others in the town of population 183. The tornado hurled trucks and autos through adobe and wood- frame homes, with some vehicles blown 500 feet. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Late afternoon and evening thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front in the north central U.S. produced severe weather from northwestern Kansas to central Minnesota and southeastern North Dakota. There were twenty-nine reports of damaging winds, or dime to golf ball size hail. Strong thunderstorm winds gusted to 69 mph at Alexandria, MN. Showers and thunderstorms over eastern North Carolina soaked Wilmington with 2.91 inches of rain, which established a record for the date. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



The Importance of Prayer Partners

God finishes what He starts, and His timing is never a moment too early or too late.

Galatians 4:4-5: 4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,

5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit planned and created a beautiful heaven and earth. Yet even before Adam and Eve were formed, God knew sin would enter the world, causing us to be separated from Him. However, a plan for our redemption was already in place. In the fullness of time, the Son of God took on human flesh and dwelled among us to carry it out (Romans 5:6).

The Lord doesn't do anything haphazardly. Every plan of His is meticulously accomplished at just the right time. And this truth doesn't apply to just the big events in human history. He has a specific plan for every believer too. He ordained the day each of us would be born and has complete knowledge of what each moment of our life will hold. And just as He did when Christ was born, God will, in the fullness of time, execute each part of His will for our life. He's promised to work all things for our good when we love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

Are you trusting God's plan for your life? The One with complete knowledge and wisdom knows what He's doing. Have confidence in His timing, even when circumstances tempt you to rush ahead or give up hope. He is faithful to complete what He has begun, and He is never late.

We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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The Groton Independent

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Winning Numbers

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.21.26

3 15 16 24 28 4

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

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 29 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.19.26

10 26 34 56 64 6

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$296,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 14 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.20.26

5 14 26 39 46 6

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$27,340,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 29 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.20.26

5 9 15 20 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$99,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 44 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.20.26

12 27 37 40 66 17

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 13 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.20.26

10 28 30 46 57 25

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$131,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 13 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

NATO allies bewildered by Trump's about-face on US troop moves in Europe

By MARK CARLSON and LORNE COOK Associated Press

HELSINGBORG, Sweden (AP) — NATO allies and defense officials expressed bewilderment on Friday at U.S. President Donald Trump's announcement that he would send 5,000 U.S. troops to Poland just weeks after he ordered the same number of forces pulled out of Europe.

The apparent change of mind came after weeks of statements from Trump and his administration about reducing — not increasing — the American military footprint in Europe. Trump's initial order set off a flurry of action among military commanders and left allies already doubtful about America's commitment to Europe's security to ponder what forces they might have to backfill on NATO's eastern flank with Russia and Ukraine.

Earlier this month, the Trump administration said it was reducing levels in Europe by about 5,000 troops, and U.S. officials confirmed about 4,000 service members were no longer deploying to Poland. The dispatch to Germany of U.S. personnel trained to fire long-range missiles was also halted.

But in a post on Truth Social on Thursday, Trump said he would send "an additional 5,000 Troops to Poland," citing his strong ties with Polish President Karol Nawrocki, whom Trump endorsed in elections last year.

"It is confusing indeed, and not always easy to navigate," Swedish Foreign Minister Maria Malmer Stenergard told reporters at a meeting Friday that she was hosting of her NATO counterparts, including U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Ministers from the Netherlands and Norway were sanguine about Trump's latest move, as was Latvian Foreign Minister Baiba Braže, who said allies knew the U.S. troop "posture was being reconsidered, and now there is no change of posture. For now."

U.S. defense officials also expressed confusion. "We just spent the better part of two weeks reacting to the first announcement. We don't know what this means either," said one of two officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military matters.

But Rubio played down the issue. He said that "the United States continues to have global commitments that it needs to meet in terms of our force deployment, and that constantly requires us to reexamine where we put troops."

Trump's vow to withdraw US forces came after Merz criticized the US

The latest surprise came despite a U.S. pledge to coordinate troop deployments, including one from NATO's top military officer, U.S. Lt. Gen. Alex Grynkeiwich, on Wednesday.

Trump's initial announcement that he would withdraw troops came as he fumed over remarks by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who said that the U.S. was being "humiliated" by the Iranian leadership and criticized what he called a lack of strategy in that war.

Trump told reporters that the U.S. would be cutting even more than 5,000 and also announced new tariffs on European cars. Germany is the continent's biggest auto producer.

Rubio insisted that Trump's decision "is not a punitive thing. It's just something that's ongoing." He has often been called on to offer a less antagonistic U.S. presence at meetings with European partners, but Rubio did skip the last NATO gathering of foreign ministers in December.

The US has a commitment to keep at least 76,000 troops in Europe

About 80,000 U.S. troops are stationed in Europe. The Pentagon is required to keep at least 76,000 troops and major equipment on the continent unless NATO allies are consulted and there is a determination that such a withdrawal is in U.S. interests.

The withdrawal of 5,000 troops might drop numbers below that limit.

But Trump's latest post suggests that troop numbers in Europe would not change. Polish Foreign Minis-

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ter Radek Sikorski welcomed the decision to send more forces to his country, saying it ensures that "the presence of American troops in Poland will be maintained more or less at previous levels."

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte also welcomed the move. On Thursday, before Trump took to Truth Social again, Rutte had underlined that it was important for Europe to take care of its own security. "We have a process in place. This is normal business," he told reporters.

Friday's NATO meeting in Helsingborg, Sweden, was aimed at preparing for a summit of Trump and his counterparts in Turkey in July.

Shoot-and-scoot: Mobile missile launchers play key role in US Pacific deterrence strategy

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

GOTEMBA, Japan (AP) — With a burst of flame, followed by a thunderclap boom that broke the bucolic serenity of the training area in the foothills of Japan's Mount Fuji, the first rocket fired by the U.S. Marines from their mobile launcher screamed toward its target, the orange burn of its engine painting a streak across the blue sky.

Another five rockets followed in rapid succession, before a second HIMARS truck drove out of its concealed position in a copse of evergreens, fired its salvo of six rockets, then retreated back to cover.

The live-fire exercise this week at the U.S. military's Camp Fuji east maneuver area lasted only a few minutes, but was a significant demonstration to Pacific allies of American capabilities as Washington seeks to deter possible Chinese aggression against Taiwan, the self-governing democracy that Beijing claims as its own and hasn't ruled out taking by force.

Deterrence through strength, not confrontation

It was also a demonstration of how the U.S. has been shifting tactics in the Pacific, made necessary by the rapid modernization and improvement of China's military in recent years.

"The U.S. does not want China to invade Taiwan, but it would not be relying on the traditional aircraft carrier-based attack wings of the past," said Euan Graham, a senior defense analyst with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

"In Iran, with the U.S. conflict there, there were over 40 U.S. aircraft, manned and unmanned, either destroyed or damaged against a much less capable adversary, so in the case of conflict with China that vulnerability would be much greater," he said. "That's why we're seeing the U.S. emphasizing ... these smaller units."

According to the Pentagon's latest annual report to Congress, the goal is to "deny the ability of any country in the Indo-Pacific to dominate us or our allies." It said the priority was on bolstering deterrence "through strength, not confrontation."

Recent wars and proliferation of drones underscore need for mobility

The function of the HIMARS is implicit in its full name, "High Mobility Artillery Rocket System." It's a truck-mounted pod of rockets that can be hidden from drone or satellite surveillance, driven out to fire its GPS-guided missiles, then quickly back to a new hidden position using what the military commonly calls "shoot-and-scoot" tactics.

"It depends on the crew, but it can get as fast as four minutes, (even) two minutes sometimes," said Sgt. Kevin Alvarez, section chief of one of the two Fox Battery, 3rd Battalion, 12th Marines, 3rd Marine Division HIMARS involved in the Camp Fuji exercise.

Introduced about 20 years ago, the HIMARS has been used in Iraq and Afghanistan, but was largely unknown to the general public until Ukraine was able to use it with great success in its fight against Russia.

Those conflicts, especially with the proliferation of drones on the battlefield that can quickly identify static artillery positions, have underscored the value of mobility, said Lt. Col. Ryan Anness, commander of the 3rd Battalion.

"They're much quicker, much faster, and much easier to hide than, say, traditional cannon artillery, and obviously having the precision fire weapons and having the ability to hide easier is why so many countries,

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and why it's important for us, to have the HIMARS," he said.

HIMARS can now hit targets at more than 300 miles

The HIMARS can fire a variety of missiles, and initially only shorter-range munitions were provided to Ukraine until the U.S. decided to allow Kyiv to have the ATACMS, or Army Tactical Missile System, that can hit targets at about 300 kilometers (180 miles) away.

In the first days of the war against Iran after the U.S. and Israel attacked on Feb. 28, the HIMARS was used to fire both ATACMS and, for the first time in combat, the even longer-range Precision Strike Missiles, sinking "multiple" Iranian surface ships and a submarine in port, Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has said.

The so-called PrSM can reach targets at ranges greater than 500 kilometers (310 miles,) according to manufacturer Lockheed Martin.

Together with the Army's Typhon — another truck-based launching system that shoots longer-range Tomahawk missiles and others, but is less maneuverable than the HIMARS — the two systems could easily cover the Taiwan Strait between Taiwan and China, and the strategically important Luzon Strait, between the Philippines and Taiwan, if deployed on Taiwan and the Philippine and Japanese islands nearby, Graham said.

Both waterways would be critical to any sort of Chinese invasion or blockade plan.

"In advance of a conflict around Taiwan, there would likely be a large-scale outflux of U.S. assets within the envelope of China's missile capabilities," Graham said. "All that would be left is submarines, which are more survivable, and small units based on rugged survivability — mobile systems like the HIMARS."

Exercises demonstrate capabilities, and partnership

The maneuvers carried out at Camp Fuji on Wednesday used dummy rockets — concrete-filled tubes with no explosives — and were carried out under strict safety guidelines and observed by Japanese military officials, who shut down a local road during the exercise just in case one of the projectiles fell short.

Even though the precautions meant carrying out the live-fire exercise somewhat slower than the HIMARS would be used in combat, Lt. Col. Anness stressed the value of it both for his Marines and for ties with U.S. allies.

"Being able to have long-range precision-fire weapons provides deterrence here in the Pacific, and we train with our Japanese partners as much as we can to make sure we're ready," he said.

Trump immunity from IRS audit shocks experts, who warn it could undermine trust in tax system

By BERNARD CONDON and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Remember Donald Trump's response in the 2016 presidential debate, when Hillary Clinton blasted him for paying virtually no federal taxes?

"That makes me smart," Trump said.

By that logic, Trump is looking smarter than ever now.

On Tuesday, the Internal Revenue Service agreed to drop all pending probes of Trump over whether he's paid his fair share of taxes, to settle a lawsuit brought by the president over a leak of his tax returns. That could include, assuming it was ongoing, a long-standing audit into a technique Trump reportedly used to avoid paying taxes years ago that could have hit him with an estimated \$100 million bill if the IRS found wrongdoing.

Trump has repeatedly denied he did anything wrong and has blasted the IRS investigation as politically motivated, without providing proof.

Details of IRS audits are not public and the merits of each side's arguments are impossible to tell. But the way the president's case against his own government's IRS was resolved is highly unusual, experts say.

Trump sued the IRS, a federal agency within his administration, putting him in the unusual position of challenging an agency overseen by the executive branch he leads — a rare move, experts say, and possibly unprecedented. Then that agency decided, in another unusual move, to grant him immunity.

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The immunity deal

Under the settlement to resolve Trump's \$10 billion lawsuit over the 2018 leak of his tax returns to The New York Times, the U.S. is "forever barred and precluded" from examining or prosecuting Trump, his sons and the Trump Organization's current tax filings, according to a one-page document released Tuesday. That was quietly added to an original settlement establishing a \$1.8 billion fund to compensate people whom Trump thinks were improperly investigated by the government.

Tax experts say this grant of immunity is shocking in the breadth of protection it offers the president and could undermine confidence in the fairness of the tax system.

"This is an unprecedented remedy," said former IRS Commissioner Daniel Werfel, noting that Trump should be treated like every other American. "People expect the same tax rules and enforcement framework to apply to everybody."

That \$100 million bill

The IRS probe revolved around whether Trump doubled-dipped in cutting his taxes, according to a 2024 report by The New York Times and ProPublica — specifically whether he used the same losses from his Chicago skyscraper to cut them twice in future filings, a big no-no.

The report said Trump could owe more than \$100 million, including penalties, if he were to lose the audit battle.

Now the Justice Department has moved to "wipe his slate clean," said tax expert Brandon DeBot, calling that an "extraordinary action" in the message it sends to the country.

"The president and his affiliates might not pay the taxes they should," said DeBot, policy director at New York University's Tax Law Center. "This is giving the president and his affiliates completely different set of rules than everyday taxpayers."

Cutting taxes to zero

The immunity is especially useful to Trump. His company includes hundreds of separate businesses, making his tax returns complicated. He also has a reputation for aggressively cutting his taxes, which some experts find suspicious — and at least in one case deemed now illegal.

After his Atlantic City casinos collapsed under heavy debt in the mid-1990s, for instance, Trump claimed about \$1 billion in losses to cut his tax bill, even though lenders had forgiven hundreds of millions of dollars he owed. Trump argued the debt was never technically forgiven because he had exchanged equity in the bankrupt casino business for it — a tax maneuver Congress later barred as an abusive tax loophole.

Through that technique and other tax shelters and deductions, Trump was able pay just \$750 in federal taxes in 2016 and 2017, and zero in 2020, according to a congressional investigation after his first term.

How the IRS has treated other presidents

Despite hinting that he may now release his tax returns, Trump has previously refused to do so, saying he can't while undergoing an IRS audit — but there is no law barring him from doing that. In fact, presidents for decades have done so voluntarily and all have had their returns audited as a matter of IRS policy.

That policy began in the late 1970s in a post-Watergate crackdown on presidential abuses after Richard Nixon was found to have claimed dubious deductions — including a donation of his personal papers — that led to big underpayments. One year while president, he paid only hundreds of dollars.

When asked about his tax maneuvers, Nixon famously retorted, "I am not a crook." He later agreed to the IRS findings, and paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in back taxes.

Court challenges

Trump's settlement with the IRS refers only to existing audits, not future examinations, so the president and his family are not off the hook for any alleged abuses in future tax returns.

Parts of the settlement are being challenged in court.

The compensation fund is being attacked by police officers who helped defend the U.S. Capitol from Trump's supporters on Jan. 6, 2021. They have sued to block anyone — including the rioters — from receiving payouts.

Some law experts expect the tax immunity will be challenged in court, too.

"This is the president trying to play every role in the system, acting as plaintiff, defendant, and his own judge and jury to extract extraordinary windfalls," said New York University's DeBot, adding that giving broad immunity "stretches beyond what DOJ actually has authority to do."

World shares track Wall Street gains and oil prices climb on uncertainty over the Iran war

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — World shares advanced Friday, with Tokyo's benchmark logging a record high close following modest gains on Wall Street, while oil prices rose in the absence of signs of progress toward ending the Iran war.

U.S. futures edged more than 0.3% higher.

In early European trading, Britain's FTSE 100 was up 0.4% at 10,489.09. France's CAC 40 gained 0.5% to 8,124.02, while Germany's DAX climbed 0.7% to 24,779.16.

In Asia, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 rose 2.7% to 63,339.07, besting a record high close just over a week earlier. A report showed inflation hitting a four-year low in April, at 1.4%, despite higher prices for oil and gas due to the war.

South Korea's Kospi gained 0.4% to 7,847.71.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng picked up 0.9% to 25,606.03, while the Shanghai Composite index climbed 0.9% to 4,112.90.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 gained 0.4% to 8,657.00.

Taiwan's Taix closed 2.2% higher, while India's Sensex rose 0.6%.

Oil prices remained elevated over disruptions around the Strait of Hormuz, a critical waterway for oil and gas transit, with shipping activities still well below before the Iran war began in late February. Talks between the U.S. and Iran have dragged on, adding to uncertainty.

Brent crude, the international standard, gained 2.8% to \$105.48 a barrel. It was trading around \$70 per barrel in February before the war's start. Benchmark U.S. crude climbed 2.3% higher to \$98.58 a barrel.

On Thursday, Republicans in Congress delayed into June planned votes on dismissing legislation that would compel President Donald Trump to withdraw from the war.

The House had scheduled a Thursday vote on a war powers resolution brought by Democrats that would rein in Trump's military campaign. But as it became clear that Republicans would not have the numbers to defeat the bill, GOP leaders declined to hold a vote on it.

"Markets are still searching for signs of progress in a potential deal between the US and Iran," ING commodities strategists Warren Patterson and Ewa Manthey wrote in a note on Friday. "While there are signs of optimism, uncertainty reigns."

Wall Street gained on Thursday, with the benchmark S&P 500 adding 0.2% and the Dow Jones Industrial Average up 0.6%. The technology-heavy Nasdaq composite edged up 0.1%.

Shares of Nvidia fell 1.8% despite better-than-expected quarterly results on the artificial intelligence frenzy, with some analysts believing its share price still is undervalued.

Southwest Airlines gained 2.7% and American Airlines climbed 4.9% as oil prices eased before bouncing back. Ralph Lauren surged 13.9% following stronger-than-expected quarterly results.

Easing oil prices helped alleviate pressure from the bond market as yields fell. Earlier this week, yields climbed so high they threatened to slow economies worldwide and undercut prices for stocks, bitcoin and all kinds of other investments.

In other dealings early Friday, the yield on the U.S. 10-year Treasury was at 4.56%, down from more than 4.67% earlier in the week, when higher global inflationary pressures stemming from the war fueled a surge in bond yields.

The U.S. dollar rose to 159.09 Japanese yen from 158.98 yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1608, down from \$1.1619.

UK police renew call for witnesses as they broaden inquiry into former Prince Andrew

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British police appealed for witnesses Friday as they sought to broaden their investigation into potential offenses by the former Prince Andrew, including sexual misconduct.

Thames Valley Police issued the statement as it updated reporters on its investigation into allegations of misconduct in public office by the former prince, now known as Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor. The force covers the area west of London where Mountbatten-Windsor lived for many years.

Mountbatten-Windsor was arrested on Feb. 19 and held for hours as police questioned him about the allegations, linked to his friendship with the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. The arrest was an extraordinary move in a country where authorities once sought to shield the royal family from embarrassment.

Mountbatten-Windsor has repeatedly denied wrongdoing.

Police previously said they were “assessing” reports that Mountbatten-Windsor sent trade reports to Epstein in 2010 when the then-prince was Britain’s special envoy for international trade. Those reports were based on correspondence between the two men that became public when the U.S. Justice Department released millions of pages of documents from its investigation into Epstein.

But detectives renewed their appeal for witnesses amid concern that the public believes they are only investigating allegations linked to the trade reports, when in fact misconduct in public office can apply to a much broader list of offenses, Britain’s Press Association reported.

“Misconduct in public office is a crime that can take different forms, making this a complex investigation,” Assistant Chief Constable Oliver Wright said. “Our team of very experienced detectives are working meticulously through a significant amount of information that has come in from the public and other sources.”

Misconduct in public office can include sharing confidential financial information, financial misconduct, willful neglect of duty, and sexual misconduct. It also covers corruption and improper interference, conflict of interest, perverting the course of justice, dishonesty or fraudulent conduct or misconduct leading to personal gain.

Police said they are looking into “a number of aspects of alleged misconduct” following the release of the U.S. documents, and they are working with the Justice Department to get additional information related to the investigation.

Thames Valley Police also issued an update on its inquiry into allegations that a woman was taken to a location in Windsor for sexual purposes in 2010.

“Should she wish to report this to police it will be taken seriously and handled with care, sensitivity and respect for her privacy,” police said in a statement.

Florida attorney Brad Edwards told the BBC in January that he represented a woman who said that Epstein sent her to England in 2010 to have a sexual encounter with Mountbatten-Windsor at his home in Windsor.

King Charles III stripped his younger brother of his royal titles late last year as he sought to distance the royal family from the fallout from the Epstein scandal. Those files showed how the wealthy financier used an international web of rich, powerful friends to gain influence and sexually exploit young women and girls.

The fallout from the document release has been strongly felt in the U.K., where the scandal has raised questions about the way power is wielded by the upper echelon of society such as the aristocracy, senior politicians and influential business owners.

Nine police forces in the U.K. have said they are investigating potential wrongdoing related to Epstein.

Britain’s former ambassador to the U.S. Peter Mandelson was fired last year after documents revealed that he had a longer and deeper relationship with Epstein than he previously acknowledged.

Rubio embarks on another mission to ease tensions with allies during NATO meeting

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Marco Rubio is on his latest mission to assuage nervous U.S. allies in Europe about the Trump administration's intentions with NATO or at least put a friendlier face on whipsawing changes and uncertainty about American troop reductions.

Rubio will attend a NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Sweden on Friday — the same day senior Pentagon officials are expected to brief the 32-nation alliance on plans for the U.S. military's commitment to European defense at the alliance's headquarters in Brussels.

The meeting of diplomats, which precedes a NATO leaders' summit in Turkey in July, comes amid great uncertainty over how the war in Iran will play out and whether stalled U.S. efforts to broker an end to the Russia-Ukraine conflict will resume. Resentment also still simmers on the continent over President Donald Trump's criticism of allies and his interest in taking over Greenland, a territory of NATO ally Denmark.

Rubio has often been called on to offer a calmer, less antagonistic presence from the Trump administration at meetings like these. He has been dispatched on several such missions this year, including the Munich Security Conference in February and, more recently, to Italy, where he met with Italian officials and Pope Leo XIV after Trump criticized the American pontiff for his stances on crime and the Iran war.

Lack of clarity about US troop drawdowns in Europe

On his departure to the meeting in Helsingborg, Sweden, Rubio declined to discuss any further changes to the American military presence in Europe, including a possible reduction in the number of troops that the U.S. will commit under the NATO Force Model, which is a contingency plan for European defense in the event of serious security concerns.

The Trump administration had decided to cancel the deployment of thousands of U.S. troops to Poland and Germany, but then the president posted on social media Thursday that "the United States will be sending an additional 5,000 Troops to Poland."

It was not clear whether that meant the brigade that had been stopped from going to Poland would be back on its way, whether additional troops beyond that rotational deployment could be added, or whether there would still be a drawdown of U.S. troops in Europe, but from a different country. The Pentagon referred requests for comment to the White House, which did not immediately respond to messages seeking clarity.

Earlier, Rubio did repeat that Trump and others in the administration, including him, are "very disappointed" in NATO, especially in its response to the Iran war.

"I don't think anyone is shocked to know that the United States, and the president in particular, is very disappointed at NATO right now," he told reporters in Miami before boarding his plane.

Rubio reiterates criticism of NATO over the Iran war

Rubio said he was a "strong supporter" of the transatlantic military alliance and called it important. But he reiterated complaints that some NATO allies, notably Spain, had refused to allow access to U.S. bases for the Iran conflict and others had been reluctant, if not resistant, to join a coalition to reopen and protect the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial oil shipping route that Iran largely has closed.

"I know why NATO is good for Europe, but why is NATO good for America?" Rubio asked rhetorically, answering his own question by referring to bases that allow the U.S. and others to project power globally. "So, when that is the key rationale for why you're in NATO, and then you have countries like Spain denying us the use of these bases, well, then, why are you in NATO?"

Rubio noted that nearly all NATO allies agree that Iran should not be allowed to develop nuclear weapons, but few, if any, stepped up when Trump said he would take action to prevent it.

"He's not asking them to commit troops. He's not asking them to send their fighter jets in. But they refuse to do anything, and so I think the president looks at that and says, 'Hold on a second,'" Rubio said. "I think we were very upset about that. The president has made that very clear."

NATO officials have downplayed the changes to U.S. troop levels in Europe, saying they have been long

planned and do not come as a surprise.

Yet the announcements have blindsided some allies and came despite U.S. promises to coordinate military moves to avoid creating security gaps. Similarly, Trump's apparent change on Poland came as another surprise.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said Wednesday that U.S. allies have known for a year that the Trump administration would be withdrawing some troops from Europe, and it expects "rightly, for Europe and Canada to take a bigger responsibility for the conventional defense of NATO and particularly, of course, the European part of NATO."

Rutte said the U.S. "will stay involved" but over time could pivot resources elsewhere in the world. U.S. Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich, commander of both American and NATO forces in Europe, said this week that security in Europe would not be compromised but warned that allies should expect more drawdowns in the coming years.

The Trump administration has warned that Europe would have to look after its own security, including Ukraine's, in the future.

2-time NASCAR champ Kyle Busch dies at 41 after being hospitalized with a 'severe illness'

By STEVE REED AP Sports Writer

CONCORD, N.C. (AP) — Kyle Busch, a two-time Cup Series champion who won more races than anyone across NASCAR's three national series, has died. He was 41.

The Busch Family, Richard Childress Racing and NASCAR issued a joint statement Thursday saying Busch died after being hospitalized. No cause of death was given.

Busch's family said earlier Thursday that he was hospitalized with a "severe illness," three days before he was to compete in the Coca-Cola 600 at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

Busch was testing in the Chevrolet racing simulator in Concord on Wednesday when he became unresponsive and was transported to a hospital in Charlotte, several people familiar with the situation told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because details have not been disclosed by Busch's team or family.

Busch was the younger brother of Kurt Busch, a NASCAR Hall of Famer. He's survived by wife Samantha and children Brexton and Lennix.

"Our entire NASCAR family is heartbroken by the loss of Kyle Busch," the statement said. "A future Hall of Famer, Kyle was a rare talent, one who comes along once in a generation. He was fierce, he was passionate, he was immensely skilled and he cared deeply about the sport and fans."

The statement went on to say that "throughout a career that spanned more than two decades, Kyle set records in national series wins, won championships at NASCAR's highest level and fostered the next generation of drivers as an owner in the Truck Series. His sharp wit and competitive spirit sparked a deep emotional connection with race fans of every age, creating the proud and loyal 'Rowdy Nation.'"

The news comes 11 days after Busch radioed into his crew near the end of a Cup Series race at Watkins Glen asking a doctor to give him a "shot" when he finished the race. According to the TV broadcast, Busch had been struggling with a sinus cold exacerbated by the intense G-forces and elevation changes at the New York road course.

Busch finished the race in eighth place.

Busch competed at Dover last weekend and won the Trucks Series race for Spire Motorsports. He then finished 17th at the NASCAR All-Star race, his final race.

"Absolutely cannot comprehend this news," NASCAR driver and former teammate Denny Hamlin posted on social media. "We just need to think of his family during this time. We love you KB."

Added driver Brad Keselowski on social media: "Absolute shock. Very hard to process."

A polarizing figure known as "Rowdy" and "Wild Thing" for his post-race fights, regular feuds with other drivers and sometimes outlandish behavior, the multi-talented Busch stormed on the Cup Series scene in

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2005 by winning Rookie of the Year.

He went on to win championships in 2015 and 2019 for Joe Gibbs Racing.

"His impact on our organization and on the sport of NASCAR will never be forgotten," the team said in a statement.

From Las Vegas, Busch experienced unrivaled success across NASCAR's three national series winning a combined 234 Cup, O'Reilly Auto Parts and Trucks Series races. He had 63 Cup victories along with 102 O'Reilly Auto Parts wins and 69 Trucks victories — both records.

Busch was fired early in his career by Hendrick Motorsports to make room on the team for Dale Earnhardt Jr.

"Kyle and I had a really challenging existence for many years," Earnhardt said in a statement. "But we luckily took the time to figure out our differences and that was something he instigated with a conversation in his bus around how we each managed our racing teams. I was super eager for us to get on better terms. But it was he who made the effort for that to be possible."

Busch moved on to Joe Gibbs Racing where he experienced the vast majority of career success. But Busch was let go when there was no sponsor after the 2022 season and joined Richard Childress Racing, where he had struggled to win races.

His lack of success led to a recent spat with former JGR teammate Hamlin, who appeared to criticize Busch on the "Actions Detrimental" podcast. Hamlin said, "If you're expecting Kyle Busch to just go back to victory lane on a regular basis, you are kidding yourselves."

While Hamlin later said he meant no harm by the comments and was just making an observation, Busch took exception and said he could make Hamlin's life "hell" on the racetrack.

While several laps down at last month's race at Kansas, Busch raced Hamlin hard instead of allowing the race leader to pass. That decision held up Hamlin during a crucial stage of the race and Tyler Reddick won the race after Hamlin faded late.

After winning the Trucks race at Dover last week and showing an uptick in speed, Busch seemed to make a veiled jab at Hamlin, saying "I guess I just remembered how to drive."

After earning his win at Dover, Busch was asked how many races he wanted to win in his career.

"You take whatever you can get, man," Busch said. "You never know when the last one is going to be, so cherish them all — trust me."

Busch's unexpected death is just the latest tragedy to hit NASCAR. Last December, former driver Greg Biffle, his wife and two children and three others died in a plane crash in Statesville, North Carolina.

The announcement of Busch's death came after teams had already left Gasoline Alley on media day at the Indianapolis 500. As word spread on Main Street in Speedway, Indiana, just a short walk from Indianapolis Motor Speedway, race fans -- IndyCar and NASCAR -- were saddened.

NASCAR officials confirmed to The Associated Press the Coca-Cola 600 will go on as planned Sunday.

Drivers are expected to begin making their way to Charlotte Motorsports Speedway in Concord on Friday with practice and qualifying beginning on Saturday. Earlier in the day, RCR had announced that Austin Hill would replace Busch in the No. 8 Chevrolet Camaro ZL1.

Sudan's war has left thousands missing. Many are buried in unmarked graves

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) — It was a classic husband's phone call. He was done for the day and would stop at the market before coming home. But he was returning from war, not work.

Fahmy al-Fateh never made it home. His wife, Azaher Abdallah, started calling friends and family, then turned to his colleagues in Sudan's army. Her husband was last seen leaving a military base in the capital, Khartoum, on a motorcycle. That was over a year ago.

Now the couple's 3-year-old son shouts at every passing motorcycle, thinking it's his father, Abdallah said.

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"He was the most precious thing in my life," she said, sobbing and burying her face in her hands. "I would feel more at peace if I knew something. It's better than not knowing what happened to him, whether he's alive or dead."

Her husband is one of more than 8,000 people who have gone missing during Sudan's three years of war, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross. The conflict has torn families apart. People have been separated while fleeing, or gone missing during fighting. Others are quietly detained, leaving friends and relatives in agony trying to learn their fate.

Many of those missing in Khartoum state are thought to be in unmarked graves where tens of thousands of bodies have been found since Sudan's army retook the capital last year from paramilitary fighters.

It was often too dangerous to bury bodies in cemeteries while fighting raged. People dug graves wherever they could.

Driving through the city last month, Associated Press reporters saw soccer fields and cemeteries overflowing with the dead. Mounds of dirt beside a defunct gas station had makeshift signs with names and dates, but many were unmarked.

A member of the military media accompanied the AP during the visit, including during interviews. The AP retains full editorial control of its content.

The ICRC said it had resolved over 1,000 cases of the missing but would not say how many were alive or dead.

'I haven't lost faith in finding you'

Abdallah was sleeping when her husband left the house before sunrise last January. Al-Fateh, a 38-year-old farmer and merchant, had joined Sudan's army when the war began. That day, he was helping to retake Khartoum from the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.

Since then, the 30-year-old Abdallah has combed the city, visited hospital morgues and asked the army for help. Her husband's unit said they'd try to find him. If she didn't hear anything, they said, consider him missing.

At home on the outskirts of Khartoum, she scrolls through photos of him in uniform, still believing that one day he'll return.

"That is what my heart tells me," she said.

Psychologists say the uncertainty surrounding missing loved ones can cause years of profound distress.

"Families of missing persons experience additional layers of vulnerabilities due to hostilities, displacement and ambiguous loss," said Nathalie Nyamukeba, a psychologist with the ICRC.

Some families in Sudan say the only way to deal with it is to keep searching.

Sulafa Mustafa's son went missing two years ago. A shy boy, 18-year-old Suleiman Abdalsid went to a friend's house near Khartoum and never came home.

His mother tirelessly traveled through the streets, even as the sounds of shelling echoed, going door to door. She has visited hospitals and prisons, and showed countless strangers his photo.

She has even rented a microphone to shout his name.

"I haven't lost faith in finding you," she said, and covered her face with her hands.

'What happened had left a mark on my heart'

Finding people alive or dead is challenging in Sudan, especially as the war continues. Labs that could have been used for DNA testing have been destroyed, and few forensic specialists remain.

In Khartoum state, authorities have moved nearly 30,000 bodies — of some 50,000 — that had been hastily buried near houses, in sports fields or by the road when the RSF controlled the area. Their work continues.

About 10% of bodies that have been reburied are unidentified.

Hisham Zienalabdien, director general of the forensic medicine department for Khartoum state, said they are saving DNA from unidentified bodies in hopes of one day being able to match it with relatives.

For families who have found loved ones but can't properly bury them, there is a different kind of pain.

Abubakar Alswai waited more than a year to move his 73-year-old brother, Mohamed, from where he had been buried in front of his house into a public cemetery.

The RSF had killed Mohamed but waited three weeks before granting a neighbor permission to bury his bullet-hit and decomposing remains. In Islamic tradition, largely followed in Sudan, funerals take place as quickly as possible, ideally within 24 hours.

Alswai wiped tears from his cheeks as he watched grave diggers remove his brother's remains. At least now Mohamed will get the dignified burial he deserves, he said, and his family will have some peace.

"What happened had left a mark on my heart," he said.

Trump says he's sending 5,000 more troops to Poland, stirring confusion about US presence in Europe

By BEN FINLEY and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Thursday said the U.S. will send an additional 5,000 troops to Poland, stirring confusion following weeks of changing statements from Trump and his administration about reducing — not increasing — the American military footprint in Europe.

The Trump administration has said it was reducing levels in Europe by about 5,000 troops, and U.S. officials confirmed about 4,000 service members were no longer deploying to Poland. Trump's social media announcement raises more uncertainty for European allies that have been blindsided by the changes as the administration has complained about NATO members not shouldering enough of the burden of their own defense and failing to do more to support the Iran war.

"Based on the successful Election of the now President of Poland, Karol Nawrocki, who I was proud to Endorse, and our relationship with him, I am pleased to announce that the United States will be sending an additional 5,000 Troops to Poland," Trump said on Truth Social.

Trump and the Pentagon have said in recent weeks that they were drawing down at least 5,000 troops in Germany after Chancellor Friedrich Merz said the U.S. was being "humiliated" by the Iranian leadership and criticized what he called a lack of strategy in the war.

Trump then told reporters at the beginning of the month that the U.S. would be "cutting a lot further than 5,000."

As of last week, some 4,000 troops from the Army's 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division were no longer en route to Poland. The Associated Press reported that the canceled deployment was part of an effort to comply with Trump's order to reduce the number of troops in Europe. A deployment to Germany of personnel trained to fire long-range missiles also was halted.

Democratic and Republican lawmakers alike criticized the reductions as sending the wrong signal both to allies and Russian President Vladimir Putin during the 4-year-old war in Ukraine.

Republican Rep. Don Bacon of Nebraska said during a congressional hearing that he spoke with Polish officials and they were "blindsided." He called the decision "reprehensible" and said it was "an embarrassment to our country what we just did to Poland."

Chief Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said Tuesday that it was "a temporary delay" of the deployment of U.S. forces to Poland, which he called a "model U.S. ally." He said it was a result of the U.S. reducing the number of brigade combat teams assigned to Europe from four to three and indicated the Pentagon still needed to decide which troops to station where.

It was not clear whether that meant the brigade would resume its deployment to Poland, if additional troops on top of that rotational deployment could be added, or whether there would still be a drawdown of U.S. troops in Europe but from a different country. The Pentagon referred requests for comment to the White House, which did not immediately respond to messages seeking clarity.

U.S. defense officials expressed confusion Friday about Trump's new announcement. "We just spent the better part of two weeks reacting to the first announcement, We don't know what this means either," said one official. Both spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military matters.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Defense Undersecretary Elbridge Colby both spoke with their Polish counterparts this week. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk had said Wednesday that he was happy to

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hear "Washington's declaration that Poland will be treated as it deserves."

As of Tuesday, U.S. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich, commander of both American and NATO forces in Europe, told reporters in Brussels that "it will be 5,000 troops coming out of Europe."

Trump's announcement came as Secretary of State Marco Rubio was on his way to Sweden to meet with his NATO counterparts, who have been questioning the Trump administration's policies on reduced U.S. troop levels in Europe.

"There seems to be no process to deliberating policies like troop withdrawals and deployments at the top," said Ian Kelly, a retired career diplomat who served as U.S. ambassador to Georgia during the Obama and first Trump administrations and now teaches international relations at Northwestern University in Illinois.

Kelly said Rubio may have a tough time in explaining Trump's wild swings to Europeans who are craving certainty and consistency even if they might disagree.

"These are not well thought out decisions," Kelly said. "These are impulsive decisions based on Trump's whims or what his advisors think are Trump's whims."

Rubio doubtful of diplomacy with Cuba as Trump raises new threat of military action

By MATTHEW LEE and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump and America's top diplomat on Thursday again raised the specter of U.S. military intervention in Cuba, a renewed threat that takes on greater weight a day after the administration announced criminal charges against the island's former leader, Raúl Castro.

Trump said previous U.S. presidents have considered intervening in Cuba for decades but that "it looks like I'll be the one that does it."

"Other presidents have looked at this for 50, 60 years, doing something," Trump told reporters when asked about Cuba during an environmental event in the Oval Office. "And, it looks like I'll be the one that does it. So, I would be happy to do it."

Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters separately that Cuba has been a national security threat for years because of its ties to U.S. adversaries and that Trump is intent on addressing it.

Rubio says the US prefers a negotiated agreement with Cuba

Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants who has long taken a hard-line against Cuba's socialist leadership, said the Trump administration wants to resolve differences with Cuba peacefully but is doubtful the U.S. can reach a diplomatic resolution with the island's current government.

Trump's "preference is always a negotiated agreement that's peaceful. That's always our preference. That remains our preference with Cuba," Rubio said in Miami before boarding a plane to attend a NATO meeting in Sweden and then visit India.

"I'm just being honest with you, you know, the likelihood of that happening, given who we're dealing with right now, is not high," he said.

Top Trump aides — including Rubio, CIA chief John Ratcliffe and other senior national security officials — have met with Cuban officials in recent months to explore possible improvements in relations. But the U.S. side has come away unimpressed from those talks, leading to even more sanctions imposed on the Cuban government in the past week.

Over the years, Cuba has gotten used to "buying time and waiting us out," Rubio said. "They're not going to be able to wait us out or buy time. We're very serious, we're very focused."

When asked whether the U.S. would use force in Cuba to change the island's political system, Rubio repeated that a diplomatic settlement was preferred but noted that "the president always has the option to do whatever it takes to support and protect the national interest."

He pushed back on a reporter's suggestion that it sounded like "nation-building," insisting it was about addressing a national security risk.

New threats follow US announcement of charges against Castro

Federal prosecutors on Wednesday unveiled an indictment that accuses Castro of ordering the shutdown

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in 1996 of civilian planes flown by Miami-based exiles. The charges, which were secretly filed by a grand jury in April, included murder and destruction of an airplane.

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel has condemned the indictment as a political stunt that sought only to "justify the folly of a military aggression against Cuba."

The Castro indictment has led many to believe that the Trump administration is following the same playbook it did when it captured then-Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in a military operation in early January. Maduro, who has been imprisoned in the U.S. since his seizure, faces federal drug trafficking charges and has pleaded not guilty.

The U.S. military touted the arrival of the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier and accompanying ships to the Caribbean Sea on the same day the charges against Castro were announced. U.S. Southern Command said the ships are taking part in maritime exercises with partners in Latin America that began in March.

Rubio would not discuss how the U.S. might move to implement the indictment against Castro, who turns 95 next month.

Trump has been threatening military action in Cuba ever since ousting Maduro and then ordering an energy blockade that choked off fuel shipments to Cuba. That has led to severe blackouts, food shortages and an economic collapse across the island.

The Trump administration this month also has slapped new sanctions on Cuba, the largest of which is against Grupo de Administración Empresarial S.A., a business conglomerate operated by the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces.

On Thursday, Rubio announced that the sister of the GAESA's executive president, who was living in the U.S., has had her green card revoked and been arrested, and is now in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody.

"Past Administrations have permitted the families of Cuban military elites, Iranian terrorists and other reprehensible organizations to enjoy lavish lifestyles in our country funded by stolen blood-money, while the people they repress at home suffer in increasingly dire circumstances. No longer," Rubio said in a statement.

Trump has ratcheted up talk of regime change in Cuba after pledging to conduct a "friendly takeover" of the country if its leadership did not open its economy to American investment and kick out U.S. adversaries.

On Thursday, Rubio said Cuba poses a serious national security threat to America because of its security and intelligence ties with China and Russia and friendly relations with U.S. foes in Latin America.

China opposes U.S. sanctions and pressure on Cuba, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Guo Jiakun, said Thursday.

"China firmly supports Cuba in safeguarding its national sovereignty and national dignity and opposes external interference," Guo added.

Residents burn an Ebola treatment center in Congo as anger grows over the outbreak

By JUSTIN KABUMBA, MONIKA PRONCZUK and GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

BUNIA, Congo (AP) — People set fire to an Ebola treatment center in a town at the heart of the outbreak in eastern Congo on Thursday after being stopped from retrieving the body of a local man, a witness and a senior police officer said, as fear and anger grow over a health crisis that doctors are struggling to contain.

The arson attack in Rwampara reflects the challenges of health workers trying to curb a rare Ebola virus by using stringent measures that might clash with local customs, such as burial rites. The disease has been spreading for weeks in a region lacking in adequate health facilities and where many people are on the move to escape armed conflicts.

The bodies of those who die from Ebola can be highly contagious and lead to further spread when people prepare bodies for burial and gather for funerals. The dangerous work of burying suspected victims is being managed wherever possible by authorities, which can be met by protests from victims' families and friends.

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Fear and anger grow

The center in Rwampara was burned by local youths who became angry while trying to retrieve the body of a friend who had apparently died of Ebola, according to a witness who spoke to The Associated Press by telephone.

"The police intervened to try to calm the situation, but unfortunately they were unsuccessful," said Alexis Burata, a local student who said he was in the area. "The young people ended up setting fire to the center. That's the situation."

An AP journalist saw people break into the center and set fire to objects inside and also to what appeared to be the body of at least one suspected Ebola victim that was being stored there. Aid workers fled the treatment center in vehicles.

Deputy Senior Commissioner Jean Claude Mukendi, head of the public security department in Ituri Province, said the youths had not understood the protocols for burying a suspected Ebola victim.

"His family, friends, and other young people wanted to take his body home for a funeral even though the instructions from the authorities during this Ebola virus outbreak are clear," Mukendi said. "All bodies must be buried according to the regulations."

Hama Amadou, field coordinator for the humanitarian organization ALIMA, which had teams working at the center, said later that calm had been restored and that aid teams were continuing their work at the center.

The flash of anger underlined the complications faced by both Congolese authorities and an array of aid agencies trying to stem an outbreak that the World Health Organization has declared a public health emergency of international concern.

The outbreak is bigger than official figures show, WHO says

There were 160 suspected deaths and 671 suspected cases in Congo's two provinces, Congolese authorities said on Thursday. Earlier in the week, the U.N. said there were two cases including one death in neighboring Uganda.

But the WHO has said the outbreak is almost certainly much larger and has also expressed concern over the speed of the spread.

"We are still in the phase where we are intensifying the investigation, searching for cases," said Jean Kaseya, Director-General of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "I expect the number of cases to increase as surveillance becomes more and more rigorous."

The risk of the outbreak spreading globally is low, the WHO has said, but high regionally with the Ituri Province at the center of the outbreak bordering Uganda and South Sudan.

Early detection of the virus is key in saving lives, but the region's already weak health infrastructure and surveillance capacity has been further weakened by international aid cuts, experts say. There are over 920,000 internally displaced people in Ituri Province, according to the U.N.

Armed conflict in the region further complicates efforts to handle the crisis. Local leaders said an attack by militants linked to the Islamic State group killed at least 17 people on Tuesday in Alima, a village in Ituri.

Health workers and aid groups have said they are in dire need of more supplies and staff to respond. Also, there is no available vaccine or medicine for the Bundibugyo strain responsible for the outbreak.

An expert said this week it would be at least six to nine months before one would be available.

"The priority now is to act quickly and work closely with communities, as the coming days are critical," said Ariel Kestens, the head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies delegation in Congo.

Ebola is highly contagious and spreads in people through contact with bodily fluids such as vomit, blood, feces or semen. Symptoms include fever, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle pain and at times internal and external bleeding.

It has spread to a new province

On Thursday, the M23 rebel group that controls parts of eastern Congo reported that a person had died of the disease near the city of Bukavu, some 500 kilometers (310 miles) south of the outbreak's epicenter

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in Ituri Province.

It was the first case confirmed in South Kivu Province, and another case was reported there later in the day. Previously, cases had been reported only in Ituri and North Kivu provinces and in neighboring Uganda.

The virus spread undetected for weeks following the first known death in late April as Congolese health authorities tested for a different Ebola virus more commonly responsible for outbreaks in the country. Health officials have not yet found "patient zero," according to the WHO.

The scale of the outbreak so far suggests it "started probably a couple of months ago," said Anaïs Legand, a viral hemorrhagic fevers expert at the WHO.

The outbreak has had international repercussions

India and the African Union said Thursday that the India-Africa Forum Summit, scheduled to be held next week in New Delhi, had been postponed due to the "evolving health situation in parts of Africa."

On Wednesday, Congo's soccer team canceled a three-day World Cup preparation training camp and a planned farewell to fans in the capital Kinshasa because of the Ebola outbreak.

The U.S. government has placed restrictions on any travelers who have visited Congo, Uganda or South Sudan in the previous 21 days, barring foreign visitors among them from entering the U.S. and requiring U.S. citizens and permanent residents to be diverted to Washington Dulles International Airport for screening.

Atlantic hurricane season forecast to be milder than normal thanks to El Nino

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

A developing El Nino that is forecast to get quite strong will likely dampen the upcoming Atlantic hurricane season, but it won't make the potentially deadly storms disappear, federal and outside meteorologists predict.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on Thursday issued its seasonal outlook for the Atlantic, giving a 55% chance of a below-average season. The agency forecasts eight to 14 named storms, with three to six of them becoming strong enough to hit hurricane status and one to three of those intensifying to major hurricanes.

A normal hurricane season has 14 named storms, seven of them becoming hurricanes and three of them reaching major hurricane level, which is more than 110 mph (177 kph).

Eighteen other groups, private and academic, have also forecast what they think the season will be like and most of them also call for a below average summer and fall. Those other forecasts average a dozen named storms, only five becoming hurricanes and two of those being major ones. Those forecasts also call for the Accumulated Cyclone Energy index, which takes into account strength and duration of storms, to be 80% of normal.

Colorado State University, which pioneered the science of hurricane seasonal forecasting in 1984, is predicting the lowest overall activity since 2015, which was the strongest El Nino in the last 75 years. And that forecast is likely to be revised to even lower numbers in June, said Colorado State's hurricane expert Phil Klotzbach.

This is after nine of the last 10 Atlantic hurricane seasons have been above normal or even hyperactive, Klotzbach said. Last year started slow, but then had a burst, producing a near-record total of three Category 5 hurricanes, including Melissa which devastated Jamaica and Cuba, said Suzana Camargo, a climate scientist and tropical weather expert at Columbia University.

Inflation-adjusted damage across the globe from tropical cyclones has increased from an average of \$11.4 billion a year in the 1980s to \$109.7 billion a year over the past 10 years, with three-quarters of the damage done in the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean, according to insurance giant Munich Re.

Hurricanes, typhoons and cyclones are the same weather event, with the different names being used in different parts of the world.

"We should expect a less active year than certainly what we've seen recently, and perhaps significantly so below average," said University at Albany atmospheric scientist Kristen Corbosiero. "But again, it only

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takes one to cause real devastation and destruction in the mainland U.S. or even in Hawaii."

El Nino decapitates Atlantic storms

It's mostly because of "the elephant in the room" which is an El Nino, Camargo said.

An El Nino is the natural and cyclic warming of parts of the central Pacific that warps weather patterns around the globe, especially during winter. Scientists for decades have found a correlation between an El Nino and below average Atlantic hurricane activity and stronger and more storms in the central and eastern Pacific. This year many forecasts are calling for a strong, superstrong or even record setting intense El Nino. During a La Nina, the cool flip side of El Nino, the Atlantic is generally busier with stronger storms.

There's a 98% chance that there will be an El Nino this summer and an 80% chance it will be moderate or strong, NOAA Administrator Neil Jacobs said Thursday.

Atlantic hurricane seasons when an El Nino reaches strong or very strong status have two-thirds the named storms and half the hurricanes of the 1991-2020 average, according to an Associated Press analysis of storm and El Nino statistics.

El Ninos fight Atlantic storm formation in several ways, especially with cross winds about 1 mile to 7 miles (1.5 to 11 kilometers) above the surface "which can basically blow apart the thunderstorms that make up" a hurricane, Corbosiero said.

"A stronger than normal wind shear tends to tilt storms as they try to develop," said University at Albany atmospheric scientist Brian Tang. "It pushes dry air into storms. And prevents storms from developing in the first place. And if they do develop, it also prevents them from intensifying."

El Nino reduces the number and intensity of weaker storms, but once a storm hits hurricane status with 74 mph winds, "they can be kind of like a self-feeding entity" and are less prone to being dampened by El Nino's wind shear, said Matthew Rosencrans, lead hurricane season forecaster with NOAA's National Weather Service.

Forecasts for peak hurricane season show strong wind shear from the west in the main development region for the largest and long-lasting hurricanes that come off of Africa and develop as they head west over the Atlantic, Klotzbach said. Fewer of these type storms happen during El Ninos.

In the 15 strongest El Nino years since 1950, 37 named storms, 11 hurricanes and three major hurricanes made landfall on the continental United States, but in the 15 coldest La Nina years 61 named storms, 31 hurricanes and 10 major hurricanes hit America's Gulf and Atlantic coasts, according to Klotzbach. He said El Nino shrinks the number of hits on the Atlantic coast, but has less of an influence on the number of Gulf coast landfalls.

In addition to El Nino, dry conditions in Africa and water in the Atlantic being only slightly warmer than normal contribute to the forecast of a weaker season, Rosencrans said.

Opposite effect in the Pacific

El Ninos and La Ninas have the opposite effect on storms in the central and eastern Pacific as they do in the Atlantic, so experts are expecting a busier season in those regions. Jacobs said there's a 70% chance that the eastern Pacific will have an above normal season.

NOAA forecasts 15 to 22 named storms in the Pacific with nine to 14 becoming hurricanes and five to nine of those being major hurricanes. Average is 15 named storms, eight hurricanes and four major hurricanes. Rosencrans said the main area of central Pacific storm development shifts closer to Hawaii during El Ninos.

Eastern Pacific storms near Baja Mexico tend to "go west, affect the fishies and little else," Corbosiero said. But at times they can turn east or north and cause massive damage as in Hurricane Otis in 2023 that smashed into Mexico, or 1992's Hurricane Lester, which caused heavy rains in the U.S. Southwest, she said.

Hawaii is a small island chain in a big ocean that can be threatened. In 1992, an El Nino year when there were few Atlantic storms (though Miami was devastated by Hurricane Andrew), Hawaii was hit by Hurricane Iniki.

Further west toward Asia and India, "your odds of any storm forming becoming a super typhoon go up significantly in El Nino," Klotzbach said.

The eastern Pacific hurricane season started May 15 and the Atlantic season begins June 1 and both end November 30.

El Ninos can also make hurricane season longer, said John Bravender, a weather service meteorologist in Honolulu. "With the warmer waters across the area, not only can hurricanes maintain their strength at higher latitudes, but also longer through the year," he said.

The state is preparing for hurricanes just as parts of Hawaii are still reeling from recent back-to-back storms that caused catastrophic flooding, Gov. Josh Green said.

Facing intense internal pressure, DNC releases postelection autopsy that criticizes Kamala Harris

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Politics Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Kamala Harris "wrote off rural America" during the 2024 presidential campaign and failed to attack Donald Trump with sufficient "negative firepower," according to a long-awaited post-election autopsy released Thursday by the Democratic National Committee.

But the document's key findings, the focus of much mystery over the last year, were almost an afterthought among Democratic officials who expressed deep frustration with DNC chair Ken Martin's handling of the situation and the direction of the party's political machine.

Martin shared the 192-page report only after facing intense internal pressure from Democratic operatives. He originally promised to release the autopsy even before taking over the committee last year, only to keep it under wraps because he worried it would interfere with Democrats' focus on the November midterms.

"I didn't want to create a distraction," Martin wrote on Substack. "Ironically, in doing so, I ended up creating an even bigger distraction. And for that, I sincerely apologize."

He said the report was withheld because it "was not ready for primetime," and the DNC covered the document with annotations and disclaimers saying it was incomplete and unsubstantiated.

The report's release did nothing to temper irritation at Martin, and Democratic insiders were exasperated as they spent the day talking about a two-year-old election instead of focusing on Trump's unpopular war in Iran, surging prices or the backlash against the president's White House ballroom.

Martin faces growing outrage

Indeed, the initial reaction to the report was a mix of bafflement and anger over Martin's handling of the situation.

Democratic strategist Dan Pfeiffer, formerly a senior adviser to President Barack Obama, said Martin "must go."

"It's hard to imagine anyone handling anything worse than Ken Martin handled the DNC autopsy," he wrote on social media. "It was a disaster of his own making, and it's sufficient evidence that he is not the right person to lead the DNC at this time."

Although the autopsy criticizes Democrats' focus on "identity politics," it sidesteps some of the most controversial elements of the 2024 campaign. The report does not address former President Joe Biden's decision to seek reelection, the rushed selection of Harris to replace him after he dropped out or the party's acrimonious divide over the war in Gaza.

"I am not proud of this product; it does not meet my standards, and it won't meet your standards," Martin said. "I don't endorse what's in this report, or what's left out of it. I could not in good faith put the DNC's stamp of approval on it. But transparency is paramount."

During a conversation with staff Thursday, Martin announced that the report's primary author, consultant Paul Rivera, was no longer working with the DNC, according to a person on the call not authorized to speak publicly about the private discussion.

A spokesperson for Harris did not respond to a request for comment.

Report says Democrats don't 'listen to all voters'

The postelection report, which was first released by CNN, calls for "a renewed focus on the voters of Middle America and the South, who have come to believe they are not included in the Democratic vision of a stronger and more dynamic America for everyone."

"Millions of Americans are suffering from poor access to healthcare, manufacturing and job losses, and

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a failing infrastructure, yet continue to be persuaded to vote against their best interests because they do not see themselves reflected in the America of the Democratic Party," the report says.

The autopsy points to a reduction in support and training for Democratic state parties, voter registration shifts and "a persistent inability or unwillingness to listen to all voters."

Thursday's release comes as Martin confronts a crisis of confidence among party officials who are increasingly concerned about the health of their political machine barely a year into his term. Some Democratic operatives have had informal discussions about recruiting a new chair, even though most believe that Martin's job isn't in serious jeopardy ahead of the midterm elections.

Few were satisfied with how Martin navigated the report's release.

"The execution, the rollout and the coverup are indicative of how Ken Martin is fundamentally not up to the task," said Amanda Litman, who leads the Democratic-allied organization Run For Something. "He will be incapable of rebuilding the trust necessary to facilitate a Democratic primary in 2027-2028."

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., said the Gaza omission was "notable." She also declined to back Martin when asked by The Associated Press whether she supports his leadership.

"I'm glad that there's something out," she said. "It's, of course, taken a very long time."

Were Democrats too nice?

The report found that Harris and her allies failed to focus enough on Trump's negatives, especially his felony convictions. This was part of a broader criticism that Democrats' messaging is too focused on reason and winning arguments, "even in cycles when the electorate is defined by rage."

"There was a decision in the 2024 Democratic leadership not to engage in negative advertising at the scale required," the report states. "The Trump campaign and supportive Super PACs went full throttle against Vice President Harris, but there was not sufficient or similar negative firepower directed at Trump by Democrats."

The report continues: "It was essential to prosecute a more effective case as to why Trump should have been disqualified from ever again taking office. The grounds were there, but the messaging did not make the case."

The DNC appeared to reject these conclusions, adding annotations like "no sourcing or evidence provided."

Trump's attack on Harris' transgender policies was cited as a key contrast.

Specifically, the report suggested the Democratic nominee was "boxed" in by the Trump campaign's "very effective" ad that highlighted Harris' previous statement of support for taxpayer-funded gender-affirming surgeries for prison inmates.

Democratic pollsters believed that "if the Vice President would not change her position — and she did not — then there was nothing which would have worked as a response," the report said.

Democrats can't exclude rural voters: 'The math doesn't work'

The report criticized Harris' outreach to key segments of America while condemning the party's focus on "identity politics."

"Harris wrote off rural America, assuming urban/suburban margins would compensate. The math doesn't work," the report says. "You can't lose rural areas by overwhelming margins and make it up elsewhere when rural voters are a significant share of the electorate. If Democrats are to reclaim leadership in the Heartland or the South, candidates must perform well in rural turf. Show up, listen, and then do it again."

The report also references Democrats' underperformance with male voters of color.

"Male voters require direct engagement. The gender gap can be narrowed. Deploy male messengers, address economic concerns, and don't assume identity politics will hold male voters of color," it says.

Backlash to Trump's \$1.8B settlement fund delays GOP immigration bill

By KEVIN FREKING, MARY CLARE JALONICK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republicans abruptly left Washington on Thursday without voting on a roughly \$70 billion bill to fund immigration enforcement agencies, frustrated with the White House and at

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an impasse over whether to try to block a new \$1.776 billion settlement fund to compensate Trump allies who believe they have been politically prosecuted.

Republicans had already abandoned part of the bill that provided \$1 billion in security money for the White House complex and President Donald Trump's ballroom amid backlash from members of their own party. But the settlement announced by the Justice Department this week prompted even more questions, spurring a push to limit the taxpayer dollars that some feared could go to Trump supporters who harmed law enforcement officers in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol.

A tense meeting with acting Attorney General Todd Blanche on Thursday morning to discuss the settlement only heightened the frustration among senators. Soon after it ended, Republican leaders announced that they would not vote on the immigration enforcement measure until they returned from a Memorial Day recess the week of June 1, which was Trump's self-imposed deadline for them to pass it.

Blanche "had an appreciation for the depth of feeling" among GOP senators, Senate Majority Leader John Thune said afterward as a growing number of them spoke out against the idea.

Kentucky Sen. Mitch McConnell, the former GOP leader, called the settlement "utterly stupid, morally wrong."

"The nation's top law enforcement official is asking for a slush fund to pay people who assault cops?" McConnell said in a statement afterward.

The last-minute scramble on the bill came as Democrats have criticized Republicans for trying to fund Trump's ballroom when voters are concerned about affordability issues — and as some GOP lawmakers have grown increasingly frustrated with Trump.

Several GOP senators have spoken out against the Justice Department settlement announced this week, and many were upset by the president's Tuesday endorsement of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton in next week's primary runoff against Sen. John Cornyn.

Growing tensions with the White House derail bill

Both sides have acknowledged the tensions. Thune said Thursday that the White House should have consulted Congress before it announced the settlement, which he said made "everything way harder than it should be." Trump's endorsement of Cornyn's opponent also complicated matters, he said.

"I think it's hard to divorce anything that happens here from what's happening in the political atmosphere around us," Thune told reporters. "There is a political component to everything we do around here."

Trump unloaded on senators in a social media post Wednesday, urging Republicans to fire the Senate parliamentarian, Elizabeth MacDonough, who said over the weekend that parts of the \$1 billion White House security proposal did not qualify for the ICE and Border Patrol bill. Trump also renewed his long-standing calls for the Senate to pass the SAVE Act, a Republican bill that would require voters to prove U.S. citizenship, and to end the Senate filibuster.

Republicans need to "get smart and tough," Trump said, or "you'll all be looking for a job much sooner than you thought possible!"

While they have been loyal to Trump on most issues, Senate Republicans have resisted his repeated calls over the years to kill the filibuster, which creates a 60-vote threshold for most bills in the Senate.

Asked Thursday at the White House if he was losing control of the Senate, Trump replied: "I really don't know. I can tell you — I only do what's right."

Hanging over the growing GOP rift is Trump's surprise endorsement of Paxton. That intervention has Republican senators privately fuming that it could cost them their majority in November as they view the incumbent, Cornyn, as the stronger candidate.

Possible parameters on Trump's settlement fund

The "anti-weaponization" fund, part of a settlement that resolves Trump's lawsuit against the IRS over the leak of his tax returns, unexpectedly became one of the main complications in the bill after Democrats announced that they would force votes to block it or place restrictions on it.

Democrats have an opening because Republicans are trying to pass the immigration enforcement bill through a budget process that allows a long series of amendment votes. The Democratic amendments would block the fund outright or ban any payments to Trump supporters who harmed law enforcement

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officers on Jan. 6, 2021.

"The only way for Republicans to get out of this box is to stop backing the slush fund, stop pushing the ballroom, and as soon as we get back, join Democrats in fighting to lower Americans' costs on health care, on housing, on power, on so much else," Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said after senators left town.

As it became clear that the Democratic amendments could pass, Republicans began discussing their own last-minute additions to head that off — an idea that appeared to have support in the GOP conference but could threaten eventual support of the bill in the House or make a presidential veto more likely.

"I think there's reasonable limitations that can be put on it," said Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., one of Trump's top allies in the Senate.

Secret Service request falters

Under the Secret Service's request, about \$220 million would fund security improvements related to the ballroom. The rest would go for a new screening center for visitors, training and other security measures.

After it became clear that Republicans would abandon that proposal, Trump told reporters at the White House on Thursday that "I don't need money for the ballroom," which he had originally said would be paid for with private funds. Still, if Congress doesn't approve the request, he said the White House "won't be a very secure place."

Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., said the effort to add the security package to the bill was a "bad idea." The bill should not have included the other security improvements, he said, "because it's just giving everybody the 'billion-dollar ballroom.'"

Left in the bill is the money for ICE and Border Patrol, which Democrats have blocked for months in protest of the administration's immigration enforcement crackdown.

Democrats demanded changes for the agencies, but negotiations with the White House yielded little progress. So Republicans are using the complicated budget maneuver called reconciliation — the same process that allowed them to pass Trump's tax and spending cuts bill last year — to fund the agencies through the end of Trump's term without any Democratic support.

Still, passage requires sign-off from the parliamentarian and unity from Republicans.

Sen. Mike Rounds, R-S.D., said the Senate's responsibility should be to focus on funding ICE and Border Patrol.

"When other extraneous things get in the middle of it, it makes it more difficult," he said.

Tennessee fails to execute Tony Carruthers after IV difficulties. State won't try again for a year

By TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Tennessee officials on Thursday called off the lethal injection of Tony Carruthers, who was convicted of kidnapping and murdering three people in 1994, after his executioners tried and failed for over an hour to establish an intravenous line. Gov. Bill Lee announced soon afterward that the state would not try again for at least a year.

In a written statement, the Tennessee Department of Corrections said medical personnel had quickly established a primary IV line but were unable to find a suitable vein for a backup line as required by the state's execution protocol. Efforts to insert a central line also failed, and officials called off the execution.

Maria DeLiberato, an American Civil Liberties Union attorney representing Carruthers, said she saw him "wincing and groaning" while officials attempted to find a vein, calling it "horrible" to watch. An Associated Press journalist was in attendance to observe the execution, but a state rule contested by news organizations prohibits media witnesses from observing the IV insertion.

DeLiberato was addressing reporters when the governor's office issued the reprieve. She began crying. "That's amazing!" she said. "I'm so grateful!"

Since 2009, six other prisoners in three states — Alabama, Idaho and Ohio — have had executions halted

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because of difficulties establishing an IV, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. In Idaho in 2024, medical team members tried eight times to establish a line to execute Thomas Creech, one of the nation's longest-serving death row inmates, before calling it off. Idaho Gov. Brad Little subsequently signed a law making firing squad the state's primary method of execution.

In Alabama, Gov. Kay Ivey paused executions for several months after officials called off the lethal injection of Kenneth Eugene Smith in 2022. It was the third time since 2018 Alabama had been unable to conduct executions due to problems with IV lines.

"Tony Carruthers' case raised serious concerns about mental illness, representation, innocence, and access to DNA testing," the Death Penalty Information Center said in an emailed statement. "The state's failed attempt today to execute him presents an additional issue surrounding the qualifications of the people tasked with executing prisoners."

Witnesses had limited access to the execution attempt

Under Tennessee's execution policies, blinds between the witness room and the execution chamber are kept closed until the IV insertion team has left. On Thursday, media witnesses sat in a dark room for over an hour, but the blinds were never raised.

Witnesses did hear what sounded like groans through a crack beneath a door connecting the two rooms.

DeLiberato, who was in the execution chamber, said that after establishing an IV line in Carruthers' right arm, medical personnel tried his other arm, his left hand and his left foot before trying to establish a central line.

Carruthers groaned as a doctor started pushing a needle in, she said. She saw two or three puncture wounds: "There was a lot of blood."

Unable to establish a central line, the medical team accessed a vein in his right shoulder before the warden received a phone call and announced the execution was off, she said.

The Associated Press is part of a group of media organizations fighting for witnesses to be allowed to see more of the execution process, including the IV insertion.

Carruthers was convicted of killing 3 in Memphis

Carruthers, 57, was found guilty of the 1994 kidnappings and murders of Marcellos Anderson; his mother, Delois Anderson; and Frederick Tucker. Authorities said Marcellos Anderson was a drug dealer and that Carruthers was trying to take over the illegal trade in their Memphis neighborhood.

He was forced to represent himself at trial after repeatedly complaining about court-appointed attorneys and threatening to harm several of them.

There was no physical evidence tying Carruthers to the killings, and he was convicted primarily on the basis of testimony from people who claimed to have heard him confess to or discuss the crimes. The ACLU said it would continue to push for DNA testing on evidence in the case, saying it should have been done long ago.

Carruthers' attorneys have also argued that he has mental health issues that render him incompetent to be executed.

Executions surged last year

The number of executions in the U.S. surged from 25 in 2024 to 47 last year, driven by a sharp increase in Florida. That state carried out 19 executions in 2025, up from one the previous year, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. Four states have carried out 14 executions so far this year, including one Thursday evening in Florida, and 10 more are scheduled.

Tennessee, which had its last execution in December, began a new round last year after a three-year pause following the discovery that the state was not properly testing lethal injection drugs for purity and potency.

An independent review later found that none of the drugs prepared for the seven inmates executed in Tennessee since 2018 had been fully tested. The state attorney general's office also conceded in court that two of the people most responsible for overseeing Tennessee's lethal injection drugs "incorrectly testified " under oath that officials were testing the chemicals as required.

Key federal agency approves the design plan for Trump's Washington arch

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts on Thursday approved the design for the triumphal arch that President Donald Trump wants built at an entrance to the nation's capital, a key step in the project's process but one that has no immediate bearing on the timeline for construction.

Commissioners, all appointed by Trump, acted despite overwhelming public opposition to the 250-foot arch, one of several projects the Republican president is pursuing alongside a White House ballroom to leave his imprint on Washington.

At the White House, Trump told reporters he thought the vote was "fantastic" adding that "we're the only important and major city that doesn't have one."

The commission only oversees designs and has no role in the actual construction or funding of the arch or any other project it considers. Preliminary surveys and testing of the arch site began last week. The National Capital Planning Commission, a separate federal agency that approves construction on federal land, has the arch on the agenda at its June meeting.

Trump had said last year that the arch could be paid for with private donations left over from the ballroom project. A cost estimate for the arch is still being calculated, but a mix of taxpayer and private money is expected to be used to pay for it, according to a White House official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the president has not publicly discussed the project's cost.

"The building is beautiful," said the commission's chairman, Rodney Mims Cook Jr., shortly before the vote on the slightly revised design. Commissioners had suggested several changes when they first reviewed the design in April. Some were made by the Harrison Design architecture firm and approved on Thursday.

Trump keeps statue but removes the lions

The arch would stand 250 feet tall (76 meters) from its base to a torch held aloft by a Lady Liberty-like figure on top of the structure, flanked by two gilded eagles. But four lions envisioned as guarding the base were removed. The phrases "One Nation Under God" and "Liberty and Justice for All" would be inscribed in gold lettering atop either side of the monument.

A public observation deck on top would provide 360-degree views of the region. The arch would have an exterior made of granite.

The commission's vice chairperson, architect James McCrery II, said in April that he preferred the arch without the figures on top, which would have reduced the height by about 80 feet (24.4 meters). Critics argue that the arch would dominate the skyline and disrupt carefully designed views between the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery.

It would be more than twice as tall as the Lincoln Memorial, which is 99 feet (30 meters) tall, and close to half the height of the Washington Monument, at about 555 feet (169 meters) tall.

Nicolas Charbonneau, a director at Harrison Design, told commissioners that Trump considered their recommendation to remove the statue "but elected not to pursue such an option" because he wants the arch to celebrate America and the living.

"This makes it distinct from monuments like the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials," Charbonneau said.

McCrery had also recommended nixing the ground-level lion statues along with an underground tunnel for pedestrians to get to the arch, which would be built on a busy traffic circle. The design approved Thursday has no lions and incorporates pedestrian crosswalks. A platform the arch would have been built on also has been removed.

Public opposition doesn't sway the commission

Ten people who testified Thursday, including on behalf of organizations such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the DC Preservation League, opposed the arch on grounds that it is too big. They said the project needed to be approved by Congress because it would be built on federal land and that it would disrupt the sightline between the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington House at Arlington National

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Cemetery that was created to symbolize reunification after the Civil War.

A group of veterans and a historian have sued the Trump administration in federal court to block the arch construction over concerns about disruptions to the sightline.

Despite the arguments by preservationists, historians and others, Trump asserted Thursday that he does not need Congress to approve the arch because he's building it on federal land. He has also said he doesn't need Congress to approve the ballroom addition at the White House.

Cook, the commission chairman, pushed back after listening to the testimony and noted the limitations of building anything new on the National Mall.

"Washington is not a static city. It must grow," Cook said.

In a statement issued after the meeting, the National Trust urged the National Park Service to begin consultations it says are required under the National Historic Preservation Act. The nonprofit group also urged the National Capital Planning Commission to "participate in a comprehensive review of this unfortunate design" and consider alternatives. It also said congressional approval is required.

Trump's work on the Lincoln Memorial

The president has said some of his other projects, including adding a blue coating to the interior of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, will beautify the city in time for July 4 celebrations of America's 250th birthday.

That project is also the subject of a court challenge brought by The Cultural Landscape Foundation, which said repainting the bottom of the Reflecting Pool blue without first undergoing relevant reviews runs afoul of federal preservation laws governing historic sites.

The nonprofit group argued in a lawsuit filed last week that the changes at the memorial to Abraham Lincoln are part of Trump's broader effort to push through dramatic renovations in Washington without proper reviews and undermine the tone of the area.

U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols, a Trump nominee, didn't rule from the bench Thursday after hearing arguments on the group's request for an order pausing the Reflecting Pool project until the review process is properly completed. The judge said he would issue a written decision but didn't indicate how or when he would rule.

Justice Department attorney John Heise said the administration wants to preserve the pool's historic character and believes it will retain its reflective characteristics after the work is done.

"Their alleged aesthetic injury is a little hard to pin down," he said of the plaintiffs. "It's really opposing the change for the sake of opposing the change."

The judge questioned whether any harms done to the plaintiffs are truly irreversible if the government is correct that the pool will remain a dark color, preserving its reflective quality.

"Everyone agrees it's not going to be the same color," foundation attorney Joseph Mead said.

Free speech or race-baiting? Tennessee shooting stirs debate over livestreamer's approach

By TERRY TANG, COREY WILLIAMS and KRISTIN M. HALL Associated Press

CLARKSVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A judge on Thursday set a \$1 million bond for a white livestreamer charged with attempted murder for allegedly shooting and wounding a Black man, in a case that has stoked debate over the extents of free speech and the rights of content creators who profit from hate-filled interactions.

Dalton Eatherly, who livestreams as "Chud the Builder," is charged in the May 13 shooting of Joshua Fox outside of the Montgomery County Courthouse in Clarksville, a Tennessee city of about 165,000 people not far from Kentucky.

Judge H. Reid Poland III forbade attendees at the hearing from using electronic devices and interfering in any way with the proceedings, and he ordered several people from the courtroom, including conservative activist Jake Lang, who was led out in handcuffs.

Eatherly's attorney, Jacob Fendley, declined to comment on the charges when reached two days after the livestreamer's arrest. But he asked people to stop harassing him and his staff, saying even though

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he's defending Eatherly, he finds his online content objectionable.

The case has drawn interest, with Eatherly raising more than \$100,000 for his legal defense in a single day on a fundraising site. It is reminiscent of an incident from a year ago in which a white Minnesota woman was captured on cellphone video admitting to calling a child a racist slur. She amassed over \$800,000 on a crowdfunding site and also pointed to her First Amendment rights.

A blurring of the lines

As more livestreamers find that being performative with bigoted language can draw big audiences — and big bucks — the line is blurring between freedom of expression and people's right to feel safe. Even within livestreaming communities, some assert they have a right to say whatever they want to and to make money, while others support having boundaries.

Racial justice advocates worry that allowing people to profit from such videos only encourages and normalizes racist and otherwise shocking antics. As for regulation, social media can sometimes feel lawless, as it's generally left to platforms to self-regulate and hold users accountable for obscene and abusive words. But at some point, laws for offline behavior can trump online freedoms, experts say.

According to the criminal complaint, Eatherly, 28, and Fox initially were involved in a verbal altercation. Eatherly reached for a gun inside his right jacket pocket and the two men started to fight. Fox was shot multiple times and later underwent emergency surgery at a hospital.

In an audio stream apparently Eatherly recorded just after the shooting and later posted online, he said he fired in self-defense.

Freedom of speech or hate speech?

Eatherly has defended his videos on the crowdsourcing site as "mild jokes, unfiltered thoughts." While he has sometimes defended using a racial slur as "edgy, harmless humor," Eatherly wrote, "I know it's controversial, but it's my right to speak freely."

But legal experts say not all speech is protected.

Speaking generally about Eatherly's social media offerings, David Raybin, a criminal defense attorney and former prosecutor, said although Eatherly repeatedly references free speech in the posts, his actions in them may actually be crimes under Tennessee law. Because Eatherly was known to openly carry a pistol while berating people, the combination could constitute assault, he said.

"You don't have to touch someone," Raybin said. Assault can be charged if you "create fear of imminent harm."

Brandon Tucker, senior director of government affairs for civil rights organization Color of Change, said "race-baiting" content creates immediate risk for Black bystanders. There's a "power imbalance" with a livestreamer who is attracting an audience.

"The same free speech that this individual wants to advocate for doesn't recognize the chilling of my response to know that I cannot react in any reasonable way because my face, my safety, my family's safety is in jeopardy and being broadcast to an audience that most likely aligns with this person's views," Tucker said.

These streaming platforms cannot claim neutrality if they're essentially financially rewarding users for using racist language to agitate, he said.

Even some other livestreamers say Eatherly crosses the line.

"When you get to terrorizing and doing all this hate speech, that's when the line gets drawn, especially when nobody is bothering you," said James Champion, a 41-year-old Los Angeles-based livestreamer and content creator who goes by the preferred online moniker SendaRoni Slosclu. "Whatever platform is allowing him to get away with that is basically race-baiting, and I just think in this day and time you got people who are going to laugh at it or people who will beat you to death about it."

Platform regulation can feel like the 'Wild West'

Eatherly was streaming on Pump.fun, a platform where users create and trade cryptocurrency tokens. Token creators have used the livestream feature to gain notice in some outrageous ways, such as by performing dangerous stunts and threatening violence. In November 2024, Pump.fun paused the feature

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because people were violating its terms of service by uploading abusive, obscene or dishonest messages.

"It's not clear what was done to improve that situation before it was reinstated," said Kate Ruane, director of the free expression program at the Center for Democracy and Technology. "If you're relying on users to report and none of the users that are viewing these livestreams disagree or have a problem with what they're seeing, you might not be getting the user reports that you should."

Representatives for Pump.fun didn't respond to a Wednesday email seeking comment.

Brandon Golob, a criminology, law and society professor at University of California, Irvine, said the number of livestreaming platforms has grown, but self-regulation can still feel like 'the Wild West.'

The First Amendment, however, is not a blanket shield from real-world laws against harassment, hate crimes and provocation.

"The reality is that when it involves two private individuals, state law is going to govern," Golob said. "We just want to make sure that we're not conflating government responsibility or government censorship with private accountability."

SendaRoni said he's been livestreaming for a few years and has "tens of thousands" of followers across a number of social media platforms.

"I usually talk about social issues. I speak on trending events, news," he said, adding that a number of livestreamers addressed Eatherly's antics following the shooting in Clarksville.

"I think he tried to find people he'd get a reaction out of," SendaRoni said. "When you do things such as that the end results are not going to be exciting. You're acting like no one has a reason not to be disgusted and you made a mockery of yourself."

Leading livestream platforms such as YouTube and Twitch do have an infrastructure for content moderation — and community guidelines barring hate speech and slurs. They utilize automated detection and user reports.

Both Golob and Ruane advise people to know their rights on how to handle livestreamers who are making them uncomfortable. Ruane says it's OK "to film them right back."

"Make sure that you're sharing a different version of the story because whatever First Amendment rights they might be exercising, you have them too," Ruane said. "Make sure that is being published at the same time and that can serve as a form of pushback in and of itself."

Texas board faults Camp Mystic leader for inaction during deadly flood

By JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A Texas board has suspended the nursing license of Camp Mystic's co-director in a scathing order that accused her of not helping children evacuate during last year's catastrophic floods that killed 25 girls and two teenage counselors.

It's one of the state's first actions against a member of the family that owns and operates the all-girls Christian camp since the July 4 flood. Last month, Camp Mystic canceled plans to reopen this summer in the face of outrage from victims' parents.

Mary Liz Eastland, a registered nurse, served as the camp's medical officer. She has previously acknowledged in court that she never tried to reach children and staff in the low-lying area of the camp as the predawn flooding along the Guadalupe River worsened. Her father-in-law, Camp Mystic owner Richard Eastland, also died in the flood.

Allowing Mary Liz Eastland to keep practicing nursing would constitute a "continuing and imminent threat to public welfare," according to an order signed Tuesday by Kristin Benton, executive director of the Texas Board of Nursing.

Eastland "abandoned the campers and staff when the camp site began to flood ... by evacuating herself and her children to higher ground without providing any assistance or direction to all of the other campers and staff," the order reads.

Eastland rejects the findings and will fight the suspension, said Camp Mystic attorney Joshua Fiveson.

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He said the board suspended her license with less than a day's notice of a hearing and without taking testimony or conducting a full investigation.

"This is a sad day for Mrs. Eastland as well as every licensed nurse in Texas," Fiveson said. "This was an exercise in premature punishment."

According to the order, the board will issue a final decision on her license within two months.

Since the flood, the Eastland family has come under intensifying criticism from families of the victims and Texas lawmakers. Several families have filed lawsuits against the Eastlands, who for months forged ahead with plans to reopen before ultimately backing down.

In April, legislative hearings laid bare the camp's lack of detailed planning for a flood emergency, reliance on poorly trained staff and missed chances to evacuate children from the cabins near the river.

Mary Liz Eastland recounted during the hearings her steps that night when she and her children left their house to join her mother-in-law. She described water pouring into the house and breaking a window to escape. The family was able to get to higher ground.

She and other staff gathered survivors for a head count, checking names against cabin rosters. She said she could not pass through the rising floodwaters to get to the campers closest to the Guadalupe River.

Eastland was also pressed as to why, as the camp's chief medical officer, she did not try to call or alert other medical staff to get to the campers before disaster struck. When asked if the other staff could have helped with the camp evacuation, she said, "Maybe so."

Trump eases refrigerant rule in a bid to address surging grocery costs

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration on Thursday loosened federal rules requiring grocery stores and air-conditioning companies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cooling equipment, a step that President Donald Trump said would help lower grocery costs.

Trump said at a White House ceremony that the action by the Environmental Protection Agency would "substantially lower costs for consumers" by delaying costly restrictions that limit the type of refrigerants U.S. businesses and families can use.

The move to relax the Biden-era rules on harmful pollutants known as hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs, emitted by refrigerators and other appliances was the latest attempt by the Republican administration before pivotal elections in November to try to address rising voter concerns over the cost of living.

It is not clear how much or how quickly grocery prices could be impacted. Industry groups said it could even raise prices because manufacturers have already redesigned products, retooled factories and trained workers to build and service next-generation refrigerant equipment.

Inflation in the United States increased to 3.8% annually in April, amid price spikes caused by the Iran war and Trump's sweeping tariffs. Inflation is now outpacing wage gains as the war has kept oil and gasoline prices high.

The regulation from the Democratic Biden administration was "unnecessary and costly and actually makes the machinery worse," Trump said at a ceremony joined by top executives from Kroger, Piggly Wiggly and other grocery chains. He said the EPA action would protect hundreds of thousands of jobs and save Americans more than \$2 billion a year.

The Air-Conditioning, Heating and Refrigeration Institute, which represents more than 330 HVAC manufacturers and commercial refrigeration companies, said the change in approach would "inject uncertainty across the market" and could even raise prices.

"This rule works against basic supply and demand," said Stephen Yurek, the group's president and CEO. "By extending the compliance deadline" for phasing out HFCs, the administration "is maintaining and even increasing demand in the market for existing refrigerants while supply continues to fall."

The net result will be "higher service costs and higher costs for consumers," he said.

Trump once supported limits on refrigerant pollutants

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Trump's action marks a reversal after he signed a law in his first term aimed at reducing harmful, planet-warming pollutants emitted by refrigerators and air conditioners. That bipartisan measure brought environmentalists and major business groups into rare alignment on the contentious issue of climate change and won praise across the political spectrum.

The 2020 law reflected a broad bipartisan consensus on the need to quickly phase out domestic use of HFCs, which are thousands of times more potent than carbon dioxide and are considered a major driver of global warming.

The EPA action highlights the second Trump administration's drive to roll back regulations perceived as climate-friendly. The plan is among a series of sweeping environmental changes that the agency's administrator, Lee Zeldin, has said will put a "dagger through the heart of climate change religion."

Environmentalists criticized the administration's actions, saying the new rule would exacerbate climate pollution while disrupting a yearslong industry transition to new coolants as an alternative to HFCs.

The law pushed industry toward less harmful alternatives

The 2020 law signed by Trump, known as the American Innovation and Manufacturing Act, phased out HFCs as part of an international agreement on ozone pollution. The law accelerated an industry shift to alternative refrigerants that use less harmful chemicals and are widely available.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the American Chemistry Council, the top lobbying group for the chemical industry, were among numerous business groups that supported the law and an international deal on pollutants, known as the Kigali Amendment, as victories for jobs and the environment. U.S. companies such as Chemours and Honeywell developed and produce the alternative refrigerants sold in the United States and around the world.

The 2023 rule, now being relaxed, imposed steep restrictions on HFCs starting in 2026. Zeldin said the rule from the Democratic Biden administration did not give companies enough time to comply and that the rapid switch to other refrigerants caused shortages and price increases last year. Some in the industry dispute this.

The Food Industry Association, which represents grocery stores and suppliers, applauded the EPA action.

The earlier rule "imposed significant costs and unrealistic compliance requirements and timelines that threatened to drive up grocery prices and create substantial implementation challenges for food retailers," said Leslie Sarasin, the group's president and CEO.

New rule ensures an 'orderly transition,' grocer says

Kroger CEO Greg Foran, whose company operates 2,700 U.S. stores, told Trump the EPA action ensures "an orderly transition" that allows the company to update its equipment "in a way which keeps the price of groceries down. And that's something that we're desperately focusing on, Mr. President."

Kevin McDaniel, whose company operates 14 Piggly Wiggly stores in Florida, Alabama and Georgia, said the Biden-era rule would have forced many independent grocers out of business.

"It was thrown together too fast," he said. "The technology is not there yet. It's just way too fast. That's the problem. Good idea, but it's terrible."

David Doniger, a senior strategist at the Natural Resources Defense Council, called Trump's action "a lose-lose for the environment and the economy. It will harm consumers and the climate and reduce American competitiveness in the global markets emerging for environmentally safer refrigerants."

Rather than address affordability, Trump is imposing "thinly veiled environmental rollbacks that leave the United States stuck with outdated technologies of the past," Doniger said.

US stocks edge higher following the latest U-turn for oil prices

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Hour-to-hour swings for oil prices keep jerking financial markets around, and U.S. stocks wavered Thursday following the latest reversal.

The S&P 500 rose 0.2% and inched closer to its all-time high set last week. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 276 points, or 0.6%, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 0.1%.

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All three indexes erased early drops and gained strength following the latest U-turn for oil prices. Brent crude oil briefly got above \$109 per barrel in the morning, threatening to worsen the world's already high inflation, before quickly erasing all its gains in midday trading and falling 2.3% to settle at \$102.58.

Oil prices are yo-yoing because of uncertainty about how long the war with Iran will keep the Strait of Hormuz shut. The closure has prevented oil tankers from exiting the Persian Gulf to deliver crude to customers worldwide, driving up oil's price.

As oil prices eased Thursday, so did pressure on Wall Street that's been building from the bond market.

Yields had climbed so high that they threatened to slow economies worldwide and undercut prices for stocks, bitcoin and all kinds of other investments. They've already forced the average long-term U.S. mortgage rate to its most expensive level since last summer, and they could curtail companies' borrowing to build the AI data centers that have supported the U.S. economy's growth recently.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury briefly got near 4.63% in the morning before falling back to 4.55% following the midday turnaround for oil prices. That's down from 4.57% late Wednesday and from 4.67% the day before.

Some of the biggest beneficiaries of lower yields can be the smallest companies, many of which need to borrow money to grow. The Russell 2000 index of the smallest U.S. stocks climbed 0.9%, far more than the rest of the market.

Stocks of companies with big fuel bills also rose because of the easing of oil prices. Southwest Airlines gained 2.7%, and American Airlines flew 4.9% higher.

Ralph Lauren jumped 13.9% after reporting stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

They helped offset a 1.8% drop for Nvidia, which is one of Wall Street's most influential stocks because of its immense size.

The chip company reported stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected, while also forecasting revenue for the current quarter that cleared analysts' estimates. "The buildout of AI factories — the largest infrastructure expansion in human history — is accelerating at extraordinary speed," CEO Jensen Huang said.

But such performances and such talk have become routine, and Nvidia's stock swiveled between losses and gains before falling.

Some analysts said the weakness may have been because investors were locking in profits after Nvidia's stock had soared nearly 70% over the prior year, more than double the S&P 500's 27% jump. The broad AI industry is also getting criticism for becoming too expensive, as well as too circular as Nvidia has bought ownership stakes in companies that use its own chips that drive Nvidia's revenue.

Walmart also fell, 7.3%, following its profit report. The retailer delivered another quarter of impressive revenue but offered up weaker forecasts for upcoming profit than analysts expected.

Walmart has resonated with Americans who have grown increasingly cautious about where they spend their money with inflation taking a bigger bite out of paychecks.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 12.75 points to 7,445.72. The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 276.31 points to 50,285.66, and the Nasdaq composite gained 22.74 to 26,293.10.

A preliminary report on U.S. business activity suggested that companies are also feeling the bite of higher inflation.

A flash survey from S&P Global said growth in activity for U.S. services businesses unexpectedly slowed a tad, though growth was better than forecast for U.S. manufacturers.

"The damaging economic impact from the war in the Middle East is becoming increasingly evident in the business surveys," according to Chris Williamson, chief business economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence.

A separate report, meanwhile, gave the latest signal that the U.S. job market remains in better shape than economists expected. The number of U.S. workers applying for unemployment benefits last week unexpectedly declined in an indication of fewer layoffs.

In stock markets abroad, indexes were mixed in Europe following bigger moves in Asia.

South Korea's Kospi Kospi jumped 8.4% thanks to strength for technology stocks. Samsung Electronics

leaped 8.5% after its labor union and management reached an agreement late Wednesday that averted a strike. SK Hynix, a chip company partnering with Nvidia, leaped 11.2%.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 jumped 3.1%, while indexes fell 1% in Hong Kong and 2% in Shanghai.

Woman at center of sprawling Minnesota fraud gets nearly 42-year prison sentence

By TIM SULLIVAN Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A judge on Thursday handed down an extraordinary prison sentence — nearly 42 years — to the former leader of a Minnesota nonprofit who was convicted in a staggering \$250 million fraud case that helped ignite an immigration crackdown by the Trump administration.

Aimee Bock ran Feeding Our Future, which had claimed it helped provide millions of meals to needy children during the pandemic. The U.S. Justice Department, however, said she was atop the “single largest COVID-19 fraud scheme in the country.”

“I understand I failed. I failed the public, my family, everyone,” Bock, 45, said in federal court.

After the hearing, authorities announced charges against 15 more people accused of fraud in receiving federal payments for a variety of social services administered through Minnesota's state government. The FBI said one man jumped from a fourth-floor balcony to avoid arrest.

“We will claw back every dollar you have stolen from the American people,” Assistant Attorney General Colin McDonald said, noting that the government sent more prosecutors and agents to Minnesota this year.

President Donald Trump used the fraud cases against Bock and many others to initially justify a massive surge of federal agents to the Minneapolis-St. Paul area last winter to target immigrants, leading to repeated confrontations between residents and those officers and the deaths of Renee Good and Alex Pretti.

Fake lists, lavish spending

COVID-19 brought changes to a federal program that typically fed children through schools. Restaurants could participate, and food distribution was extended to sites outside schools.

Investigators said Bock's nonprofit was at the center of a crime network that included a web of partner organizations, phony distribution sites, kickbacks and fake lists of children. Feeding Our Future recruited people to create sites throughout Minnesota, and claims for reimbursement quickly followed, according to the government.

“Aimee was a god,” a witness testified at trial.

Bock had long proclaimed her innocence but was convicted of conspiracy, fraud and bribery. Investigators said she and co-conspirators enriched themselves with international travel, real estate, luxury vehicles and other lavish spending.

“This was a vortex of fraud and you were at the epicenter,” U.S. District Judge Nancy Brasel told Bock.

A co-defendant was sentenced last August to 28 years in prison. Abdiyaz Farah claimed to be serving meals to thousands of children per day, investigators said, but the sites turned out to be parking lots or empty commercial space.

Bock's lawyer, Kenneth Udoibok, had argued for no more than three years in prison, saying she had provided key information to investigators. He said Bock, a former teacher, had been unfairly portrayed as the mastermind and insisted that two co-defendants were responsible for running the scams.

State auditors found that the Minnesota Department of Education received numerous complaints about Feeding Our Future, but often told the group to police itself. In January, Democratic Gov. Tim Walz said he would not run for reelection after being pounded by Trump about theft in programs that rely on federal cash.

Trump, who has long derided Somalis, last year blasted Minnesota as “a hub of fraudulent money laundering activity.”

“Somali gangs are terrorizing the people of that great State, and BILLIONS of Dollars are missing. Send them back to where they came from,” Trump wrote on social media.

Bock is white, and the U.S. Attorney's Office says the overwhelming majority of defendants in the cases

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are of Somali descent. Most are U.S. citizens.

At least 65 people have been convicted in a series of overlapping food fraud cases. Investigations began during the Biden administration.

"This case has changed our state forever," Joe Thompson, formerly the lead prosecutor in the case, said outside the courtroom. "Aimee Bock did everything she could to earn this long sentence."

Fraud cases grow

In a fresh batch of criminal cases filed this week in Minnesota, the government said alleged fraud involved \$90 million across seven state-managed Medicaid programs.

The defendants include Fahima Mahamud, who was CEO of Future Leaders Early Learning Center, a childcare center in Minneapolis. Over three years, Mahamud's organization was reimbursed approximately \$4.6 million for services on behalf of people who didn't make a required copayment, prosecutors allege.

A message seeking comment from her lawyer was not immediately returned Thursday. Mahamud earlier this year pleaded not guilty to fraud related to meals.

Two other people were charged with conspiring to get \$975,000 in Medicaid subsidies for housing services that were not provided.

Two additional people were accused of receiving \$21.1 million by billing Medicaid for autism therapy that was either unnecessary or not provided. Investigators said the two paid families as much as \$1,500 per child per month to add their names to the program and get reimbursement.

Minnesota's Department of Human Services said it helped build the cases. Inspector General James Clark said payments to more than 600 providers have been halted since 2025 because of fraud allegations.

Trump calls off AI executive order over concern it could weaken US tech edge

By COLLIN BINKLEY and MATT O'BRIEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump called off plans to sign a new executive order on artificial intelligence hours before an expected White House ceremony Thursday because he said he was worried the measure could dull America's edge on AI technology.

Trump said he was postponing the Oval Office event with tech industry executives because he did not like what he saw in the order's text. "We're leading China, we're leading everybody, and I don't want to do anything that's going to get in the way of that lead," Trump told reporters.

The order would have established a framework for the government to vet the national security risks of the most advanced AI systems before their public release, according to a person familiar with the White House's deliberations with the tech industry but not authorized to speak about them publicly. The directive was being characterized as a voluntary collaboration with participating U.S.-based tech companies, including Anthropic, OpenAI and Google, the person said.

The push for some kind of government action to review leading AI systems follows growing concern within the banking industry and other institutions about the leaps in AI's abilities to find cybersecurity vulnerabilities in the world's software.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and outgoing Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell convened an urgent meeting with Wall Street CEOs in April, warning them about the cybersecurity risks posed by Anthropic's AI model, Claude Mythos.

The meeting, urgently assembled at the Treasury Department's headquarters, was intended to ensure that banks were aware of the risks associated with the models, Bessent said at CNBC's "Invest in America Forum" in Washington in April. "This new Anthropic model is very powerful," he said. "Some banks are doing a better job in cybersecurity than others, and we want to have the ability to convene them and talk about what is best practices and where they should be heading."

That led some allies of the Republican president to propose better methods for getting those AI tools in the hands of trusted cybersecurity experts.

Trump's hopes for AI have run up against voters' fears of its impact

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Trump had pledged to undo the AI safety regulations set by his predecessor, Democratic President Joe Biden. Trump's administration has viewed the AI sector as an engine to help deliver on his pledges to expand the economy and he has promoted its major players at events at the White House and around the world. Last week, Trump had tech CEOs in tow for a summit with China's Xi Jinping.

Trump's ambitions for the sector have collided with the fears of voters over the impact of the technology on American life, jobs and electricity bills. Republicans themselves are divided over whether to embrace the AI industry or side with voters who express skepticism about the technology.

Also complicating the government's interest in working with Anthropic on cybersecurity is the government's ongoing legal fight with the company. Trump in February ordered all U.S. agencies to stop using Anthropic's chatbot Claude after an unusually public clash between the Pentagon and CEO Dario Amodei.

There are competing factions within the administration, said Serena Booth, a computer science professor at Brown University and former AI policy fellow in a Democratic-led Senate committee.

"We do see this kind of public fighting," she said. "We will release an executive order. No, we won't. We're going to sign it this afternoon. Oh, the signing is canceled." I think this whiplash is because we're seeing these fractures."

Some of those divides are balancing what Booth said is a "reasonable idea" to test the most capable AI models before their public release, with a concern that government scrutiny, if it takes too long, could burden AI developers.

"It does come at a potential very large cost to innovation and speed of development," she said. "There is, I think, a real risk here and I do see both sides."

The White House has pushed back against state laws seeking to regulate AI, saying the measures could curb growth. A new executive order that could have been perceived as government screening of commercial AI models would have signaled a significant shift in the administration's approach.

At the same time, similar screening is already happening. Trump's Commerce Department announced earlier this month that it signed agreements with Google, Microsoft and Elon Musk's xAI to evaluate their most powerful AI models before their public release, building on previous agreements the Biden administration made with Anthropic and OpenAI. But the announcement later disappeared from the Commerce Department website.

White House describes a balance between safety and innovation

At a White House press briefing Tuesday, Vice President JD Vance declined to discuss specifics from the order but said the administration wants to promote innovation while also addressing cybersecurity threats and data privacy.

"The president wants us to be pro-innovation. He wants us to win the AI race against all other countries in the world," he said. Vance added, "We also want to make sure that we're protecting people."

Asked about new models that could pose security risks, Vance said the administration is taking a collaborative approach with tech companies.

"It also does have some downsides," he said, "and we're trying to balance that safety against innovation."

A former White House tech policy adviser who was a lead author of Trump's AI policy road map said the disagreements likely represent "healthy tension" in an administration that has long been wary of regulating the "frontier AI" companies like Anthropic, OpenAI and Google.

"They don't want to do it because it's politically risky in a million different ways," said Dean Ball, now at the Foundation for American Innovation. Ball said he would welcome an executive order that would get those companies working more closely with the government on cybersecurity but "ultimately, I'm fine with them taking time to get this right."

Takeaways from AP's report on deep-sea mining

By HELEN WIEFFERING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the year since President Donald Trump signed an executive order promising to create a deep-sea mining industry from scratch, businesses have raised millions of dollars from investors,

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stock prices have soared and federal regulators have raced to fast-track a permitting process.

At least nine companies are in talks with the government for access to seabed minerals, according to an Associated Press review. Sections of the seafloor from American Samoa to Alaska could be auctioned for offshore mining this summer and through the fall.

All the action suggests the U.S. may soon give the green light for companies to commercially mine the seabed — something that's never been done in international waters.

But a close look at some of the companies involved reveals uncertain track records and histories spattered with legal disputes, while major questions about how the minerals would be processed and refined remain unanswered. Watchers of the nascent industry are skeptical the promised riches will ever materialize.

What kinds of minerals are in the deep sea?

The most widely prized ores on the seafloor are fist-shaped rocks known as polymetallic nodules, formed over millions of years from the remains of sunken shark teeth and shells. They contain high grades of manganese, copper, nickel and cobalt, and much smaller amounts of rare earth elements. Trillions of nodules lie on the international seabed between Mexico and Hawaii, scientists say.

Nearer to shore, companies have proposed dredging ocean sands for titanium, zirconium and phosphorites.

How is the Trump administration promoting deep-sea mining?

Trump's April 2025 executive order hailed seafloor minerals as vital to America's future prosperity and its trade independence from China, and directed U.S. agencies to expedite permitting.

Two U.S. agencies will enforce rules: the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. NOAA has never approved a commercial project for seabed mining; nor has BOEM, beyond a short-lived mining effort in California waters more than 60 years ago.

In June, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum announced a mandate for his staff to "speed up" the development of critical minerals offshore. The agency soon announced it was evaluating seabed mining in the waters of Alaska, Virginia, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands. It plans to hold the first lease sale as early as August, according to a budget proposal.

NOAA has shortened the timeline for companies pursuing commercial permits, and targets processing 16 applications next fiscal year.

What companies are seeking permits?

So far, companies include a firm that once made its money hunting for sunken treasure, and a startup that sprung from an effort to find Amelia Earhart's long-lost plane.

And it includes The Metals Company, long seen as the industry's front-runner. If granted a permit, the firm says it can commercially mine the seafloor before the end of next year. It is one of few companies to have tested equipment in deep-water conditions — hauling up 3,000 metric tons of nodules in a 2022 trial.

The company has close ties to the Trump administration. CEO Gerard Barron says he was in the White House on the day Trump signed the executive order, and since then, he's been invited to speak at three congressional hearings.

A spokesperson for The Metals Company said the firm had no unfair advantages, and is well-poised to address the strategic priorities of the U.S. after 15 years of preparation and testing.

Odyssey Marine Exploration formed in the 1990s with a mission to discover sunken treasure and sell the artifacts for profit. The company claims to have found more shipwrecks than any other organization in the world.

Odyssey ran into trouble in 2007, when it discovered an underwater shipwreck littered with silver and gold coins that Odyssey brought to the U.S. The treasure was later claimed by the government of Spain, prompting a yearslong court battle, during which Odyssey pivoted to pursuing seafloor minerals.

In December, BOEM announced that Odyssey had requested the agency begin the regulatory process to consider mining off the coast of Virginia.

The startup Impossible Metals has set its sights on seafloor nodules in U.S. waters near American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands, despite growing outcry from local residents and leaders. The company boasts of being the most environmentally friendly deep-sea mining company.

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Still other companies are lining up for U.S. permission, including American Metal Resources, SeaX, Deep Sea Minerals Corp., and Deep Sea Rare Minerals, which planned to change its name to Eco Minerals this week.

What's the business case for deep-sea mining?

A number of analysts and investors question the economic merit of deep-sea mining. Ian Lange, a professor of mineral economics at the Colorado School of Mines, said deep-sea mining advocates seem to overlook the more affordable and widely available sources of minerals on land. He questioned whether demand is strong enough: Copper mines in Michigan and Wyoming are fully permitted but inactive; a cobalt mine is idled in Idaho.

In an assessment of the economic viability of The Metals Company's project, the company forecast that it would break even in its eighth year of commercial seabed mining – the same year that it forecast the mineral reserves to be "all mined."

"No one goes into a project saying, 'In the best-case scenario, we'll break even,'" said mining consultant Steven Emerman.

The Metals Company said it had completed mining plans and seafloor surveys for the first eight years of the project, and that the costs of surveying, sampling and analyzing additional seafloor minerals were best incurred once the project was underway. It said at least three land-based mines were needed to produce the four minerals that exist in polymetallic nodules, the company said, and this variety makes the project resilient to economic headwinds and changing demand for metals.

What other challenges are facing deep-sea mining companies?

Despite Trump's focus on trade independence, the U.S. currently has no major processing facilities for nickel, manganese or cobalt.

In the near term, companies will have to rely on existing supply chains abroad. The Metals Company has thus far explored processing in Japan, South Korea and Indonesia.

But reliance on foreign partners could raise a host of legal issues for deep-sea mining companies. Most other countries involved in deep-sea mining are bound by their commitments to the International Seabed Authority, and could be sued for helping the U.S. tap the global seabed.

Memorial Day: Higher fuel prices have some Americans scaling back their travel plans

By RIO YAMAT AP Airlines and Travel Writer

As someone who is "not the best person with bugs and stuff," Stephanie Bernaba never imagined herself becoming an outdoorsy mom.

But the mother of three is getting more daring as gas prices and other travel costs make vacations more expensive. Her family has traded pricier trips, such as long summer stays in Florida and an annual Disney World visit around her birthday, for local beaches, bike rides and hiking trails near their home in coastal Rhode Island.

"I've been trying to do more of that because one, it's quality time. Two, it's fresh air. And three, we're not spending an arm and a leg," Bernaba, 47, said.

That kind of calibration is shaping the summer travel season, which gets its traditional start in the U.S. with the long Memorial Day holiday weekend. Higher fuel prices resulting from the Iran war and other inflationary pressures are making most forms of travel costlier as people in many parts of the world form their plans.

The U.S. Travel Association expects annual travel spending to grow by a modest 1% this year, powered largely by domestic leisure travel despite the FIFA World Cup giving soccer fans from other countries a reason to visit the U.S. Airfares have climbed around the world along with the price of jet fuel as the war constrains global oil supplies.

Sticking closer to home may not cushion the sticker shock. The nonprofit Institute on Taxation and

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Economic Policy estimated Americans would collectively spend an extra \$3.5 billion on gasoline over the holiday weekend. The average price for a gallon of regular gas in the U.S. was \$4.56 on Thursday compared to \$3.18 a year ago, according to motor club AAA.

Other travel expenses have gone up too. The latest consumer price index showed airfares were 20.7% higher in April from a year earlier, the cost of intracity transit such as buses and subways rose 5.6%, lodging cost 4.3% more, and eating out got 3.6% pricier.

Changing travel patterns

Despite elevated prices, industry forecasts suggest Americans still want to get away, even if it means replacing long trips with long weekends, choosing destinations closer to home and finding ways to cut costs by cooking meals or using buses and trains instead of driving.

AAA predicted that 45 million U.S. residents would travel at least 50 miles (80.47 kilometers) from home between Thursday and Monday for the holiday. The Transportation Security Administration said it expects to screen 18.3 million passengers from Thursday to next Wednesday.

Many households are planning summer vacations but making tradeoffs such as shorter trips or cheaper lodging, according to Bank of America analysts. Mastercard said in a recent report that consumers appeared increasingly focused on value and were adjusting their destinations and timing instead of not going away at all.

"Generally, it's certainly more of a demand reshuffling than a demand softening," David Tinsley, a senior economist at Bank of America Institute, said.

For the Bernaba family, that has meant trading a big vacation for a shorter trip nearby this summer. Their scaled-back itinerary still is pricey: more than \$400 for a ferry to Martha's Vineyard for their car and passengers, and about \$800 a night for each of the two hotel rooms the family of five needs.

Another family that had planned to join them backed out after seeing the price tag.

"The pinch is being felt all the way around," Bernaba said.

Analysts have increasingly described travel spending as "K-shaped," with higher-income households continuing to spend while lower-income families pull back or opt out entirely. Bank of America said lower-income households were significantly more likely to report having no summer travel plans this year.

New polling of registered U.S. voters by Quinnipiac University found that 48% have cut back on vacation spending, 54% have reduced what they spend on dining out, and 36% have curbed their driving.

Travelers are confronting other stressors besides cost.

Airlines around the world have canceled flights and trimmed routes to save on fuel and operating costs, leaving passengers with fewer options. The conflict in the Middle East has complicated getting there and rerouted flights to and from Asia, adding another layer of concern on top of broader geopolitical tensions and the declining value of the dollar for people considering trips abroad.

Recent U.S. government shutdowns, which caused major flight disruptions and long security lines, also are likely still fresh in travelers' minds.

The various factors impacting travel right now has made planning trips more mentally taxing and may be pushing people toward simpler and more accessible vacations that feel easier to manage, said Marta Soligo, a tourism sociologist at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

"The key word here is unpredictability," Soligo said. "Tourists don't like unpredictability."

Quality over quantity

Jim Wang, a personal finance blogger who lives in Maryland with his wife and four children, said his family's original plan to travel to Spain to see a full solar eclipse in August began to unravel once they looked at the logistics.

Beyond thousands of dollars in airfare, the trip would have required multiple connecting flights, plus a car rental to reach northern Spain, where the path of totality is expected to pass.

"It's like, 'Oh, I don't know if I want to see the eclipse that much,'" Wang said.

Instead, Wang's family plans to head this summer to the Lake Tahoe area straddling California and Nevada, where they can stay at a relative's cabin for free, hike and enjoy a slower pace with limited cellphone service. His wife's parents and sister expect to join them.

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"We're still going to travel. It'll just be different," Wang said. "The vacations are no longer as grand for the adults. But for our kids, it's still exciting."

Nancy McGehee, a Virginia Tech hospitality professor who studies consumer behavior, said travelers are increasingly focusing more on the "why than the where" when it comes to vacations.

"What we're seeing is people are saying, 'Alright, we can't do that big splashy trip we wanted to do, but what else can we do?'" McGehee said. "It's more quality over quantity that we're seeing people go for."

Back in Rhode Island, Bernaba has accepted that travel may look different for her family for a while.

"I think that's probably why my mind has gone to doing more nature-y things," she said. "Let's learn how to use the earth to enjoy ourselves because that's not going to cost as much money."

Ukraine says its drones hit another refinery deep inside Russia as long-range strikes escalate

By SUSIE BLANN and BARRY HATTON Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian drones smashed into another Russian refinery overnight, starting a fire that produced huge clouds of black smoke, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Thursday, in what appeared to be the latest long-range attack on Moscow's vital oil industry.

The drones targeted the Syzran oil refinery more than 800 kilometers (500 miles) inside Russia, Zelenskyy said on social media, where he posted a video of the aftermath.

It was impossible to verify the video or independently confirm the attack. The governor of Russia's Samara region, Vyacheslav Fedorishchev, said two people were killed by Ukrainian drones in Syzran, but he did not mention the refinery. Russia's Astra news outlet said Ukrainian drones struck the Syzran refinery owned by oil and gas giant Rosneft.

Ukraine has expanded its mid- and long-range strike capabilities, deploying drone and missile technology that it has developed domestically to battle Russia's 4-year-old invasion. Ukrainian weaponry and expertise are now sought by other countries, whereas earlier in the war Kyiv had to plead for massive foreign military aid.

Ukrainian drones hit another refinery the previous day, Zelenskyy said, as attacks on Russian oil assets that play a key part in funding the invasion have become almost daily occurrences.

"Overall, our long-range plan for May is being carried out largely in full," Zelenskyy said in a social media post late Wednesday. "The key targets are Russian oil refineries, storage facilities, and other infrastructure tied to these oil revenues."

The escalating attacks have hurt Moscow's revenue at the same time as the economic pinch of international sanctions. With some attacks reaching more than 1,500 kilometers (900 miles) into Russia, the strikes have contributed to some Russians feeling unsafe and heaped pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Ukraine reportedly makes battlefield gains

Ukraine's new reach has also helped it push back Russian troops along parts of the front line, with Ukrainian forces making their most significant battlefield gains since 2024, according to the Institute for the Study of War.

Ukraine's "intensified midrange strike campaign" since early 2026 "has also degraded Russian forces' ability to conduct offensive operations across the theater and has also likely supported recent Ukrainian advances," the Washington-based think tank said in an assessment late Wednesday.

Ukraine has slowed Russia's battlefield advance and is gradually regaining the initiative along the front line, Defense Minister Mykhailo Fedorov said, partly due to Russian forces being denied access to Starlink satellite services to steer drones toward targets.

"Russia has since not been able to find a full replacement (for Starlink), giving Ukraine a critical battlefield advantage," Fedorov told reporters. He spoke on Saturday, but his comments were embargoed until Thursday.

Fedorov said in February that he had asked Elon Musk's SpaceX to help deny Russia use of the service

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in Ukraine. Starlink is a global internet network that relies on around 10,000 satellites orbiting Earth.

Fedorov said midsize drones have become a key technological advantage for Ukraine on the front line and claimed that Ukrainian forces have doubled their interception rate of Russian drones over the past four months.

In other developments, Ukraine is also preparing changes to military pay and contract terms, he said.

Drone attacks claim victims in Ukraine and Russia

The Russian Defense Ministry said air defenses downed 121 Ukrainian drones between late Wednesday and early Thursday.

In the Belgorod region that borders Ukraine, eight people were wounded by Ukrainian drones, according to the regional governor, Alexander Shuvayev.

Russia has also invested heavily in drones, using them to bombard civilian areas of Ukraine throughout the war and killing more than 15,000 civilians, according to the United Nations.

Ukraine's air force said Thursday it shot down 109 out of 116 drones that Russia launched overnight.

One civilian was killed and at least six others were wounded in the strikes in the north, south and east of the country, emergency services said.

Russia holds nuclear drills

Elsewhere, Russia and neighboring Belarus held the final stage of their joint nuclear drills. As part of the exercises, trucks carrying intercontinental ballistic missiles rumbled over forest roads, atomic-powered submarines set sail from Arctic and Pacific ports, and crews scrambled into warplanes.

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko inspected Russian short-range, nuclear-capable Iskander ballistic missiles at a military unit.

The three-day drills that began Tuesday come amid the surge in Ukrainian drone strikes, which make it harder for officials in the Kremlin to cast the conflict in Ukraine as something so distant that it does not affect Russian civilians.

As America hits 250, many Brits say one man defines it: Trump

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON, England (AP) — Loud. Broken. Baffling.

Ask Brits what they think of their former colonies in 2026, and they note these long-held views of America and Americans. But after 250 years of independence from Britain, the country's former rulers cannot discuss the United States without mentioning President Donald Trump, almost always before listing the many qualities they admire and appreciate in the upstart nation across the pond.

"It's Trump's world now, isn't it?" says Mark Keightley, a printer technician who serves the Cambridge area, about an hour north of London.

Over the past year, The Associated Press asked Britons — from George Washington's ancestral home near Scotland to Cambridge, Bristol and London — a neutral question: "What do you think of America now?" Virtually every answer, even from those like Keightley who support some of the president's policies, begins with a considered pause, followed by a crisp euphemism such as "He..." with no ambiguity about who.

Is it possible to talk about America now without referencing Trump, they are asked? The unanimous answer, according to these interviews: No.

"My own opinion of America is now dictated by the president and he's not covering himself in glory as far as I'm concerned," said Eddie Boyle of Falkirk, Scotland, as he walked across Westminster Bridge in London last week. "It's a shame that such a long arrangement between the two countries has been tarnished."

'The Country disappoints me'

Being British and disappointed by the reality of the United States isn't a new phenomenon.

Charles Dickens wrote to a friend that he felt just that way during his 1842 visit to the new nation, where he was feted from Boston to New York and Washington. But he was horrified by the ongoing practice of slavery, which Britain abolished in 1833.

"This is not the Republic I came to see. This is not the Republic of my imagination," he wrote to Wil-

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liam Charles Macready on March 22, 1842. "In every respect but that of National Education, the Country disappoints me."

Several inflection points inspired Britain to take America seriously as a permanent power and not a temporary, rebellious whim. Among them, the War of 1812 — a rematch of sorts between the two nations. It ended in a draw, but the conflict boosted the sense of American independence and established the United States as a sturdy trading and military force to be reckoned with.

The new country then survived its own Civil War. Then, before a century elapsed, the United States helped Britain fend off Nazi occupation and, with the rest of the Allied powers, defeated Germany during World War II. Four decades later, the storied friendship between President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher helped drive the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

"They did something great there," Maria Miston of Suffolk, pausing recently near Big Ben, says of Thatcher and Reagan. "They actually managed to bring the Cold War to an end." She notes that the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 damaged the superpower's image around the world. And, she thinks, it hasn't gotten better. "We've just gone backwards since then."

Trump rebrands the 'special relationship'

During his second term, the American president first tolerated his fellow head of government, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, but then dismissed him as "not Winston Churchill" over the premier's refusal to involve the U.K. in the U.S. war against Iran.

Trump has suggested that he considers the king, not the prime minister, to be his peer and was deeply flattered last year by Charles' invitation for an unprecedented second state visit to England. as well as the monarch's recent visit to Washington. In the U.S., Charles said the four-century-long U.S.-British relationship is "more important today than it has ever been," even as he laid in support for checks and balances — seen as an implicit criticism of Trump.

The White House posted on social media that the pair are "TWO KINGS," — in part, perhaps, a clapback to the "No Kings" rallies that drew crowds across the U.S. during Charles' visit. But the irony was not missed in the land of the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, Thomas Paine's "Common Sense," founding-era documents that rejected the rule of Charles' five-times great-grandfather, King George III, and government by monarchy generally.

Back home, where polls showed significant opposition to the king's visit beforehand, Charles' performance won raves as a show of soft power.

"May I say, well done in the Americas," rock star Rod Stewart told Charles at a May 11 gala within earshot of reporters. "You were superb, absolutely superb, put that little rat bag in his place."

Polls show Britons have soured on America. Only 28% of British adults approved of U.S. leadership in a Gallup poll conducted in the late summer and early fall of 2025, while 68% disapproved. That's broadly in line with views of U.S. leadership during Trump's first term, and lower than approval of U.S. leadership under Democratic President Joe Biden, when around 45% of U.K. adults approved of American leadership.

Watching the American experiment under Trump

Throughout the years, watching America has become something of a spectator sport in Britain, if only to gauge how well — or poorly, or amusingly — the cousins across the Atlantic are doing democracy their way.

Nowadays, Brits readily acknowledge a long list of American qualities they admire alongside those that anger or mystify them. To the good: American ambition. The country's wealth. Its military might. Its vastness. Its television, music and movies. And its resilience despite racial tensions and the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

In parallel runs the rest: American gun violence. Immigration crackdowns in a nation founded by immigrants. Trump's rudeness.

Topping the list of mysteries is Trump. But talking about him is socially sensitive, Brits say, with Brexit still a raw tear through society and populist reform, led by some Trump supporters, on the rise in recent local elections.

"How can someone like that become president?" Mark Gibson asked over an ale recently at The Cross Keys pub in Washington, down the hill from the first president's ancestral home. He understands why

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Americans elected other men as their leaders, even if he didn't agree with them. But Trump? "I don't understand it. He's had bankruptcies and legal troubles."

"But," Gibson adds, "I guess that's what people wanted. They elected him twice."

Today in History: May 22, strongest earthquake recorded strikes Chile

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, May 22, the 142nd day of 2026. There are 223 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On May 22, 1960, the strongest earthquake recorded struck southern Chile. The magnitude 9.5 quake claimed 1,655 lives, left 2 million homeless and triggered a tsunami responsible for over 230 additional deaths in Hawaii, Japan and the Philippines.

Also on this date:

In 1939, the foreign ministers of Germany and Italy, Joachim von Ribbentrop and Galeazzo Ciano, signed a "Pact of Steel" committing their two countries to a military and political alliance.

In 1962, Continental Airlines Flight 11, en route from Chicago to Kansas City, Missouri, crashed near Unionville, Missouri, after a passenger ignited dynamite on board the plane, killing all 45 occupants of the Boeing 707.

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson, speaking at the University of Michigan, outlined the goals of his "Great Society," saying that it "rests on abundance and liberty for all" and "demands an end to poverty and racial injustice."

In 1969, the lunar module of Apollo 10, with Thomas P. Stafford and Eugene Cernan aboard, flew within nine miles of the moon's surface in a "dress rehearsal" for the first lunar landing.

In 1985, U.S. sailor Michael L. Walker was arrested aboard the aircraft carrier Nimitz, two days after his father, John A. Walker Jr., was apprehended by the FBI; both were later convicted of spying for the Soviet Union. (Michael Walker served 15 years in prison and was released in 2000; John Walker Jr. died in prison in 2014.)

In 1992, after a reign lasting nearly 30 years, Johnny Carson hosted his final episode of NBC's "Tonight Show." (Jay Leno took over as host three days later.)

In 2011, a massive EF5 tornado struck Joplin, Missouri, with winds up to 250 mph (400 kph), killing at least 159 people and destroying about 8,000 homes and businesses.

In 2017, a suicide bomber set off an improvised explosive device that killed 22 people and injured over 1,000 following an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-filmmaker Richard Benjamin is 88. Songwriter Bernie Taupin is 76. Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska is 69. Singer Morrissey is 67. Singer Johnny Gill (New Edition) is 60. Actor Brooke Smith is 59. Model Naomi Campbell is 56. Actor Sean Gunn is 52. Actor Ginnifer Goodwin is 48. Actor Maggie Q is 47. Olympic speed skating gold medalist Apolo Anton Ohno is 44. Tennis player Novak Djokovic is 39. Actor Judah Lewis is 25. Actor Peyton Elizabeth Lee is 22.