

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Thursday, May 28

Senior Menu: Swedish meatballs, mashed potatoes with gravy, carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.

Pickleball, 5:30 p.m., Elementary Gym

State Track Meet in Sioux Falls

James Valley Telecommunications Annual Meeting

## Friday, May 29

Senior Menu: Lemon baked fish, parsley buttered potatoes, California blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.

State Track Meet in Sioux Falls

## Saturday, May 30

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

State Track Meet in Sioux Falls

## Sunday, May 31

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m., at Zion, 11 a.m.

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Groton Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.; Cody Swanson Piano Recital, 3 p.m.

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**GROTON AREA TRACK TEAM**

*TODAY IS YOUR DAY.  
YOUR HARD WORK GOT YOU HERE.  
YOUR ATTITUDE WILL TAKE YOU FURTHER.  
**BELIEVE. COMPETE. FINISH.**  
**MAKE IT COUNT!***

**GO TIGERS!**

**SIoux FALLS STATE MEET**

***RUN YOUR RACE.  
GIVE YOUR BEST.  
WE ARE PROUD OF YOU!***

**GROTON STRONG!**

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

## Monday, June 1

Senior Menu: BBQ Chicken breast, au gratin potatoes, coleslaw, fruited Jell-O, whole wheat bread.

State Golf Meet in Sioux Falls

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Jr. Legion hosts Britton, 5:30 p.m.

U12 Baseball hosts Roslyn, DH, 5:30 p.m., Falk Field

T-Ball Practice, 6 p.m., Nelson Field

**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.**

## Laos Cave Rescue

Five villagers trapped for more than a week inside a flooded cave in central Laos were found alive yesterday (w/photos), a breakthrough in a rescue mission that drew comparisons to Thailand's 2018 cave rescue. Two others remain missing.

The group entered a cave on May 19, reportedly searching for gold despite safety warnings, when heavy rain flooded the cave and blocked the entrance. Rescue teams from Laos and Thailand, including divers from the 2018 rescue, navigated over 900 feet of narrow, muddy tunnels and strong currents. Video footage showed the five survivors huddled together on rocks and surrounded by floodwater. They remain inside as crews work to extract them through the same hazardous route.

The rescue echoes the 2018 operation in northern Thailand, when 12 boys and their soccer coach were trapped in a flooded cave for 18 days before a multinational diving mission brought them out.

## Matthew Perry Assistant

A personal assistant to Matthew Perry was sentenced to three years and five months in prison yesterday for his role in the actor's 2023 death. Kenneth Iwamasa pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to distribute ketamine causing death.

Iwamasa is the last of five people convicted in connection with Perry's fatal overdose, including a drug dealer, two doctors, and a counselor. Iwamasa was hired as his live-in assistant in 2022. When Perry wanted a higher dosage of ketamine than his doctor allowed, Iwamasa helped secure and administer the drug illegally. In the week before Perry's death, Iwamasa injected Perry with at least 27 shots of ketamine, including three the day he died.

Developed as an anesthetic in the 1960s, ketamine is a Schedule III controlled substance used to treat depression, anxiety, and pain. A study published this year found how it impacts specific receptors in the brain.

## Sea Cucumber Parts Are Forever

Scientists have observed sea cucumber parts healing, absorbing nutrients, and functioning for years after detaching from the organism. The study is the first to document amputated tissue living long term in a natural setting.

Marine invertebrates, including sea urchins and starfish, are known for their regenerative capabilities. In this case, researchers observed expelled limbs from the sea cucumber *Psolus fabricii* healing and growing for days. To investigate further, they amputated dozens of tube feet, ambulacra, and tentacles from three sea cucumbers, returning them to seawater. In the days after amputation, tissues healed at the site of detachment. They also absorbed dissolved amino acids and displayed immune activity, neutralizing pathogens and expelling dead and dying cells for upward of three years in seawater.

The detached parts showed no signs of degeneration. However, there was also no indication the tissue was on track to regrow the rest of the sea cucumber, unlike flatworms.



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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

New York, New Jersey subpoena FIFA officials for allegedly manipulating the price and seat location of World Cup tickets for games held at MetLife Stadium; average ticket costs over \$1K per seat.

AI startup ElevenLabs strikes deal to use the voice and likeness of Marvel Comics legend Stan Lee; the cocreator of dozens of iconic characters, including Spider-Man and the X-Men, died in 2018.

Broadway shows gross roughly \$1.9B during the 2025-26 season with around 14.6 million attendees.

"Emily in Paris" star Pierre Deny dies at age 69 after battle with ALS.

## Science & Technology

NASA reveals updated plans for its permanent lunar base, including three uncrewed trips this year to scout for sites, and contracts to build next-generation moon buggies.

New open-source model predicts the 3D shape of more than 1 billion proteins; platform developed by Biohub, a nonprofit launched by Mark Zuckerberg and wife Priscilla Chan.

Paleontologists discover new species of feathered bird that lived 121 million years ago; creature had tail feathers nearly twice the length of its body.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.0%, Dow +0.4%, Nasdaq +0.1%) as oil prices fall more than 5% amid optimism over US-Iran truce.

South Korean chipmaker SK Hynix reaches \$1T market cap, a day after Micron, on AI boom.

Lululemon settles proxy battle with founder Chip Wilson, agreeing to add two of his board nominees in June and a third by October; Wilson agrees to 18-month nondisparagement deal, among other provisions.

Median pay for CEOs rose nearly 6% last year to \$17.7M, per AP survey; median employee pay in the S&P 500 rose 4.7% to roughly \$89K.

## Politics & World Affairs

At least two people are killed, with nine more still missing, as of this writing after a chemical tank ruptures in Washington state.

Uganda closes its border with the Democratic Republic of Congo as number of suspected Ebola cases approaches 1,000.

Iranians begin accessing the internet after 88 days, the longest nationwide blackout recorded.

Israel says it killed the leader of Hamas' armed wing earlier this week, days after killing his predecessor.



**It was recertification day for the Groton lifeguards. Everyone was on hand Wednesday morning to get their American Red Cross certification done at the Groton Swimming Pool.**



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## Track & Field

**Lincoln Krause – Academic All-State; Jordan Schwan – Most Improved; Keegen Tracy – Sprinter MVP, Middle Distance MVP, Academic All-State; Rylee Dunker – Field Event MVP, Academic All-State; McKenna Tietz – Tiger “GUTS” Award; Ryelle Gilbert – Distance MVP; Makenna Krause – Sprinter MVP; Not Pictured: Kella Tracy – Middle Distance MVP; Ashlynn Warrington - Most Improved; Jayden Schwan – Middle Distance MVP, Distance MVP, Academic All-State; Ethan Kroll - Field Event MVP; Jace Johnson - Tiger “GUTS” Award.** (Courtesy

Photo Alexa Sperry)



## Girls Golf

**Most Improved - Rylie Rose (not pictured) Top Medalist - Carlee Johnson.** (Courtesy Photo Alexa

Sperry)



## Softball

**Hannah Sandness – Academic All-State; Jerica Locke – Academic All-State; Jaedyn Penning - Offensive Player of the Year, Academic All-State; Talli Wright – Team Spirit Award, Academic All-State; Lillian Cowan – Most Improved Player; pictured separately to the right: Elizabeth Cole - Defensive Player of the Year.**

(Courtesy Photo Alexa Sperry)





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A large group of Groton Area Track team members will be attending the state track meet today through Saturday in Sioux Falls. (Courtesy Photo Bruce Babcock)

## JAMES VALLEY TELECOMMUNICATIONS 69<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday, May 28th  
Groton Area High School Arena  
11:30am Registration & Lunch  
12:30pm Meeting

- Membership Gift
- Serving Ken's Roast Beef, Mashed Potatoes & Gravy, Sides & Dessert
- Many Door Prizes, Including a \$500 Credit

*Our Groton office will be closed 11am-2pm.*



Built by James Valley  
Telecommunications





**SOUTH DAKOTA  
NEWS WATCH**

Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

## Toby Doeden: The 'Outsider'

By Alexander Rifaat  
South Dakota News Watch

This is the first installment in a four-part series profiling the four candidates seeking the GOP nomination for governor of South Dakota.

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — Businessman Toby Doeden said his decision to run for governor of South Dakota wasn't solidified in conversations with family and friends in his hometown of Aberdeen but rather in events that unfolded on a fateful afternoon in Butler, Pennsylvania, in July 2024.

"The second Trump stood up and was yelling 'fight, fight, fight', I knew in that moment

God was sending me a message," Doeden said, referring to the attempted assassination of then-candidate Donald Trump, which marked a seminal moment in his successful bid to reclaim the White House in the 2024 presidential election.

Doeden said the incident sparked his belief South Dakota needed someone like President Trump, a businessman with little to no experience dealing with the typical horse trading that goes on in the political arena, to fix the ills plaguing the Mount Rushmore State.

"We needed a bold outsider to step up," Doeden said.

He believes he is that outsider.

News Watch met with Doeden last week in downtown Sioux Falls, where, in addition to being flanked by a handful of campaign staffers, he was joined by his wife of 30 years, Elizabeth.

Just a few hours earlier, Doeden received a major boost when a KELO-TV/Emerson College poll came out that found him leading the GOP gubernatorial primary race at 26%.

Doeden, however, appeared cerebral when asked what he thought of the latest figures.

"I looked at the poll for about three seconds this morning and went right back to work," he said. Doeden



**Toby Doeden and his wife Elizabeth with their four children: Jackson, Jonathan, Josie and Jennie.** (Photo: TobyDoeden.com)

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said his own internal polling had shown rising support, but he didn't want to publicize it for fear of accusations of "doctoring the numbers."

Doeden believes a major factor behind the uptick is the growing number of negative political ads centered on his three opponents: Gov. Larry Rhoden, U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson and state House Speaker Jon Hansen.

"It feels different the last couple of months. I wasn't able to put my finger on it. Then we started going to events and when I would shake everybody's hands afterwards they would tell me: 'We weren't going to vote for you, but now we are because we are sick and tired of the three politicians battling it out over the airwaves. We can't even enjoy television anymore,'" Doeden said.

Doeden, while critical of his primary opponents, said his campaign strategy has sought to avoid relying on attack ads and has remained focused on bread-and-butter issues such as the cost of living, crime and education.

His belief in this approach has been underscored by the amount of his own money he has already put into his campaign. According the latest financial figures, Doeden has loaned his campaign a total of \$4 million since he entered the contest last year.

"We're going to win this race. One-hundred percent," Doeden said.

## The boy from Groton

Doeden's status as a multimillionaire businessman is a far cry from his upbringing in Groton, 20 miles east of Aberdeen.

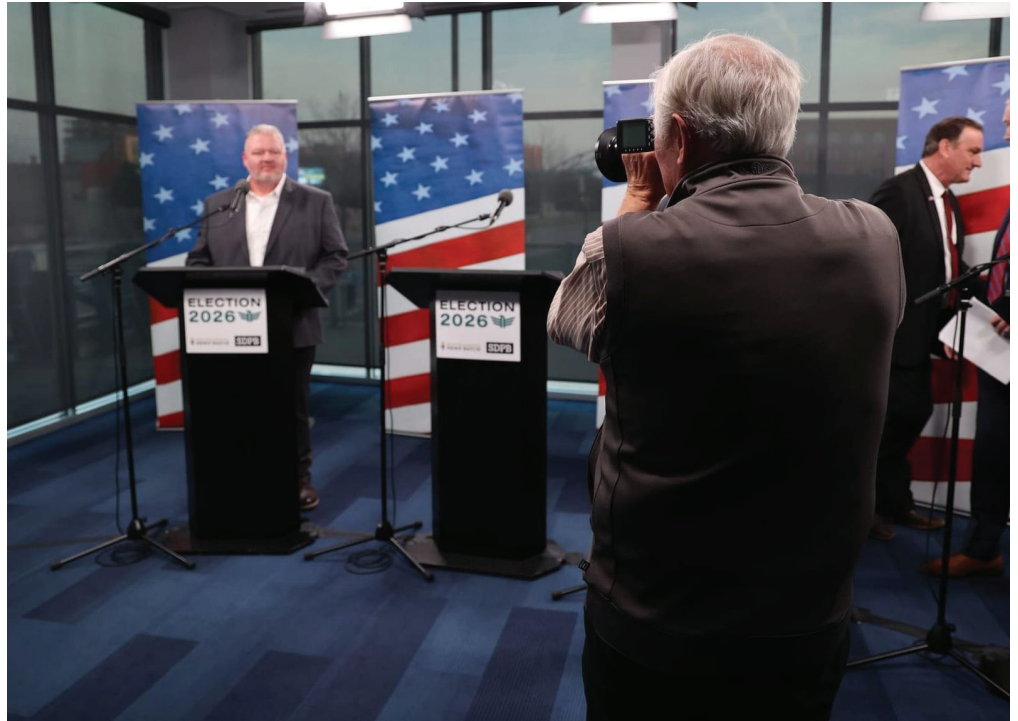
He owns a number of ventures, including rental property, car dealerships and a casino. While Doeden is keen to talk up his business acumen, little is actually known as to the extent of his wealth.

In a gubernatorial debate in Sioux Falls last month, Doeden snapped at a moderator who pointed out, while he had voiced his opposition to government-led economic development programs, he benefitted from pandemic-era paycheck protection program loans.

"I don't appreciate you saying that I used it to further my business interests. That's a flat-out lie," Doeden said at the time, claiming he had only taken out one PPP loan – which were introduced during the pandemic to help small businesses by funding up to eight weeks of their payroll costs – for just one of the dozen companies he owned and defended other businesses that used such loans during the pandemic.

"Where would our state economy be today if we hadn't fought to keep our companies open? I'm proud of that one loan," Doeden said.

The youngest of four children, Doeden said his childhood was largely shaped by seeing his mother, Ar-



**Businessman Toby Doeden prepares for the South Dakota GOP gubernatorial debate on Monday, April 13, 2026, at the SDPB studios in Sioux Falls, S.D.** (Photo: Photo: Jon Beringer / South Dakota News Watch)

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lis, work multiple jobs to provide for their family after his father, Doug, was permanently disabled. He died in 2020 and she passed away in 2021.

"You want to find a role model in life? Find someone that is willing to work seven days a week for 20 straight years and never complain," Doeden said. "She was old school: You do whatever you got to do to provide for your kids."

While his father was a self-styled "JFK Democrat," Doeden said his formative years were shaped by his mom's admiration for former President Ronald Reagan.

"For the very few moments I got with her when she wasn't at work or asleep, she would talk about how much she loved Reagan," Doeden said.

Doeden lived in Groton for most of his life until eight years ago, when he said he decided to move to Aberdeen after all four of his children graduated from Groton High School.



## **Affordability, fiscal discipline top of mind**

It is perhaps the experience of growing up under strained financial circumstances that leads Doeden to bring up the issues of affordability and the need for greater fiscal discipline at the state level.

When it comes to cost of living concerns in South Dakota, Doeden pins the blame not just on former President Joe Biden and what he believes were inflationary policies introduced during the pandemic but also on what he believes is runaway spending in Pierre that, due to a subsequent rise in taxes, has dampened economic activity.

"Taxes were increasing at breakneck speeds, yet our revenue remained flat. That's a big, big red flag for somebody who has been in the business world," Doeden said.

While Doeden claimed the state budget had doubled in seven years from 2017 to 2024, the figure is closer to 61 percent, according to the Urban Institute.

Doeden also appears to run into a math problem when it comes to his plan to eliminate property taxes as a way to provide relief to South Dakotans.

Enacting such a measure would lead to an estimated \$1.8 billion hole in the state budget, which could deprive the state funding for some of Doeden's other promises, such as raising teacher pay.

## **The Trump factor**

For all the ways Doeden has sought to tie his own brand of populist conservatism with Trump, that still hasn't translated into a coveted endorsement from the president, which he played down.

"President Trump has been a little busy. He has ended countless wars. He shut down our southern border. He's collecting billions of dollars in tariffs to help fund our federal government. I doubt there are too many days he is scrolling Facebook looking at Toby Doeden videos," Doeden said. "I suspect Team Trump is pulling for Toby, whether it's publicly or behind the scenes."

Doeden said that, while the other three candidates only demonstrated lukewarm support for Trump on the debate stage, he had no qualms about pledging his loyalty.

"I looked at the camera and I said, 'I love Donald Trump,'" Doeden said.

He added that the president needed a strong "Midwest ally" to ensure South Dakota didn't turn into states such as Minnesota and Colorado that have become solidly Democratic in recent years.

Perhaps Doeden's most Trump-esque moment of the interview came when he was pressed on his support for the administration's tariff policy, which was seen as negatively impacting U.S. agriculture.

A poll last month commissioned by News Watch and the Chiesman Center for Democracy found a majority of respondents in South Dakota agreed with the Supreme Court's ruling to strike down the tariffs.

"I think the people that respond to polls like that, many of them are liberals and they would say 'Donald Trump is terrible' even if he handed them a million dollars in cash. There's nothing to please them," Doeden said.

While Doeden appeared to agree that civility in politics was important, he said detractors of Trump's style,



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especially within the Republican party, should remember the wider context of the 2024 presidential vote.

"If they can't at least say the words out loud 'Thank you Donald Trump for saving our country from Kamala Harris,' I have nothing in common with that person."

If Doeden, Hansen, Johnson or Rhoden doesn't receive 35% of the vote in the June 2 Republican primary, a runoff election between the two top vote-getters will be held July 28. The winner of that contest will meet Democrat Dan Ahlers in the Nov. 3 general election.

*South Dakota News Watch is an independent nonprofit. Read, donate and subscribe for free at [sdnewswatch.org](https://sdnewswatch.org). Contact politics and statehouse reporter Alexander Rifaat: 605-736-4396/[alexander.rifaat@sdnewswatch.org](mailto:alexander.rifaat@sdnewswatch.org).*



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Legislative primaries attract millions in spending as Republican factions fight for control

**Campaign finance reports show side that suffered losses last time spending heavily to 'take back what they lost in 2024'**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR**

A Republican rupture that shook the South Dakota Legislature two years ago is returning to the ballot Tuesday, this time with more money and organization on the side that lost control in 2024, plus a governor primary that's expected to increase turnout.

Campaign finance reports reviewed by South Dakota Searchlight show a total of at least \$2 million spent by 23 groups so far this year to influence legislative primary races.

The result is a slate of Republican primaries that will test whether the 2024 intraparty revolt was a lasting or temporary shift.

That year, 14 Republican legislators lost to challengers from their own party in the primary.

Many of the ousted lawmakers had supported legislation that sought to regulate, rather than defeat, a proposal for a five-state carbon capture pipeline proposed by Iowa-based Summit Carbon Solutions that would have run through eastern South Dakota.

Opponents of the legislation — expressing concern about the private property rights of landowners along the route — referred it to voters, who rejected it in the 2024 general election. Opponents also won enough legislative seats in 2024 to replace the Republican legislative leadership team and ultimately pass legislation banning eminent domain for carbon pipelines — a law that has so far kept the pipeline out of the state. Additionally, the pipeline opponents installed one of their own as the chairman of the state Republican Party.

The pipeline fight turned out to be the opening salvo in a broader struggle among South Dakota Republicans over economic development. Subsequent debates have centered on incentives and regulations for data centers, and state government's role in aiding businesses.

Ten of the 14 Republican lawmakers who lost their seats two years ago are trying to rejoin the Legislature



**The South Dakota House of Representatives meets at the Capitol in Pierre on Feb. 10, 2026.** (Photo by Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

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this year, aided by political action committee spending for them or against their opponents.

## Dueling philosophies

Spearfish Republican Scott Odenbach, who became the state House majority leader in 2024 with support from newly elected lawmakers, called the spending against him and his allies in this year's Republican legislative primaries "totally unprecedented."

"I think it's a desperate attempt from the business class to take back what they lost in 2024," Odenbach said.

One of the people leading the spending on the other side is Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt, R-Sioux Falls. She voted for the pipeline regulations bill that was later placed on the ballot and defeated by voters. She won reelection in 2024 but was ousted by Republican colleagues from her position as assistant House majority leader.

"Rep. Odenbach has actively played in primaries himself since being elected, including through political organizations aligned with his own agenda, so his comments are a little amusing," Rehfeldt wrote in a statement to Searchlight.

Indicating that the fight is about more than just economic development, Rehfeldt criticized failed proposals from some Republican legislators that she described as extreme. One example is a bill that would have subjected librarians to criminal liability for failing to prevent children from obtaining materials deemed obscene.

"The reality is this effort is being driven by South Dakotans who are tired of dysfunction, political theater, and unserious legislating," Rehfeldt said. "They are tired of watching energy get wasted on headlines and chaos while real issues affecting families, communities, healthcare, education, and public safety take a back seat."

## PAC ties to business leaders, governor race

One of the biggest spenders in this year's primary is the South Dakota Republican Forward political action committee, chaired by Rehfeldt.

So far this year, Rehfeldt's PAC has reported spending \$271,000 on ads, \$216,000 on postage and \$140,000 on printing to influence legislative races.

Rehfeldt's state-registered PAC received \$675,000 from the federally registered Republican Forward PAC. Republican Forward is a super PAC. Due to U.S. Supreme Court decisions, super PACs are legally allowed to raise and spend unlimited amounts as long as there's no coordination with candidates. In South Dakota, political action committees can receive unlimited contributions from other political action committees.

Republican Forward's fundraising includes large amounts from the Sioux Falls business community: \$500,000 from POET ethanol (which sought to capture carbon dioxide from its ethanol plants for the carbon capture pipeline, to capitalize on tax credits incentivizing the practice), \$300,000 from First Premier Bank Chairman and CEO Dana Dykhous, \$150,000 from MarketBeat founder and CEO Matthew Paulson, and \$100,000 from Lloyd Companies. Among other donors, Republican Forward has also received \$100,000 from Genesis Farms Cannabis Company, which has multiple medical marijuana outlets across the state.

Dykhous said he was motivated to get involved after seeing Republican legislators oppose state-funded economic development programs. He said that could result in "our children and grandchildren leaving the state because they didn't have opportunities."

"That's what we want to change," Dykhous said. "We don't want our kids to have to leave to get jobs. We want them to stay here."

The same federal super PAC has also funded spending by the state-registered Rushmore Principles PAC against Gov. Larry Rhoden and state House Speaker Jon Hansen in the race for the Republican nomination for governor. Rhoden signed a bill into law banning eminent domain for carbon pipelines, and Hansen has been a prominent opponent of the carbon pipeline and state economic development programs.

The primary beneficiary of the spending against Rhoden and Hansen is another Republican candidate for governor, U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson. The other candidate in the four-way race is businessman Toby Doeden.



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A committee that bears Johnson's name, Dusty PAC, has also been active in legislative races. It has the same treasurer as Johnson's candidate committee, and Dusty PAC is chaired by Jeff Erickson, longtime chairman of the South Dakota Board of Economic Development. The PAC has spent \$232,000 this year to influence legislative races, in some cases supporting Republican lawmakers who lost their 2024 primaries.

Nathan Sanderson was director of policy and operations in former Gov. Dennis Daugaard's administration. Johnson served as Daugaard's chief of staff. Daugaard has endorsed Johnson for governor.

Sanderson is now executive director of the South Dakota Retailers Association. The association's PAC has spent \$47,500 this year to influence legislative races.

"I think that it's very clear that a broad swath of South Dakota is interested in making state government boring again," Sanderson said. "I don't think that it's any specific issue. It's an approach to governance."

Republican Sioux Falls Mayor Paul TenHaken expressed similar motivations for spending by his South Dakotans for Common Sense PAC. It reported raising \$340,500 and spending \$214,000 since the beginning of the year. That includes a \$150,000 contribution from a federal PAC affiliated with NetChoice, a trade association that advocates for data centers.

"I don't, quite honestly, feel that the majority of the state even knows what it means to be a true Republican anymore. And so I think we have to just get rid of labels," TenHaken said. "I just want people who are less loyal to a party and more loyal to our state and our future, our kids."

## Former lawmakers receiving support

Candidates receiving support from the Rehfeldt, Dusty, TenHaken or other similar PACs include Erin Tobin, of Winner, who lost her primary race in 2024 after supporting the carbon pipeline regulations bill. Tobin lost to Erin Voita, of Bonesteel, whose efforts in the Legislature have included her successful sponsorship of a bill allowing concealed pistols on college campuses. Tobin is running against Voita on Tuesday.

Another candidate receiving support is Katie Washnok, who ran a close but unsuccessful race two years ago against Sen. Carl Perry, who recently described himself as being in favor of "anybody but Dusty" for governor. Washnok and Perry are both from Aberdeen and are in a rematch Tuesday.

Other candidates with support from that same side of the Republican aisle include Sen. Glen Vilhauer, a certified public accountant from Watertown serving on the state budget committee. He faces a challenge from Rep. Josephine Garcia, of Watertown, who has backed failed legislation that would have banned lab-grown meat, required employers to use the federal E-Verify system to check whether employees are in the country legally, and required blood donors to disclose whether they've received a COVID-19 vaccine.

Jean Hunhoff, who was the state's longest-serving female lawmaker when she lost her primary in 2024, also has backing in her return bid. Hunhoff is in a rematch with the person who defeated her in 2024, Sen. Lauren Nelson of Yankton, who sponsored the bill that would have criminalized librarians and has unsuccessfully backed efforts to approve the use of state funds for private educational options.

## Current leader resists push from 'business class'

Odenbach, who became House majority leader after the 2024 election, runs the state-registered Liberty Tree PAC. He uses it to support candidates on the "other side of the Republican divide" from those aligned with Republicans like Rehfeldt and Johnson.

Odenbach said "the Sioux Falls business class" is afraid that "conservative principles and the free market might govern the state instead of crony capitalism and sweetheart deals."

Odenbach's Liberty Tree PAC has spent \$48,000 this year, including support for Voita in her race against Tobin; for Sen. Taffy Howard of Rapid City, who introduced several bills to restrict state economic development programs; and for Representatives Kathy Rice of Black Hawk and Terri Jorgenson of Piedmont, who in the 2024 primary beat out Gary Cammack, who was the House majority whip at the time.

Sen. Mark Lapka of Leola was elected in 2024 as a prominent opponent of the carbon pipeline. His Land & Legacy PAC gave \$50,000 this year, including \$5,000 to Voita, \$5,000 to Howard, \$10,000 to the Senate president pro tempore installed after the 2024 elections, Chris Karr, of Sioux Falls, and \$10,000 to The

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People First, a PAC supporting Speaker Hansen's campaign for governor.

Rep. Phil Jensen of Rapid City and Sen. John Carley of Piedmont run the South Dakota Freedom Caucus PAC. The caucus says it advocates for liberty, limited government and conservative values. The PAC has spent \$33,000 this year, including \$3,500 each to Jensen and Carley's campaigns, and donations to the campaigns of other members of the caucus, including Rice, Rep. Dylan Jordan of Clear Lake, and Garcia.

Some spending to influence legislative races has focused on specific issues. One report filed by Forge the Future Project, based in Sioux Falls, shows \$521,000 in spending on digital ads and mailers supporting 17 candidates. Forge the Future Project is not listed as a state or federal PAC, so information on its donors is not readily available. The group's website says it advocates "for a favorable regulatory environment to bring valuable AI products to market in America" and "empowering parents to have oversight over their children's online activities."

## Comeback attempts

Among the 14 Republican legislators who lost their primary races in 2024, 10 are attempting a comeback:

Former Rep. Fred Deutsch, R-Florence, running for House District 4.

Former Rep. Byron Callies, R-Watertown, running for House District 5.

Former Rep. Tyler Tordsen, R-Sioux Falls, running for House District 14.

Former Sen. Jean Hunhoff, R-Yankton, running for Senate District 18.

Former Sen. Erin Tobin, R-Winner, running for Senate District 21.

Former Sen. Ryan Maher, R-Isabel, running for Senate District 28.

Former Rep. Gary Cammack, R-Union Center, running for House District 29.

Former Sen. David Johnson, R-Rapid City, running for Senate District 33.

Former Rep. Becky Drury, R-Rapid City, running for House District 34.

Former Sen. Julie Frye-Mueller, R-Rapid City, running for Senate District 30.

*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.*

## Rule changes for kinship care boost number of Native American foster homes, state says

**Adjustments allow more families access to reimbursement when caring for relatives, family friends**

**BY: JOHN HULT**

The number of licensed Native American foster homes in South Dakota has grown by 44% since new rules took effect last summer for the licensing of foster homes run by family members or family friends.

The news came during a virtual meeting of the Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council on Wednesday. The council is designed to gather input from child protection representatives from each of the nine tribes in South Dakota for the state Department of Social Services.

The department oversees the state's foster care system, where Native American children are overrepresented and non-Native American families head up the majority of licensed foster homes.

Lawmakers created the council in 2024, in part as a response to those disparities, which have persisted for generations in South Dakota.

As of Wednesday, 69% of the 1,719 kids in foster care in South Dakota were Native American, social services spokeswoman Emily Richardt told South Dakota Searchlight.

About 13% of South Dakota's child population is Native American.

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## Growth in Native American foster homes

During the Wednesday meeting, Sara Sheppick of the Department of Social Services said the number of licensed Native American foster homes grew from 93 in July 2025 to 134 in late February.

That's about 15% of total foster homes. The total number of licensed homes grew from 793 to 908 in that same time period.

The growth is "largely due" to new kinship licensing standards, Sheppick said.

To be licensed, foster parents must be 21 years old, pass a health screening and complete 30 hours of training.

"Kinship care" is a form of foster care that places children removed from their homes under suspicion of abuse or neglect with extended family members or people who have a close relationship with the child's family.

Before the rule changes, kinship foster parents needed to meet those same standards to be eligible for licensing. The rule changes opened up kinship licensing to those 19 and older, removed the training and health screening requirements and offered child protective services workers the ability to evaluate placements on a case-by-case basis.

The total number of kids placed in kinship care has grown by 6% since last July, Sheppick said.

A license is not required for kinship care, but only caregivers with a license are eligible for reimbursement for their expenses. The number of kids placed in licensed kinship care, Sheppick noted, has increased by 80% since last July, from 143 to 258.

As of Wednesday, 33% of Native American foster kids were in kinship care, Richardt told Searchlight after the meeting. The kinship care figure for non-Native foster kids is 38%.



**Children play on inflatables during Eagle Butte Days on the Cheyenne River Reservation in Eagle Butte, South Dakota, in July 2025. New rules for kinship care have helped grow the number of Native American foster homes in the state.** (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

## Next steps

In a letter supporting the kinship licensure changes that was submitted to the Legislature's Rules Review Committee in 2025, the Oglala Sioux Tribe's Child Protection Services Director Susan Schrader wrote that temporary care from extended family members is a longstanding part of Lakota culture.

Long term, she wrote, it's healthier and less traumatic for a kid to stay with family than with strangers, but many families on reservations avoid the licensing process because they find the process "too difficult and cumbersome."

At the time, she wrote, there were 400 families caring for relatives without receiving the financial assistance from the state that would be available through licensing. Those children and families "are not receiving the benefits and assistance that being in a licensed kinship home would provide."

Schrader is also a member of the advisory committee.

She hopes to see the state to work more closely with tribes on kinship placements in the future, she said Wednesday. Until a recent retirement, Schrader's tribe had a staff member who specialized in connecting



children who need temporary care with extended family and family friends. That sort of work on the local level could benefit the state and children on tribal lands, she said.

"I'm requesting that the state look at supporting the tribes to have our own kinship locators," Schrader said, because "we know our families, and we're from here."

Tiffany Wolfgang, the head of state Child Protection Services, told Schrader the department is looking for "win-win" situations on kinship placement and encouraged Schrader to keep the lines of communication open.

"We do have some good data to show that this has been impactful, but we always want to be striving to take a look at how we continue to grow, mature, and respond to what worked and what didn't work," Wolfgang said.

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

## Trump struck a deal for China to buy \$17B a year in US ag products. Farmers are skeptical.

By Rebecca Pieder/Medill News Service

WASHINGTON – In a deal that could provide a major trade boost for American farmers, the White House said that during the recent summit, China committed to buying at least \$17 billion in additional U.S. agricultural products annually for three years.

But Beijing has not confirmed the figure and farm groups expressed skepticism that the deal would materialize.

"I think we are cautiously optimistic when it comes to these things because we've been on both sides of this equation. You know, the first time we went through the tariff crisis, we lost 20% market share," said Todd Main, director of market development at the Illinois Soybean Association.

President Donald Trump visited Beijing in May for talks. Two days after the U.S. delegation returned, the White House shared a list of achievements reached between the two countries.

This included a commitment that China would increase U.S. beef imports and buy at least \$17 billion per year in additional U.S. agricultural products over the next three years. In a statement to Medill News Service on May 20, the Chinese Embassy in Washington did not confirm the \$17 billion or the time frame.



**A combine harvests corn on an Illinois farm in the fall.** (Photo courtesy of Lance Muirhead/Muirhead farms)

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However, it discussed progress on the trade of beef and other agricultural products.

## Tariffs hit hard

American farmers have been caught in a cost pinch for years. Grain prices are down, and the costs of machinery and fertilizer are up, making it harder for farmers to break even.

Last year, these pressures were exacerbated as the Trump administration placed high tariffs on Chinese imports, sparking Beijing to retaliate by halting imports of U.S. agricultural products.

China is the world's largest importer of agricultural products. This hit Midwestern farmers particularly hard. Iowa and Illinois produce the most soybeans in the United States, and China is their largest market by far.

If Beijing were to follow through on the commitments announced by the White House, it would increase total U.S. farm exports to China to \$28 billion to \$30 billion a year, according to Reuters. While this would be below the \$38 billion exported in 2022, it would be higher than the \$24 billion in 2024 and much higher than last year's \$8 billion.

A return to predictable trade relations between the U.S. and China would benefit farmers, said Chris Chinn, Director of the Missouri Department of Agriculture.

"This announcement is a great first step in what we hope is a full commitment to purchasing American products," he said.

Jerry Costello II, director of the Illinois Department of Agriculture, echoed this sentiment while expressing doubts at the likelihood of the deal panning out.

"If China truly committed to purchasing an additional \$17 billion in U.S. agricultural products for three years and followed through on the purchases, it would provide meaningful support for Illinois farmers," he said. "Unfortunately, it's not that simple."

When asked to confirm the \$17 billion number, a spokesperson for the Chinese embassy notably omitted any mention of the figure or the time frame.

"It is hoped that both sides will create favorable conditions for two-way agricultural trade by jointly reducing tariffs, removing non-tariff barriers, and expanding market access, so as to promote the recovery and continuous expansion of cooperation in agricultural trade," the spokesperson said.

China also resumed registration of U.S. beef suppliers after the summit, according to the spokesperson.

## Soybean imports cut off

After the Trump administration imposed sprawling tariffs on China last year, China halted imports of U.S. soybeans for several months. In November, the U.S. and China reached a trade agreement in which China committed to purchasing 12 million metric tons of soybeans by the end of February. The order represented a sharp decrease from 2024 levels.

"The ag industry has heard big promises before, but the actual trade commitments have often failed to materialize," Costello said. "During previous trade agreements, China fell well short of its pledged purchases, leaving farmers to suffer the economic impact."

Lance Muirhead, a seventh generation farmer in Macon County, Illinois, has felt the costs of the trade war first hand. As a direct result of ongoing trade disputes, he has had to tighten the budget on the farm he operates together with his family, he said.

"It has put a halt on us buying any new equipment we might have been in the market for," Muirhead said. "I run a 16-year-old combine that I'd like to upgrade to a slightly newer model, but that's just not in the budget the way commodity prices have been."

He is "skeptically optimistic" about the new proposed trade agreement. While a tweet or a promise can have positive effects on the market, that hype is short-lived unless commitments are followed through with concrete purchases the way they were last fall, he said.

"I think the proof will be in the pudding and only time will tell, but I sure hope the agreement is executed," he said. "When China has that big of a basket, it's hard not to want to put all of your eggs, or soybeans, into it."

## 'Just fluff'?

Senator Adam Schiff, D-Calif., also expressed skepticism.

"There's a long history of the president coming back and misrepresenting what he's achieved. My first question is, are any of these commitments real or are they just fluff?" Schiff, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, told Medill News Service.

When China halted imports last year, it was a massive blow to U.S. soybean exports, said Main, of the Illinois Soybean Association. It's a market that has been built up over the last 30 years, and establishing new markets takes time.

Even if the deal were to pan out, soybean farmers still should diversify their buyers so they are no longer so reliant on China, he said.

"If you look out a decade or so, we know that long-term China is not going to be the dominant buyer that it once was," Main said. "And so we have to pivot."

*Medill News Service articles are reported and written by graduate student journalists in the Washington program of the Medill School at Northwestern University.*

*These articles are reported and written by graduate student journalists in the Washington program of the Medill School at Northwestern University.*

## States could purge voter rolls close to elections if Supreme Court takes Trump's side in Arizona case

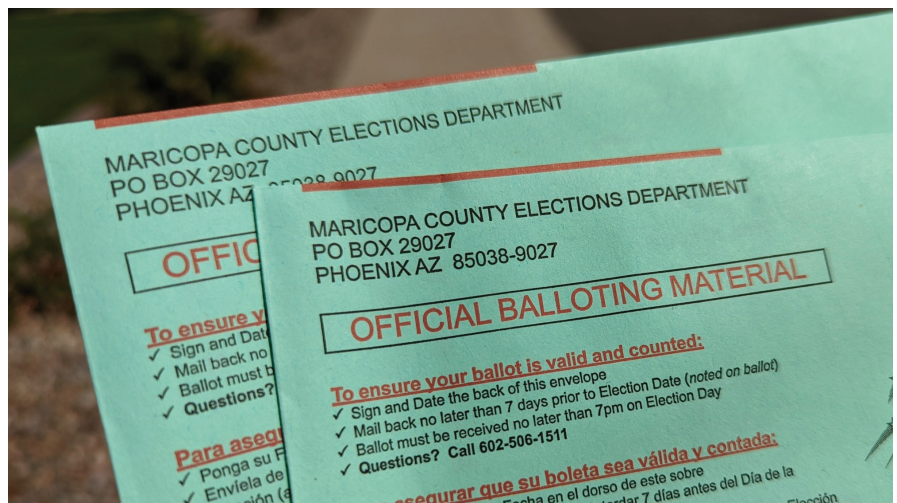
BY: JONATHAN SHORMAN

The Trump administration wants the U.S. Supreme Court to empower states to review their voter rolls for noncitizens just days before elections, a change that voting rights advocates say would risk disenfranchising Americans.

The U.S. Department of Justice asked the Supreme Court on Tuesday to wade into a legal fight between the Republican National Committee and a host of Democratic and voting rights groups over a series of voting restrictions in Arizona.

If the court takes the case, it could lead to a significant decision granting states greater leeway to purge alleged noncitizen voters close to elections and mandate that voters prove their citizenship — a key aim of the SAVE America Act, President Donald Trump's signature elections legislation that's stalled in Congress.

The high court's decision could arrive prior to the 2028 presidential election.



**The U.S. Department of Justice asked the Supreme Court on Tuesday to take up a case casting the Republican National Committee against a host of Democratic and voting rights groups over voting restrictions in Arizona.**

(Photo by Jim Small/Arizona Mirror)



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## Voting in Arizona

Arizona requires individuals to provide proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate or passport, to vote in state elections. Residents who don't offer documentation can still use a federal form to register, but can only vote in federal elections.

Election officials must run the names of federal-only voters through a U.S. Department of Homeland Security computer program that can identify possible noncitizens.

The Justice Department argues that the Supreme Court should affirm the Arizona law and find that it doesn't violate the National Voter Registration Act, a 1993 federal law that sets rules for how voters are registered and when states can remove them from their rolls. The NVRA imposes strict limits on canceling registrations in the 90 days before a federal election.

The U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals previously ruled that Arizona's law violates the NVRA.

"But that decision eliminates the flexibility the Act promises to States when enforcing their voter qualifications," the Justice Department says in its brief.

While the Trump administration wants the Supreme Court to take the case, the underlying petition was filed by the Republican National Committee. Its chairman, Joe Gruters, in a statement said it was "unacceptable" that the RNC was still having to defend the Arizona law.

"Federal law is clear: only U.S. citizens have the right to vote in American elections," Gruters said.

## Appeals court ruling

Mi Familia Vota, a Latino voting rights group that's opposing the RNC in court, said in a statement the Justice Department's brief shows "MAGA Republicans and their friends in the Trump Administration are once again trying to disenfranchise Latino voters in Arizona."

Opponents of Arizona's law argue the 9th Circuit decision was correct. The state law, they say, goes well beyond what's allowed under the NVRA. Election officials may remove individual voters in certain circumstances in the run-up to an election but the law prohibits sweeping purges.

"States cannot circumvent the limits on systematic removals that Congress — exercising its express constitutional authority to regulate federal elections — put in place to ensure that eligible voters have adequate time to correct erroneous removal procedures, thereby protecting Americans' fundamental right to vote," the Democratic National Committee and the Arizona Democratic Party argued in a brief filed Tuesday.

Democrats and voting rights groups warn about expanding use of Homeland Security's SAVE system, short for Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements, that's mandated under Arizona law.

Initially a program used by states to check whether individual noncitizens were eligible for government benefits, the Trump administration has overhauled it into a tool that can verify citizenship by checking information in federal databases.

SAVE can now check millions of names simultaneously. Many Republican states have begun uploading their voter rolls into SAVE to search for potential noncitizens.

Critics of the program say SAVE has falsely flagged U.S. citizens, a problem that could be exacerbated if the Supreme Court allows its widespread use in the weeks before an election. Last-minute misidentifications could leave little time for voters to prove their citizenship.

Justin Levitt, who served as senior policy adviser for democracy and voting rights in the Biden White House and is now a law professor at Loyola Marymount University, said in an interview that the 90-day period serves as a "pencils down" time to minimize the possibility of errors just before elections.

"Anytime you're matching one giant list to another giant list, you're going to have mistakes," Levitt said. "If you execute this systemic list maintenance two days before the election, those mistakes are going to keep eligible voters from voting."

## Voter purges

At a U.S. House hearing on the NVRA in December, Sophia Lin Lakin, director of the ACLU's Voting Rights Project, pointed to several voter purges, including a 2024 effort in Virginia, to highlight the dangers of last-minute removals.

That August, Virginia's Republican governor at the time, Glenn Youngkin, ordered election officials to

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scrub the state's voter list for noncitizens. More than 1,600 voter registrations were canceled, with citizens swept up in the purge. The Supreme Court in October 2024 declined to overturn the purge.

"There is no dispute that states and localities must keep their voter rolls accurate and up to date," Lakin wrote in her opening statement. "But the integrity of our elections is not threatened by the phantom menace of widespread noncitizen voting — it is threatened by aggressive purge practices that wrongfully strike legitimate voters from the rolls and by unnecessary barriers to registration that prevent eligible Americans from getting on those rolls in the first place.

## Noncitizen voting

The specter of noncitizen voting has been a central focus of Trump's second term, despite studies showing it's an extremely rare occurrence. One study of the 2016 election placed the prevalence of noncitizen voting at 0.0001% of votes cast.

Utah recently announced that a review of its 2 million registered voters identified just 27 confirmed noncitizens and an additional 25 "probable" noncitizens — a miniscule percentage of voters.

The Justice Department has sued 30 states and the District of Columbia in a so-far unsuccessful effort to force them to hand over private voter data so the information can be run through the SAVE system to search for noncitizens. In late March, Trump signed an executive order to restrict the transmission of ballots through the mail, though several lawsuits have been filed against it.

Trump also continues to demand that senators pass the SAVE America Act, even though it has stalled in the U.S. Senate. While the legislation would set a national proof of citizenship rule, some states have enacted or are weighing their own requirements.

## Republican attorneys general

Five states — Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, New Hampshire and South Dakota — ask for proof of citizenship when voters register for the first time, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. One state, Wyoming, also requires proof when voters update their registration.

But Arizona was the only state before 2025 to maintain two separate voter rolls to enforce its proof of citizenship rules, according to the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University. The distinction helps explain why the Arizona case is now poised for consideration by the Supreme Court.

A host of Republican state attorneys general, led by Kansas' Kris Kobach, have filed a brief urging the Supreme Court to take the Arizona case. They say the 9th Circuit gutted Arizona's "common-sense measures" to protect its elections.

"This case presents yet another assault on State efforts to promote election security," the states' brief says.

In addition to Kansas, Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah and West Virginia signed on to the brief.

The Supreme Court has sent conflicting signals about proof of citizenship laws in the past. In August 2024, the court issued an unsigned order on its "shadow docket" allowing Arizona to enforce its proof of citizenship requirements for the 2024 election.

But four years earlier, the justices declined to take a case over a Kansas proof of citizenship law. That left in place an appeals court decision blocking the law, which remains unenforceable.

The Arizona case would offer the Supreme Court a way to provide a more definitive opinion. If the justices decide soon to take it, they would likely hold oral arguments in the fall and potentially issue a decision next spring, more than a year before the 2028 presidential election.

The Justice Department's brief says the case "offers an opportunity to resolve these important election-law issues outside the setting of a contested election."

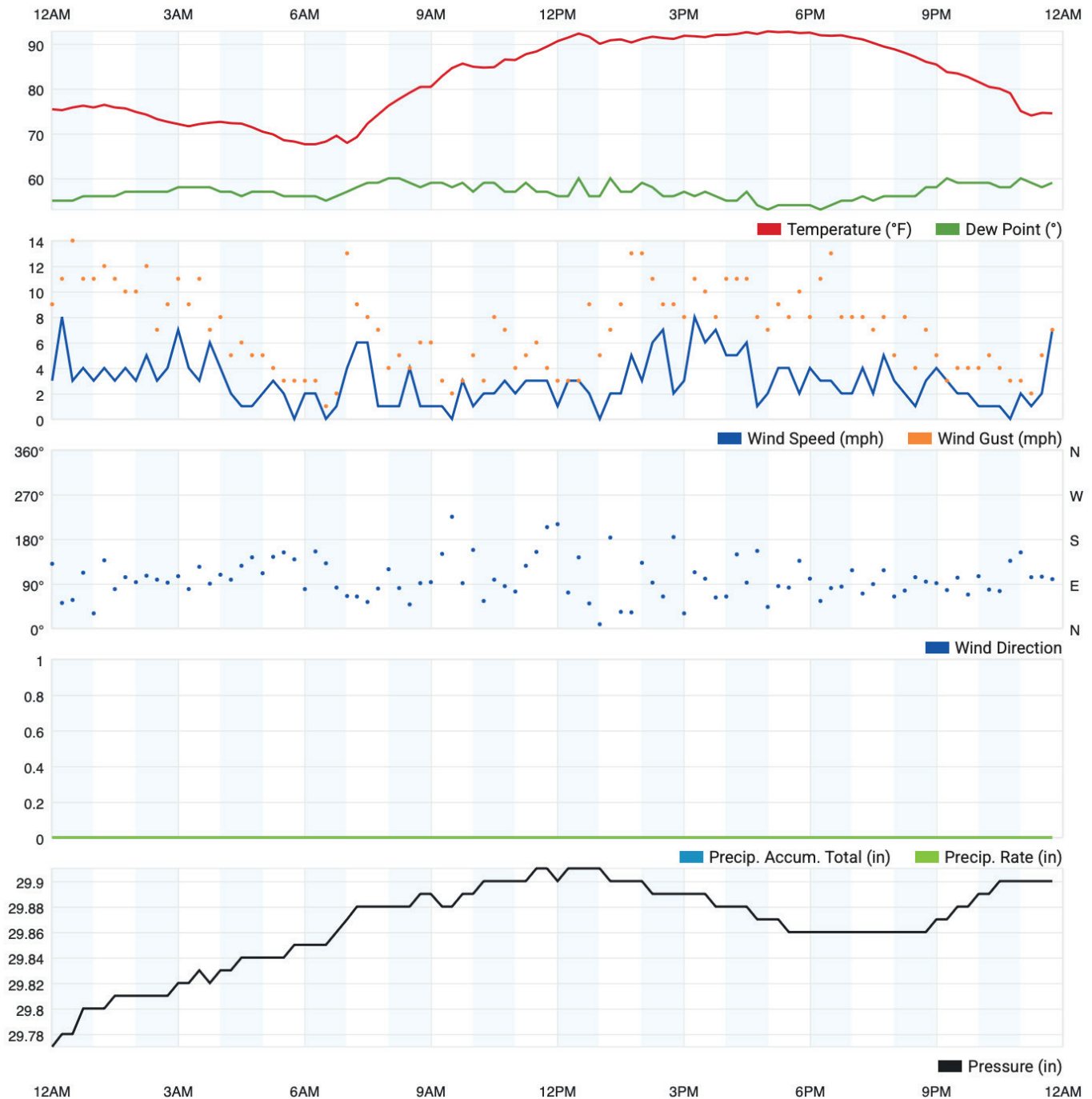
*Jonathan Shorman covers democracy for States Newsroom. Based in Kansas City, his coverage area includes elections and voting rights, fights over state and federal power, civil liberties and more. An alumnus of the University of Kansas, he previously covered politics for The Kansas City Star.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

May 27, 2026





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Today



**High: 94 °F**

Hot

Tonight



**Low: 61 °F**

Mostly Cloudy

Friday



**High: 87 °F**

Mostly Cloudy  
then Slight  
Chance  
Showers

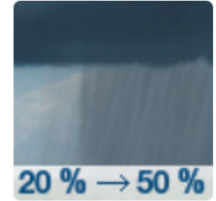
Friday Night



**Low: 58 °F**

Mostly Cloudy

Saturday



**High: 85 °F**

Slight Chance  
Showers then  
Chance  
Showers and  
Breezy

## Hot Temperatures Again Today

Today

Friday

Saturday



88 to 95°

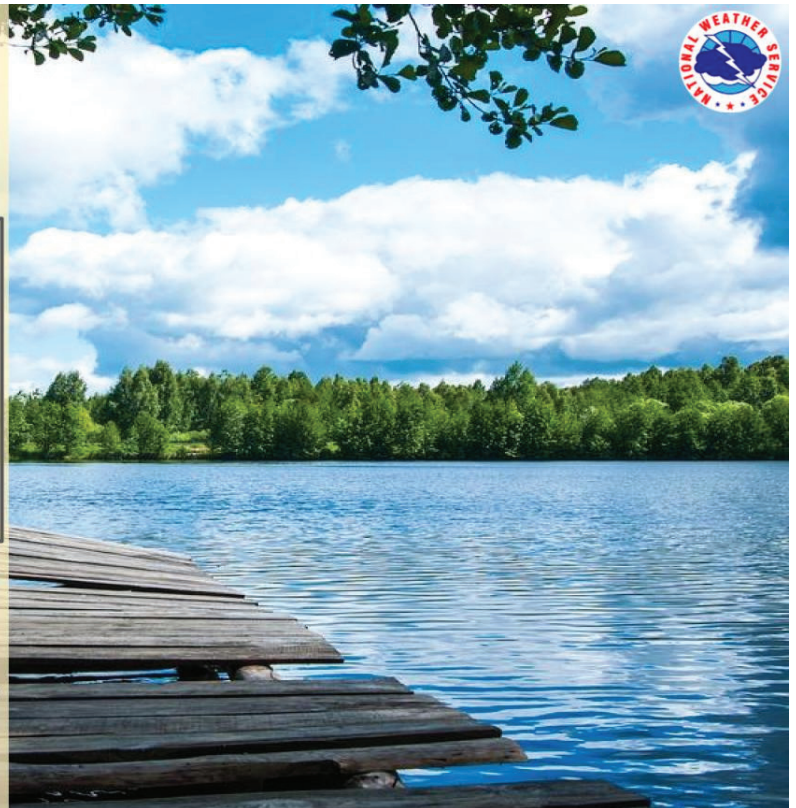
83 to 88°

81 to 86°

- Precipitation chances increase this weekend, especially over central SD
- *Slight* "cooldown" Friday & Saturday

May 28, 2026

3:33 AM



A hot air mass will remain in place over the region today, with well above normal high temperatures in the upper 80s to mid 90s. Records really aren't in jeopardy today as those numbers are into the 100s. Much of the region will remain dry today, but rainfall chances increase Friday and especially into Saturday and Sunday, more so across central SD.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 93 °F at 5:00 PM**

**Low Temp: 67 °F at 6:06 AM**

**Wind: 14 mph at 12:24 AM**

**Precip: : 0.00**

## Today's Info

Record High: 102 in 1934

Record Low: 30 in 1965

Average High: 75

Average Low: 49

Average Precip in May.: 2.98

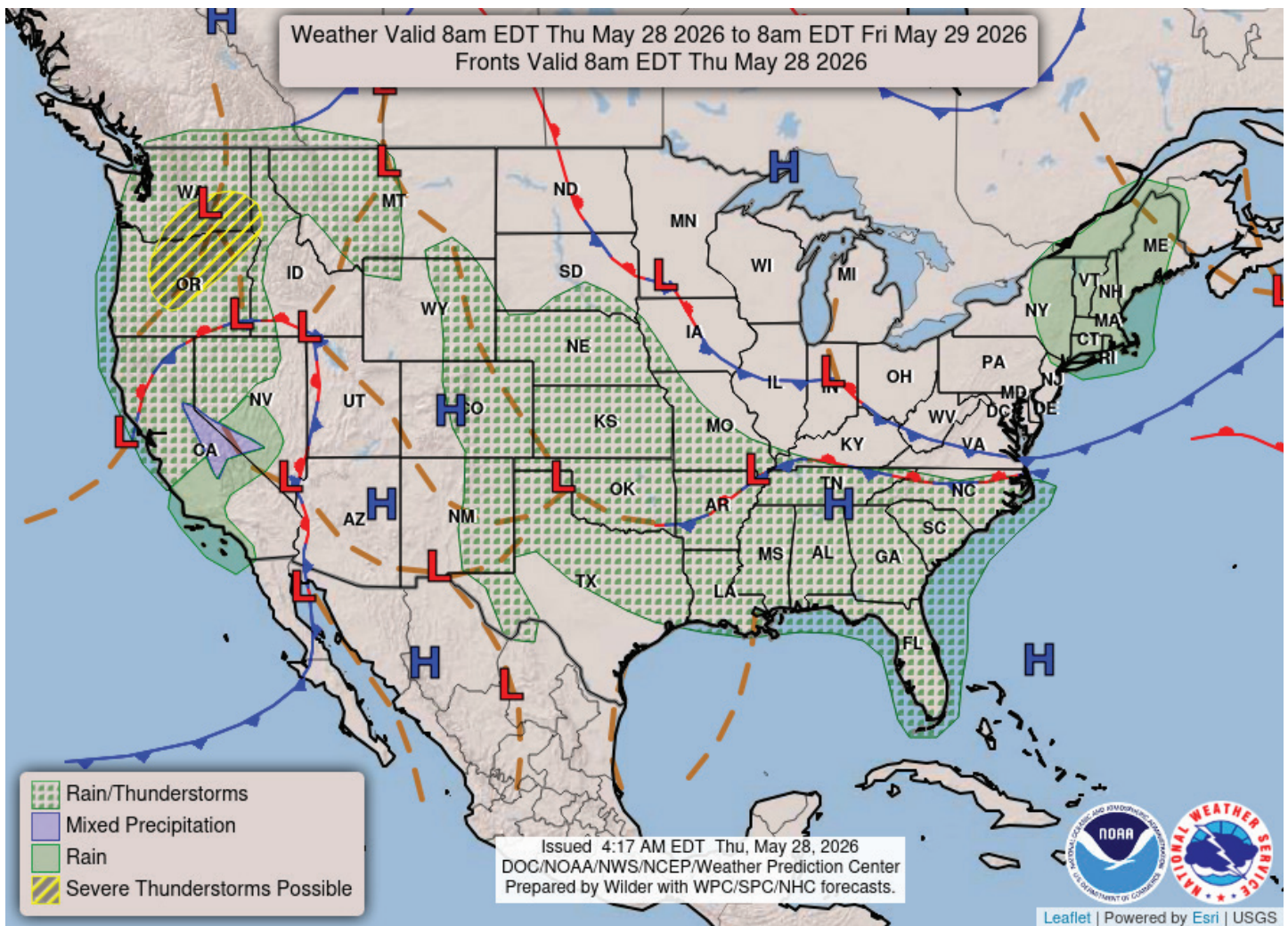
Precip to date in May.: 1.73

Average Precip to date: 6.95

Precip Year to Date: 4.85

Sunset Tonight: 9:09 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:49 am





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## Today in Weather History

May 28th, 1934: Watertown recorded a high temperature of 102 degrees, the earliest yearly date when it reached 100 degrees.

May 28th, 1965: Low temperatures were mainly in the mid-to upper-20s across a broad area. The low temperatures set back some crops and caused light damage to others. Some low temperatures around the area include 26 degrees in Andover, 27 in Ipswich, 28 in Britton, Leola, and McLaughlin, and 29 in Clear Lake, Eureka, Gettysburg, and Pierre.

1877 — A "terrific" two day long sandstorm (sand) blasted Yuma, AZ. (28th-29th) (The Weather Channel)

1942 — The latest snowstorm of record for the state of Iowa left ten inches at LeMars, eight inches at Cherokee, and 7.5 inches at Waukon. Afternoon highs were in the lower 30s in parts of northwestern Iowa. (The Weather Channel)

1947 — A storm produced heavy snow across Wisconsin, with ten inches reported at Gay Mills. The snow damaged fruit and other trees, and downed power lines. The storm was followed by the coldest weather of the month for much of the High Plains Region and Missouri Valley. Williston ND reported a low of 21 degrees the morning of the 28th, and the next morning Cheyenne WY reported a morning low of 16 above zero. (David Ludlum)

1987 — Thunderstorms produced torrential rains in Oklahoma and northern Texas. Lake Altus, OK, was deluged with nine inches of rain. Up to eight inches drenched northern Texas, and baseball size hail was reported north of Seminole and at Knickerbocker. Ten to 13 inch rains soaked central Oklahoma the last five days of May resulting in an estimated 65 million dollars damage, and forcing several thousand persons to evacuate their homes, many by boat or helicopter. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — A sharp cold front began to usher cold, wet and windy weather into the western U.S. Thunderstorms in the Great Plains Region produced wind gusts to 80 mph near Brookings, SD. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Unseasonably hot weather continued in Florida. Five cities reported record high temperatures for the date. The record high of 98 degrees at Lakeland, FL, was their fifth in a row. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in Florida late in the day, with golf ball size hail reported at Kissimmee. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Two to five inches of rain over southeastern Ohio on the 28th and 29th capped an exceptionally wet month of May, and triggered widespread flooding. Flooding which resulted claimed three lives, and caused millions of dollars damage. Numerous roads in southeast Ohio were flooded and impassable, and many other roads were blocked by landslides. (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotion

## The Process of Sanctification

**Spiritual growth can't be rushed—it's a journey that requires your patient, daily cooperation with God.**

Hebrews 5:11-14: 11 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.

14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Many modern-day inventions are designed to help us accomplish tasks more quickly. Not every process, however, lends itself to acceleration. Consider our growth in Christ, which is known as sanctification. Being a Christian is neither an event nor a quick fix. Rather, it is a journey. There are things for us to learn along the way, and while we may unwisely choose a longer path than necessary, there really are no shortcuts.

Sadly, there are people who grow little after salvation. Some aren't disciplined or encouraged in their faith. Others fail to pursue maturity through prayer, meditation on Scripture, and fellowship. But God's Word says to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

Consider how spiritual development benefits believers. The more we get to know God, the better able we are to walk in obedience and live a contented, purposeful life for His glory. We also become more adept at discerning truth from falsehood.

Have you noticed any change in your life and character since you were saved? Your heavenly Father wants to mature you. So make a continuous effort to cooperate with Him by reading Scripture, praying, fellowshiping, and repenting of all known sin in your life.

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



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## The Groton Independent

Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.27.26

3 4 30 40 46 2

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 32 Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.26.26

1 5 49 51 59 7

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$331,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 17 Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.27.26

2 27 32 37 48 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$28,170,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 32 Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.27.26

5 10 22 30 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$109,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 47 Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.27.26

4 9 43 62 68 3

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 16 Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.27.26

5 14 21 31 51 13

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$172,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 16 Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the **AP** Associated Press

### **Official in Kenya says 16 students killed in an overnight fire at a girls' school**

By EVELYNE MUSAMBI Associated Press

GILGIL, Kenya (AP) — At least 16 students died in an overnight fire that started in the dormitories of a girls' boarding school in Kenya, a government official said, in the latest such incident to rock the East African nation.

Education Minister Julius Ogamba said Thursday that 79 others were injured at the Utumishi Girls School, which has more than 800 students in the Gilgil area of central Kenya.

The cause has not yet been established. Ogamba said authorities would investigate whether the school's fire safety manual had been adhered to.

Police said they were leading the rescue and emergency response efforts at the school, which is located about 120 kilometers (75 miles) from the capital, Nairobi.

The government-owned secondary school is managed and sponsored by the Kenya Police Service. Many of the students are daughters of police officers.

The victims have not yet been identified.

One person at the scene, Wambui Nderitu, said the matron opened one of two dormitory doors "without alerting the children to exit."

"The second door remained closed, and even though my cousin escaped with a leg injury, we've been told many children are injured and some died," Nderitu said.

The Kenya Red Cross said several students were evacuated and are receiving treatment in various hospitals.

The group said it deployed "tracing and psychosocial support teams to support affected students and families."

Kenya's deadliest school fire in recent history occurred in 2001 when 67 students died in a dormitory fire in Machakos County.

In 2024, 21 students burned to death in a school fire in central Kenya. President William Ruto declared three days of mourning.

In 2017, 10 students died in a school fire in Nairobi. A student was charged with murder.

### **Think it's hot now? The next five years will smash records, UN says**

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the next five years, the Earth is overwhelmingly likely to surge again and again past the international climate threshold set as safe and shatter its hottest-year record along the way, according to new United Nations climate projections.

The World Meteorological Organization also forecasts an overheating Arctic that warms nearly 3 degrees Fahrenheit (1.66 degrees Celsius) between now and 2030 and a dangerous drought with potential wildfires for the Amazon, a crucial part of Earth's natural defenses to lessen human-caused climate change. A hotter globe from the burning of coal, oil and gas means more extreme weather including floods, droughts and heat waves, scientists said.

The projections by the U.N. climate agency and the United Kingdom's Meteorological Office said there's a 75% chance that the average global temperature between 2026 and 2030 will exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times. That threshold is the agreed-upon limit of warming — averaged over 20 years — set in 2015 by the Paris climate agreement.

A U.N. science report a few years later detailed how exceeding that 1.5 mark means more likely death, danger and species loss. Even though it's only a few tenths of a degree, some of the planet's ecosystems,



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such as coral and glaciers, can't handle the strain.

Passing warming limit has consequences, but no cliff

There's a 91% chance that at least one of the next five years will shoot past the 1.5 degree threshold and an 86% chance that one of those years will smash the record for Earth's hottest year set in 2024, the WMO report said. The WMO projects each year between now and 2030 to be between 1.3 degrees Celsius (2.3 degrees Fahrenheit) and 1.9 degrees Celsius (3.4 degrees Fahrenheit) since the late 1800s.

"It's important to note that (1.5) is not kind of a cliff edge that we're going to fall off," said report co-author Melissa Seabrook, a climate scientist at the U.K. Meteorological Office. "Every kind of 0.1 of a degree has more and more severe impact."

She pointed to unprecedented May heat in Europe this week.

An entire year or more above the 1.5 degree mark "means a whole range of extreme weather events, probably many so hot/wet/dry that it exceeds anything we've experienced in the past and thus crucially, anything our city planning, agriculture etc. has anticipated," Imperial College of London climate scientist Friederike Otto, who wasn't part of the report, said in an email. "This will mean many people will lose their lives, we are in for a lot of food price shocks, and more intense wildfires."

Nearly all the shorter-term forecasts call for a strong El Nino — a natural warming of parts of the central Pacific that alters weather worldwide and spikes global temperatures — to form soon. The WMO report said it could stretch all the way to 2028. Because of that, Seabrook said 2027 will likely break the 2024 heat record.

And if the next five years do average more than 1.5 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times, that means Earth will have warmed a quarter of a degree Celsius (0.45 degrees Fahrenheit) in a decade, which is faster than the previous rates of warming. Those were closer to two-tenths of a degree Celsius per decade.

Climate scientists are debating whether global warming is accelerating, "which obviously is quite scary," and if these projections come true it would give additional evidence to those who see a speeded up rate of change, Seabrook said.

Accelerating warmth forecast in the Arctic

The projections, based on the averaging of about 200 runs of computer simulations using 13 different climate models from various countries, show warming in the Arctic rising 3.5 times faster than the rest of the globe, because there's less ice and snow that had been reflecting solar radiation to space, Seabrook said. It becomes a vicious cycle.

"As the temperature warms, more sea ice melts, the worse this makes it," Seabrook said.

Winters in the Arctic from 2020 to 2025 on average were 2.1 degrees Fahrenheit (1.2 degrees Celsius) warmer than the 1991-2020 average. The WMO projects the next five winters will average 5.1 degrees Fahrenheit (2.8 degrees Celsius) warmer than that recent normal, Seabrook said.

The report also forecasts Arctic sea ice to continue to shrink in the summer.

Amazon may get drier, sparking fire worries

The report calls for even warmer and unusually dry conditions in the Amazon basin, and that could be devastating for both local residents and the planet as a whole, Seabrook said.

People rely on the Amazon for water and the hotter, drier conditions should increase wildfire risk, Seabrook said, threatening to turn the Amazon, which now sucks heat-trapping carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, into a region that worsens the problem.

Africa's Sahel area, which has been extra dry, is likely to get more than normal rain and that could lead to flooding, Seabrook said.

United Nations officials said efforts to curb climate change haven't been enough.

"Despite the progress of recent years, it's clear that global heating is still outpacing global efforts to contain it, and the baking temperatures in Europe, India and elsewhere show yet again the brutal human and economic impacts of humanity still burning colossal amounts of coal, oil and gas," U.N. climate chief Simon Stiell said about the WMO report.

"Whether it's extreme heat, mega-storms, floods, massive wildfires or droughts hitting food supply and prices," he said, "every nation is already paying a huge price from this global climate crisis."

## **Kuwait says it faced a missile and drone attack, another challenge to Iran war's shaky ceasefire**

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Kuwait said it was targeted with a missile and drone attack Thursday, another challenge to the shaky ceasefire in the Iran war following strikes by both Washington and Tehran.

Kuwait's military made the announcement, without providing further details on what had been targeted. Iran said hours later that it launched an attack in the region, but it did not say exactly what was targeted.

Kuwait, a close ally of the U.S., repeatedly came under fire from Iran and Iranian-backed Shiite militias in Iraq during the war.

The announcement comes as the Middle East is on the edge. U.S. President Donald Trump has expressed confidence that his administration is making headway in negotiations with Iran to end the war, but the talks remain in flux.

Trump is looking for an agreement that will reopen the Strait of Hormuz — through which about a fifth of all traded oil and natural gas once passed. He is also seeking to get Iran to give up its stockpile of highly enriched uranium while the Islamic Republic wants economic sanctions to be lifted and frozen assets to be released to aid its shattered economy. The war has been unpopular in the U.S., and Iran's closure of the strait has sent oil prices skyrocketing, driving up fuel prices around the world.

As the negotiations continue, there have been several challenges to the ceasefire in recent days.

On Monday, the U.S. said it conducted what the Pentagon called "defensive" strikes on missile launch sites and minelaying boats in southern Iran. U.S. officials said late Wednesday in Washington that forces launched more strikes on Iran, shooting down four one-way attack drones that posed a threat around the strait and hitting an Iranian ground control station in Bandar Abbas that was about to launch a fifth drone.

The officials were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard via the state-run IRNA news agency acknowledged the attack around Bandar Abbas International Airport and said it launched its own retaliatory attack on the air base that launched the assault.

It did not elaborate on the target and it wasn't clear whether that was the attack that Kuwait announced.

## **Israeli strikes kill at least 8 in Lebanon's fourth largest city ahead of Washington talks**

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The Israeli military early Thursday pounded Lebanon's fourth largest city, killing at least eight people in its ongoing military escalation against the Hezbollah group ahead of crucial talks in Washington.

Several others were injured in the strikes, according to Lebanon's state-run National News Agency.

An Israeli soldier meanwhile in northern Israel was killed in a Hezbollah drone attack, the military said.

The intensification comes after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced an expansion in the Israeli military's attacks in Lebanon, apparently sparked by Hezbollah's use of fiber-optic exploding drones that have struck Israeli troops in Lebanon and reached some of Israel's northern border towns.

Lebanese and Israeli military officials are set to hold their first security talks on Friday in the U.S. capital. The talks have extended a nominal ceasefire that went into effect April 17, although the attacks have since intensified while sparing the Lebanese capital Beirut.

Hezbollah has dismissed the talks and instead endorsed its key ally Iran, which has made ending the war in Lebanon a condition for its own talks with Washington brokered by Pakistan.

Prior to the attacks on Thursday, Israeli military Arabic spokesperson Avichay Adraee issued warnings to eight buildings in the coastal city of Tyre along the Mediterranean and surrounding neighborhoods. Many people have fled the area.

Further north in the city of Sidon, an Israeli drone struck an apartment building where some displaced families lived.

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Mohammad Al-Gharbi, who lived across the street from the building in Sidon, woke to the sound of the explosion.

"I was in my room when part of the wall and shattered glass fell on me, and everything was thrown into chaos," he said. "This building that was hit had six apartments occupied by poor families who had fled from the south to escape the attacks there, only to be hit here."

In the nearby coastal town of Adloun, an Israeli drone struck a car with a family that was fleeing, killing six people including children. Another drone strike that came without warning killed two people on a motorcycle near Tyre. The target of the attack was not immediately clear, NNA reported.

The Israeli military said Thursday that a soldier in northern Israel was killed in a Hezbollah drone attack and two reservists were wounded.

Hezbollah has claimed dozens of drone and rocket attacks that it says targeted Israeli troops in southern Lebanon and northern Israel.

Over 1 million people in Lebanon have been displaced by the war between Israel and Hezbollah, which was sparked when Hezbollah fired rockets into northern Israel on March 2 in solidarity with Iran, two days after the Iran war began.

At least 3,269 people have been killed in Israeli strikes since the start of the war, according to the Lebanese Health Ministry, with over 9,800 wounded.

According to Netanyahu's office, at least 23 Israeli soldiers and a defense contractor have been killed in or near southern Lebanon and two civilians have been killed in northern Israel, the vast majority by drones.

## Australia launches record \$1.4B lawsuit against 3M over 'forever chemicals' at defense bases

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Australia is suing U.S. conglomerate 3M for more than 2 billion Australian dollars (\$1.4 billion) over so-called "forever chemical" contamination from firefighting foam at defense bases, the government said on Thursday.

The government's largest-ever claim for compensation relates to contamination with per- and polyfluoralkyl substances, known as PFAS, at 28 bases. Human-made PFAS are commonly referred to as "forever chemicals" because they don't break down naturally.

Australia filed the suit in the Federal Court of Australia against Minnesota-based 3M Company and its subsidiary 3M Australia.

3M said it would fight Australia's claim.

"3M has never manufactured PFAS in Australia and ceased sales of the products at issue in Australia around two decades ago," 3M said in a statement. "Despite this, the (Australian) Department of Defense continued to use PFAS-containing firefighting foams for nearly two decades longer."

PFAS has been used since the 1950s in household and industrial products that resist heat, stains, grease and water. The firefighting foam containing PFAS was effective against fuel fires.

The Australian Defense Department warned residents near its Richmond Air Base outside Sydney in 2018 to reduce their consumption of locally produced fish and eggs, after PFAS was found in nearby groundwater.

Attorney-General Michelle Rowland on Thursday accused 3M of withholding information about environmental risks the foam posed.

"The Commonwealth (of Australia) is seeking more than AU\$2 billion (\$1.4 billion) in damages to recover significant past and future expenses incurred in investigating and managing contamination resulting from the historic storage and use of this foam," Rowland told reporters.

Assistant Defense Minister Peter Khalil said his department had already spent AU\$1.3 billion (\$920 million) on managing and mitigating environmental impacts of the foam. The department had removed 200,000 metric tons (220,000 U.S. tons) of contaminated earth from bases and treated 13 billion liters (3.4 billion gallons) of contaminated water, Khalil said.

"We are prepared to take on powerful corporations when Australians and Australian communities have



been impacted," Khalil said.

## **US military strikes another alleged drug boat in the eastern Pacific, killing 2**

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. military on Wednesday struck another vessel suspected of transporting drugs in the eastern Pacific Ocean, killing two men.

U.S. Southern Command posted video on social media showing a boat resting on the water before being struck by an explosion. The last few seconds of the video show smoke and fire rising from the boat.

A day earlier, U.S. forces had launched a strike on an alleged drug vessel in the eastern Pacific, killing one man and leaving two survivors. Southern Command said it "immediately notified the U.S. Coast Guard to activate the Search and Rescue system for the survivors."

The Trump administration's campaign of blowing up alleged drug-trafficking vessels in Latin American waters, including the eastern Pacific and the Caribbean Sea, has gone on since early September and killed at least 196 people in total. The military has not provided evidence that any of the vessels were carrying drugs.

The Pentagon watchdog said last week that it will evaluate whether the U.S. military followed an established targeting framework when carrying out the attacks on alleged drug-smuggling boats. The six-phase Joint Targeting Cycle include a military commander's intent, target development, analysis, decision, execution and assessment.

The Pentagon inspector general's office said the review was "self-initiated." It will not probe the legality of the strikes, which have drawn intense scrutiny from some Democratic lawmakers and military legal scholars.

The Trump administration says the U.S. is at war against the Latin American drug cartels, which it says are responsible for the scourge of fatal drug overdoses plaguing many American communities.

## **Inside an African hotel where asylum seekers deported by the US are imprisoned**

By MONIKA PRONCZUK Associated Press

MALABO, Equatorial Guinea (AP) — At first glance, the hotel looks like any other on this tropical island off the Central African coast, with its palm tree-lined driveway, marble-floored foyer and portrait of the oil-rich country's president hanging behind a mahogany reception desk.

Yet the eerily empty Bamy Hotel is not a refuge for adventure-seeking tourists or international business travelers these days. Since late last year, only a small number of people have been staying there, and they aren't on vacation. They are being held against their will.

Under an opaque \$7.5 million deal with the Trump administration, Equatorial Guinea's all-powerful president, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, has turned this hotel owned by his family into a prison for asylum seekers deported from the United States.

The hotel is just a way station, though. Of the at least 32 people imprisoned there since November — all of whom had previously been granted protection from U.S. judges, their lawyers said — 25 have been forced to go back to home countries across Africa where their lives might be in danger. The rest face pressure from authorities to leave.

"Government people would come all the time and say: Where is your passport? You need to go back to your own country," said a 26-year-old man from an East African country imprisoned at the hotel. Out of fear of retaliation, he spoke on condition of anonymity, as did two other deportees interviewed by The Associated Press.

The Trump administration uses deportations to third countries as a legal loophole, immigration lawyers say, to indirectly force asylum seekers back to their home countries.

Because Equatorial Guinea is run by an authoritarian government — as are some other countries that have signed similar deals — it is difficult for foreign journalists to visit and report directly on conditions

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there. AP traveled to the island of Bioko as part of a recent visit by the first American pope, and is the only international news organization to visit the hotel detaining migrants.

Pressured to return to countries they fear

Trapped for now in a country many had never heard of before arriving, men and women from Angola, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Mauritania wander the hotel's long corridors and gaze out the windows at the shimmering pool they are not allowed to use.

They haven't faced any physical abuse, but they feel intense psychological pressure knowing they are likely headed back to home countries they fear.

"I am scared and depressed," said the East African man.

Because of his ethnicity and the fact he fled his home country, he said he would be imprisoned or killed if forced to return. All of the asylum seekers at the hotel face a high risk of persecution back home, human rights experts say.

Under a series of murky and often-secret agreements, the Trump administration has deported thousands of people to nearly two dozen countries that are not their own, advocates say, all part of the broad U.S. crackdown on immigration. The countries with agreements are mostly in the developing world, according to the group Third Country Deportation Watch, including roughly a dozen in Africa. Experts say countries accepting the deportees may be doing so to earn goodwill in negotiations with the U.S. over trade, migration or aid.

The Trump administration declined to comment on the details of its deal with Equatorial Guinea. A State Department spokesperson said, "we remain unwavering in our commitment to end illegal and mass immigration."

The Obiang administration did not respond to a request seeking comment.

Trapped in the surreal and the mundane

As the man from East Africa at the Bamy Hotel recounted his journey, a government minder who spoke little English sat nearby, scrolling on his phone in an otherwise empty conference room.

After traveling from Africa to Brazil, the man said, he arrived in August 2024 at the U.S. border, where he was detained. He then was shuffled between immigration centers in California, Arizona and Louisiana — before landing in Equatorial Guinea almost six months ago.

The deportees' daily routines at the hotel are mundane, though the setting makes it all seem surreal, he said.

They sleep in fancy rooms that rarely get cleaned, he said, and they are served rice and meat at white cloth tables set up inside the hotel's restaurant. After being sickened by the food several times, the East African man said he eats the bare minimum.

A local lawyer brings new toothbrushes, cellphone SIM cards, and, for women, sanitary products.

Medical care has been uneven. The East African man was driven to the hospital right away after complaining of an eye problem. But when he came down with malaria and typhoid, he was not taken to a hospital until his condition had greatly deteriorated, requiring an IV. Other detainees have had similar experiences, he said.

Recently, the East African man complained to a police officer about his situation. The officer responded by saying his problems would go away if he went to the hotel's fourth floor and jumped out the window.

"What can I do now? It's become worse," he said, his frail body shaking. "I started losing my mind."

The US has strong ties to, and criticisms of, Equatorial Guinea

Equatorial Guinea is one of the richest countries in Africa thanks to its oil resources. It is also rife with corruption and human rights abuses, according to U.S. officials.

A former Spanish colony, the country fell into economic despair after gaining independence in 1968. Its fate shifted in the 1990s when U.S. companies started drilling for oil along its vast coastline. The subsequent boom transformed the economy, yet over half the population still lives in poverty.

The country's oil-fueled wealth has been largely pocketed by Obiang and his family, according to rights groups. Obiang's 57-year-old son and heir apparent, Teodoro "Teodorin" Obiang Nguema, chronicles his lavish lifestyle on TikTok — soaking in infinity pools, feasting on lobster, traveling on private jets — even

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as citizens of Equatorial Guinea are banned from the platform.

The younger Obiang, who serves as vice president, has faced international sanctions because of corruption across his father's administration. But the U.S. lifted sanctions, allowing the younger Obiang to travel to a high-level U.N. meeting in New York last September, just weeks before the deportations to Equatorial Guinea began.

There are virtually no critical voices in Equatorial Guinea, where the government has been accused by rights groups and the U.S. State Department of detaining, torturing and even killing those that dare to speak out.

Despite that, its largest foreign investors are U.S. businesses, and its military receives funding for training from the U.S. government.

East African migrant awaits his fate

The deportees still at the Bamy Hotel know they can be sent home any day.

Representatives of the U.N.'s International Organization for Migration, and its refugee agency, visited the hotel in November, and promised the deportees they would come back. They never did.

The East African man is the only one among them that has been allowed to see a lawyer, though it's not clear why.

While Equatorial Guinea has no asylum policy, his lawyer made a formal request with the prime minister's office — a long shot worth taking if there was any chance of being released from the hotel.

He was told to plead for mercy with the country's vice president, but his asylum claim was rejected.

The next morning, authorities deported five other people, leaving him anguished as he awaits his fate. He was told he would be next.

## Verdict due in trial of man who admits plot to attack a Taylor Swift concert in Vienna

By PHILIPP JENNE Associated Press

WIENER NEUSTADT, Austria (AP) — A verdict is expected Thursday in the case of a man who admitted to plotting to attack a Taylor Swift concert in Vienna nearly two years ago.

The plot was thwarted, but Austrian authorities still canceled Swift's three performances in August 2024.

The defendant, a 21-year-old Austrian citizen known only as Beran A. in line with Austrian privacy rules, faces charges including terrorist offenses and membership in a terrorist organization.

His defense attorney said he pleaded guilty to the charges related to the concert plot during the opening day of the trial last month. He could face up to 20 years in prison.

Beran A. allegedly planned to target people outside the Ernst Happel Stadium with knives or homemade explosives. Tens of thousands of Taylor Swift fans, known as Swifties, had travelled to Austria to attend the performances of the American singer's record-setting Eras Tour. Devastated by the cancellations, many gathered in central Vienna to trade friendship bracelets and commiserate about the cancellations.

Beran A. is facing trial alongside Arda K., whose full name also has not been made public. They, along with a third man who was arrested and remains in pretrial detention in Saudi Arabia, allegedly planned to carry out simultaneous attacks in Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates during Ramadan 2024 in the name of the Islamic State group.

Only Beran A. was charged in connection with the concert plot. He pleaded not guilty to the charges related to the plot for simultaneous attacks.

It wasn't immediately clear how long the court would need to reach a verdict on Thursday, as experts still have to be heard and closing arguments made.

## France moves to repeal Code Noir, the slavery law it never abolished

By THOMAS ADAMSON Associated Press



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PARIS (AP) — For nearly two centuries after France abolished slavery, the colonial-era law that classified humans as property remained quietly in place. On Thursday, lawmakers will finally move to eliminate it.

The bill, expected to be adopted by the National Assembly, will repeal Code Noir, or Black Code, the 1685 decree King Louis XIV signed to govern slaves across France's colonies.

The law turned human beings into chattel, allowing them to be worked, beaten, sold, raped and killed — and France never formally did away with it.

That realization has left many aghast.

"That shocks me," said Muriel Jean-Baptiste, a Paris-born nurse whose parents are from Martinique, a French overseas department in the Caribbean.

"A law that treated Black people as property was left sitting there," she said.

The code's reach was total. Article 44 declared the enslaved "movable property." Other sections ordered mutilation for those who fled, and dictated that the word of an enslaved person counted for nothing.

Code Noir's 60 articles "should never have survived the abolition of slavery" in the 19th century, President Emmanuel Macron said last week.

"The silence, even the indifference, that we have maintained for nearly two centuries toward this Black Code is no longer an oversight," Macron said. "It has become a form of offense."

Like French presidents before him, Macron stopped short of an apology.

France ran the third-largest slave trade, shipping about 1.4 million Africans to plantations whose sugar wealth built the French cities of Nantes and Bordeaux. Its empire later spanned four continents.

Others see the repeal as something more telling — a symptom, they argue, of a country that has yet to reckon fully with that past, one of many slow steps along the way.

Calls for France to face its past

In law, officially eliminating it is the easy part, observers say. Code Noir lost all authority in 1848, when France abolished slavery.

France didn't relinquish its slave colonies: the four oldest — Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana and Réunion — were made full French overseas departments in 1946. That means they're governed from Paris like any other.

Their roughly 1.9 million people, most descended from the enslaved, are French citizens.

Despite being fully part of France, the overseas departments remain among its poorest territories. Unemployment runs roughly double the mainland rate, and more than three-quarters of households in Mayotte live below the national poverty line.

Shocked to find the law wasn't annulled

Before he discovered the truth, the French lawmaker who put forward the proposal to repeal the law didn't know it still existed.

Max Mathiasin, from Guadeloupe, had bought copies of the text over the years and left them on his shelf.

"As the great-great-grandson of people who were enslaved, I had never been able to read it in full," he said. "This was made by human beings — against human beings."

For him, the vote is "a way of restoring our ancestors, restoring our humanity" before a France whose motto is liberty, equality, fraternity. "It means living up to the Republican promise."

That promise, he says, is still unkept at home.

"In Guadeloupe," Mathiasin said, "in the most important positions, in the structures of the state, they are white."

A colonial exception that never ended

The Foundation for the Memory of Slavery is chaired by a former prime minister, Jean-Marc Ayrault, and its deputy director is Pierre-Yves Bocquet — both white men.

Bocquet calls Code Noir the birthplace of France's "colonial exception" — the principle that the French Republic's founding rights could be suspended for those under its rule.

The principle outlived the empire, he said: "Even today, we accept that people in the overseas territories can have fewer rights than in mainland France."

France is hardly the only country still holding fragments of empire — the United Kingdom and the United

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States still have overseas territories.

But what sets France apart, observers say, is that it made its slave colonies equal departments of the Republic, not dependencies it governs from afar.

The state insists that the overseas departments are France like anywhere else, even as the people who live there say they are treated as less.

France is 'still in a form of apartheid'

For Max Relouzat, 81, president of the Association for the Memory of Slaveries, the repeal matters, because so little else has.

His African ancestor had no name under the law, only a number and a registration code — the family that lived in Martinique was given the name Relouzat at emancipation, likely after Nelouzat, a village in the Auvergne region of central France.

What galls him, he said, is what the symbolism leaves untouched: systemic racism in France.

"Under the cover of departmentalization, a colonial system was maintained," Relouzat said. "If the overseas departments are part of France, why is there a ministry for the overseas?"

In France, he said, "we are still today in a form of apartheid ... a form of colonial continuity."

'Racism is the legacy of slavery itself'

For some who have fought longest, Thursday isn't the milestone it appears.

For Florence Alexis, a slavery expert and daughter of the Haitian writer Jacques Stephen Alexis, the real turning point came 25 years ago. In 2001, the Taubira law made France the first country to call the slave trade, and slavery, crimes against humanity.

"That is what changed my life," Alexis said.

For her, racism is the legacy of slavery itself, not of one edict.

"When I was a child at school, they called me the little monkey," she said. "People made animal cries when I walked past — as they still do in football stadiums today."

Paris-born Élodie Léon, 29, whose family is from French Guiana, welcomes the repeal, but resents the delay.

"Symbolic neglect is also neglect," she said.

The history of reparations

At the Taubira law's 25th anniversary on May 21, Macron floated the idea of reparations — something that France has long stay away from addressing.

He called it "a question we must not refuse," but one on which "we must not make false promises."

He committed no money, instead defining repair first as truth-telling, education and historical work.

The wealthiest of France's plantations were in Saint-Domingue, where the enslaved rose up and won independence in 1804 as Haiti. France then forced the freed to pay reparations for the loss of their masters — a debt cleared only in 1947.

France isn't alone. In the United States, federal reparations legislation has stalled for decades. California approved an apology, but no cash.

But the timing of Macron's latest speech was awkward. Two months earlier, France abstained when the U.N. General Assembly voted 123-3, with 52 abstentions, to call the trans-Atlantic slave trade the gravest crime against humanity.

And this month at the Africa Forward Summit in Kenya, days after declaring himself a "pan-Africanist," Macron seized a microphone and ordered the room to quiet down.

"As soon as he sets foot on the African continent," French opposition lawmaker Danièle Obono said, "he can't help but behave like a colonizer."

The repeal of Code Noir, said Bocquet, "will have no direct effect." Whether it helps France fight racism and inequality in its overseas territories, he said, "remains to be seen."

"It is easy for the French authorities, and for Macron, to do this," Alexis added. "Because it commits them to nothing."

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## California Democrats shrug at their choices in packed race to replace Newsom

By SOPHIE AUSTIN Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — The packed race for California governor has left many Democrats in the state wrestling with who to vote for in the race's closing days.

Though voting began in early May ahead of the June 2 primary, Democrats have been returning their ballots at a slower pace than normal after a chaotic campaign full of surprises. Unlike recent races for governor, there's been no clear frontrunner or political superstar (think Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger or Democrat Jerry Brown).

"I'm kind of pinching my nose and voting this go-around rather than being excited," said Colin Culver, a 21-year-old San Diego resident who ultimately voted for Tom Steyer, a billionaire hedge fund manager turned climate activist.

Democrats have been particularly perplexed given the state's top-two primary system, which places all candidates on a single ballot regardless of party. There are roughly 60 candidates vying to succeed termed-out Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom. They include six major Democrats and just two prominent Republicans.

With the large number of Democrats running, party leaders feared months ago that the two leading Republicans, Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco and conservative commentator Steve Hilton, could advance, locking out Democrats. That scenario has grown less likely after former Rep. Eric Swalwell dropped out of the race after being accused of sexual assault, but the scandal further rattled anxious Democrats. President Donald Trump endorsed Hilton in April, which may have coalesced GOP support behind him and decreased the odds of a Republican upset in a state that hasn't had a Republican governor since 2011.

But the fear among voters remains. Some Democrats are waiting to cast their ballots to see if one candidate breaks away from the pack in the final days, relying on polling to help make their decision. Others have struggled to make up their minds, reluctantly choosing a candidate after being unimpressed with the field.

Voters are returning their ballots later than normal

Even Democrats who typically have a high turnout in primary elections — often older, white voters — have been slow to drop off their ballots, said Paul Mitchell, a Democratic strategist tracking ballot returns.

"My joke is: Call your Democratic parents and tell them to turn in their ballot," he said. "They are holding onto the ballot because they have seen this kind of topsy-turvy governor's race. They're waiting to make sure they're making the right choice."

About 10% of the state's roughly 23 million voters had voted as of Wednesday, according to Mitchell's tracker. That includes about 15% of Republicans, 10% of Democrats and 7% of voters registered with no or another party. That breakdown is unusual because Democrats in recent years have tended to vote early while many Republicans wait until Election Day.

Democrats toggle between candidates

Former state attorney general and federal Health secretary Xavier Becerra and Steyer are among the top Democrats voters are weighing.

A poll conducted in mid-May by the Public Policy Institute of California found that Becerra and Hilton each have the support of about 2 in 10 likely California primary voters. Steyer, Bianco and former Congresswoman Katie Porter each drew the support of between 10% and 15% of likely voters in the survey. No other candidates were polling in double digits.

Support for Becerra has increased from only 5% in a PPIC poll conducted in late March and early April, when Swalwell was still in the race.

Some voters aren't relying on the polls to make their choice. That includes San Francisco native Mary O'Neal, who voted for former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa because she liked his record leading the city from 2005 to 2013. Although he's been on the debate stages, he's failed to generate significant support.



Fresno native Alexa Duran, 22, a recent graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, said she's leaning toward Becerra, despite her concerns about his refusal as attorney general to investigate the killing of a Latino man by an officer in the San Francisco Bay Area in 2020.

"I know he has tons of political experience, but I'm just not sure if he's the right candidate," Duran said. Amber Larson, 41, a judicial analyst for the state living in Chico, likes Ramsey Robinson, a socialist candidate. But casting her ballot for him would be a "waste" due to his slim odds, she said.

She doesn't want to support a longtime politician — Becerra — and she's skeptical of billionaires — Steyer. "Are we at a point where only a billionaire can beat an establishment, career politician?" Larson said, referencing Steyer spending millions to largely self-fund his campaign.

She planned to go with Steyer anyway because she likes his energy affordability plans and since he's one of the leading candidates.

"I don't want to throw my vote away," she said.

## 'Shoot me up with a big one': A timeline of the last days of Matthew Perry

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — After a lifetime of sobriety struggles, Matthew Perry spent the last days of his life desperately seeking the ketamine that would ultimately cause his death.

The 2 1/2-year investigation and prosecution that followed came to a close Wednesday with the sentencing of his personal assistant Kenneth Iwamasa, who bought him the drugs, gave him injections, and found him dead in the hot tub of the house they shared on Oct. 23, 2023. The 54-year-old "Friends" star had told Iwamasa to shoot him up "with a big one."

Here's a chronological look at the end of Perry's life, drawn from federal court documents, a medical examiner's investigation and law enforcement reports.

The final month

Sometime in September of 2023 — Perry asks Iwamasa to help him get illegal ketamine. Working with his regular doctor, Perry had been receiving legal ketamine treatments for depression — an increasingly common off-label use of the surgical anesthetic. But he wanted more. Perry's family members would later say they had known Iwamasa for decades, and trusted him to help keep the actor sober.

Sept. 30, 2023 — Told by a patient that he knew a prominent person willing to pay big money for ketamine, Dr. Salvador Plasencia meets with Perry and Iwamasa at their home in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles. Plasencia texts a doctor friend, Mark Chavez, who agrees to obtain ketamine for him. "I wonder how much this moron will pay," Plasencia texts Chavez. Later the same day, Plasencia returns to Perry's house, where Iwamasa pays him \$4,500 in cash for four vials. Plasencia gives Perry two injections, and teaches Iwamasa how to do it.

Oct. 2, 2023 — Iwamasa texts Plasencia seeking more ketamine, referring to it in code as "dr pepper." Plasencia appears, gives Perry the injections, and leaves behind more vials.

Oct. 4, 2023 — Iwamasa injects Perry without help for the first time. He texts the doctor that he had found "the sweet spot" to put the needle into his boss, but that trying different spots on Perry had led to them running out of ketamine and says they need more. Plasencia texts Chavez asking if he can keep supplying the drug so they can become Perry's "go-to."

Oct. 8, 2023 — In a late night meetup at a Santa Monica shopping plaza, Plasencia sells Iwamasa four vials of ketamine for \$6,000 in cash.

Oct. 10, 2023 — Iwamasa drives Perry to a public parking lot in Long Beach to meet with Plasencia. The doctor sells them more ketamine and gives an injection to Perry as he sits in a car. The same day, Perry asks a friend about other sources. She sends him to Erik Fleming, a licensed drug counselor she knows who has relapsed into addiction.

Oct. 11, 2023 — Fleming messages Iwamasa that he can get ketamine from a dealer he knows, Jasveen

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Sangha, who prosecutors dub "The Ketamine Queen." Fleming says she only deals "with high end and celebs."

Oct. 12, 2023 — Plasencia goes to Perry's house, where he is paid \$21,000 in cash, some of it owed to him for previous ketamine buys. While there, he injects Perry. The actor immediately freezes up and his blood pressure spikes. The assistant said the doctor told him, "let's not do that again."

Oct. 13, 2023 — Perry gets a sample of Sangha's ketamine and tries it. He and Iwamasa ask for 25 vials of it, for which they pay \$5,500 to Sangha and another \$500 to Fleming. Fleming drops it off at Perry's house a day later.

Around Oct. 20, 2023 — Perry receives his last legal ketamine treatment from his regular physician.

The final week

Oct. 23, 2023 — Iwamasa pays \$6,000 to Fleming and Sangha for 25 more vials of ketamine.

Oct. 24, 2023 — Iwamasa gives Perry six to eight injections, a daily dosage that would continue until the actor's death.

Oct. 25, 2023 — Fleming makes a third and final delivery of another 25 vials of ketamine for another \$6,000. This batch includes the fatal dose.

Oct. 27, 2023 — With the supply coming from Sangha, Perry and Iwamasa had been out of touch with Plasencia for about two weeks. Plasencia texts Iwamasa, saying he had more to offer: "I know you mentioned taking a break. I have been stocking up."

The final day

Oct. 28, 2023, about 8:30 a.m. — Using syringes from Plasencia and ketamine from Sangha, Iwamasa gives Perry an injection.

About 11 a.m. — Perry plays pickleball.

About 12:45 p.m. — Iwamasa gives Perry his second shot of the day, and the actor begins watching a movie.

About 1:30 p.m. — Iwamasa gives Perry his third and final injection of the day while Perry sits in or near his backyard Jacuzzi. "Shoot me up with a big one," Iwamasa remembers Perry telling him. Iwamasa leaves to run errands.

About 4 p.m. — Iwamasa returns home to find Perry face down in the Jacuzzi. Paramedics arrive minutes later and declare Perry dead. When Iwamasa talks to police, he does not mention Perry's illegal ketamine consumption, or his role in it, and hides evidence of it. Sangha and Fleming learn of Perry's death and delete their message history.

The aftermath

Dec. 15 — An autopsy report is released, saying the acute effects of ketamine were the primary cause of Perry's death, with drowning as a secondary cause.

January 2024 — A search warrant is served at Perry and Iwamasa's home. Over the course of several interviews, the assistant admits to his role in Perry's illegal drug use. He points investigators to Fleming and gives them information on Plasencia, whom they have already identified.

March 2024 — A search warrant is served on Fleming's sister's home, where he was staying. He gave up Sangha to prosecutors and became an essential witness along with Iwamasa.

Aug. 7, 2024 — Iwamasa pleads guilty to one count of conspiracy to distribute ketamine causing death. He will be sentenced to 3 1/2 years in prison.

Aug. 8, 2024 — Fleming pleads guilty to one count of conspiracy to distribute ketamine and one count of distribution of ketamine resulting in death. He will be sentenced to two years in prison.

Oct. 2, 2024 — Chavez pleads guilty to one count of conspiracy to distribute ketamine. He will get eight months of home detention.

July 23, 2025 — Plasencia pleads guilty to four counts of distribution of ketamine. He will get 2 1/2 years in prison.

Sept. 3, 2025 — Sangha pleads guilty to three counts of distribution of ketamine, one count of using her home for a drug operation and one count of distribution of ketamine resulting in death. She will get 15 years in prison.

## Iran war has complicated plans for an international force in Gaza that has yet to materialize

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — The International Stabilization Force for Gaza was announced with great aplomb at the inaugural meeting of U.S. President Donald Trump's Board of Peace in February. The American general tapped to lead the 20,000-strong force said it would ensure "future prosperity and enduring peace" after the devastating Israel-Hamas war.

Three months on, he still has no force to lead as none of the five countries that pledged troops have come through with any significant contributions.

Efforts to shore up the fragile ceasefire have stalled as Hamas has refused to disarm and Israel has seized more territory while continuing to strike what it says are militant targets, often killing civilians.

The Iran war has meanwhile made it more difficult for Arab and Muslim leaders to openly cooperate with the United States and Israel, which many in the region view as aggressors, and the resulting global energy crisis has sapped their resources.

Indonesian commitment of 8,000 troops on indefinite hold

The biggest blow to the planned force came about a week after the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28, when Indonesia put its commitment of 8,000 troops on indefinite hold. Some 1,000 were to have been sent in April, followed by the remainder in June.

Indonesia's pledge was by far the largest of the group, which also includes Morocco, Kazakhstan, Kosovo and Albania. U.S. Maj. Gen. Jasper Jeffers, who spoke at the Board of Peace event, was to command the force.

Indonesia suspended its plans over what Defense Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin said last week seemed to be a lack of commitment from a distracted Washington, saying "we have not yet received any implementation guidelines."

"New dynamics have emerged," he told parliament. "Because the intensity of the conflict between U.S. and Iranian forces remains very high, the BoP has tended to be left behind. Since the BoP has been left behind, the ISF has also been left behind."

US attack on Iran influenced Indonesia's decision

Domestic issues may have factored into Indonesia's decision, said Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat, director of the Indonesia-Middle East/North Africa desk at Jakarta's Center for Economic and Law Studies.

The Iran war is extremely unpopular in Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country. The economy is suffering from soaring prices as a result of the conflict, and there is widespread skepticism of the Board of Peace.

"If you talk to the people on the street, I don't think they believe that the Board of Peace will actually help the people of Gaza," Rakhmat said. There are also concerns about sending troops to the Middle East when the economy is faltering, he added.

Indonesia lost four peacekeepers who were part of the United Nations mission in Lebanon during fighting between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah. That has further soured public opinion on such international commitments, he said.

Board of Peace blames stalled ceasefire on Hamas

The U.S. military's Central Command declined to comment or make Jeffers available for an interview, referring all queries to the Board of Peace.

Board of Peace spokesman Brad Klapper also declined to comment on Indonesia's decision or the future of the stabilization force, pointing instead to May 21 remarks made at the U.N. by Nikolay Mladenov, a former Bulgarian defense minister who Trump appointed director of the Board of Peace.

Mladenov said the international force would not be able to begin operations until there was agreement and implementation of a second phase of the ceasefire, which would see Hamas disarm and Israel begin



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to withdraw. Israeli troops control some 60% of Gaza.

Mladenov has blamed the deadlock on Hamas, saying its disarmament is "non-negotiable" and is holding up progress on other fronts, including Israel's withdrawal and reconstruction.

"You cannot build a future with armed groups running the streets, hiding in tunnels and stockpiling weapons," Mladenov said in Jerusalem this month. "You cannot deliver reconstruction with militias on every corner."

Hamas blames delays on Israel

Hamas says Israel has repeatedly violated the ceasefire, holding up its further implementation, and has accused Mladenov of siding with Israel.

Israeli strikes have killed more than 880 Palestinians since the ceasefire, according to local health officials. Israel says it was responding to violations of the truce.

Hamas is also demanding Israel withdraw from areas seized since the start of the ceasefire, according to an Egyptian official with knowledge of the discussions, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss closed-door talks. Egypt has long served as a mediator with Hamas.

Many of the countries that have pledged forces have refused to send troops without a deal on Hamas disarming, the official said.

Token forces committed and none yet known to be on the ground

Kazakhstan has said its support for the stabilization force would be limited to "the humanitarian component," including sending medical units with a field hospital. Its Foreign Ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

Albania's Defense Ministry also declined to comment on its troop commitment, saying it was a "dynamic and ongoing process."

Earlier this month, its chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Arben Kingji, told reporters that while the military had "participated in reconnaissance activities," no troops had yet been sent. He said only a few would be dispatched as part of the stabilization force headquarters, without giving numbers, adding that further contributions would be considered.

Kosovo, which is expected to send 20 troops, said in April that it was in the "final phase of preparations." The Defense Ministry did not reply to a request for an update.

Morocco's Foreign Ministry also did not reply. At the inaugural meeting of the Board of Peace, Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita said it would deploy "high-level military officers to the joint military command of the ISF."

Indonesian turnaround can't be ruled out

Despite the delays from Indonesia, Rakhmat said it was too early to rule out eventual participation in the stabilization force.

President Prabowo Subianto is a former army general who has been keen to raise Indonesia's profile on the world stage and wants to avoid jeopardizing economic ties with the U.S., Rakhmat said.

"Prabowo wants to strengthen ties to Washington and sign different agreements with the U.S., so to completely withdraw and completely cancel the plan, I don't think it's on the table," he said.

## Newsom seeks to shield California elections from federal interference before Tuesday primary

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

Gov. Gavin Newsom signed legislation Wednesday that aims to shield California elections from federal interference, saying he expected President Donald Trump's administration to try to meddle in the mid-terms this year.

The law, which took effect immediately and came days before next Tuesday's primary, prohibits any person — including federal agents — from accessing voter rolls or election technology without a court order. Law enforcement officers are restricted from disrupting election workers, except in public safety

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emergencies.

Trump administration officials so far have said they have no plans to send immigration agents to polling locations across the U.S., a concern raised this year by several Democratic secretaries of state. But Newsom warned "we have to be prepared for everything" because "there's no rules anymore with the Trump administration."

Voting is already underway in California's closely watched primary for governor, where a crowded field of Democrats and two viable Republicans are vying for just two spots on the November ballot. Under the state's open primary system, only the top two vote-getters advance to the general election, regardless of party affiliation.

Newsom, who cannot seek a third term, said the election law is a response to "legitimate anxiety" about Trump's tactics, primarily in Democratic-led states, where the president has deployed federal agents over the objections of local leaders. The Democratic governor warned against underestimating someone who "doesn't believe in free and fair elections."

"I expect the worst with Trump because he's done the worst," he said at a news conference.

White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson told The Associated Press later Wednesday that Trump is committed to ensuring that Americans have full confidence in the administration of elections.

"Instead of levying false attacks at the President, Newsom should look in the mirror," she said in a statement, using Trump's derogatory nickname for Newsom.

In an interview last year with Vanity Fair, White House chief of staff Susie Wiles knocked down the idea that Trump would deploy the military to suppress voting, saying it was "categorically false."

The California law also makes it a crime to knowingly take voted ballots out of the custody of election officials.

Earlier this year, the FBI under Trump seized the 2020 general election ballots from Georgia's most populous county, which is heavily Democratic and has long been at the center of the president's false claims that fraud cost him the race. The FBI and Justice Department also have sought records from previous elections in the largest counties in Arizona and Michigan.

Trump triggered a national redistricting frenzy ahead of the midterms when he urged Republicans in Texas and elsewhere to redraw their U.S. House districts to help the party retain control of the closely divided chamber. Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Florida and Tennessee also have enacted new maps that could benefit Republicans, and Louisiana is expected to be next.

Republicans so far think they could gain as many as 14 seats from redistricting in November, while Democrats think they could gain six in California and Utah.

## US military conducts another strike against Iran after Trump says Iran is 'negotiating on fumes'

By AAMER MADHANI and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. forces carried out new defensive strikes on Iran on Wednesday after President Donald Trump asserted that Iran is "negotiating on fumes" and insisted that November's midterm elections in the United States won't make him rush into a deal to end the nearly three-month-old conflict.

U.S. Central Command forces shot down four Iranian one-way attack drones that posed a threat around the Strait of Hormuz, according to U.S. officials who were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The U.S. military also struck an Iranian ground control station in Bandar Abbas that was about to launch a fifth drone, the officials said.

Details about the strikes emerged after Trump, at a Cabinet meeting earlier Wednesday, expressed confidence that his administration was making headway on settling the war, even though the talks still remain very much in flux.

The president is looking for a settlement that will reopen the Strait of Hormuz and provide him with a credible argument that Iran's nuclear capability has been diminished enough to declare victory, winding

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down a conflict that's been politically unpopular for Republicans.

But as things stand, Trump also risks finding that closure to his war of choice comes with an unsatisfactory ending.

The emerging deal puts off many critical issues to be resolved later and has already exposed the Republican president to fierce criticism — even from some of his own supporters — that Iran's hardline leaders will emerge from the conflict battered but emboldened. It all comes to a head just as the midterm elections to determine control of Congress come into focus and as Republicans worry that rising costs and fuel prices are darkening the American electorate's mood.

But Trump on Wednesday dismissed the idea that the upcoming elections would shape his Iran strategy. "They thought they were gonna outwait me. You know, 'We'll outwait him. He's got the midterms,'" Trump said. "I don't care about the midterms."

Trump acknowledged there's still work to do, but he spoke with a measure of certainty that the two sides would get there.

"They want very much to make a deal," Trump said. "So far, they haven't gotten there. We're not satisfied with it, but we will be — either that or we'll have to just finish the job."

The new strikes came after U.S. forces carried out what the Pentagon called "defensive" strikes on missile launch sites and minelaying boats in southern Iran on Monday. The U.S. has said it has acted with restraint with both of this week's military actions in light of the fragile, weeklong ceasefire that continues to hold.

Some Trump backers are skeptical

While Trump insists a deal is within reach, there appears to be daylight between the U.S. and Iran on several key issues. The president is also facing scrutiny from Republican allies, including Sens. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and Ted Cruz of Texas, who have said the terms seem too favorable to Tehran.

They're balking at aspects of the deal that have emerged publicly that they say too closely resemble the nuclear agreement reached with Iran by Democratic President Barack Obama, which Trump scrapped during his first term.

Under the potential deal, Tehran would agree to give up its stockpile of highly enriched uranium — a key Trump demand — in return for sanctions relief. That's according to two regional officials and one senior Trump administration official, all of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive negotiations.

One regional official, with direct knowledge of the negotiations, said how Iran would give up the uranium would be subject to further talks during a 60-day period. Some would likely be diluted, while the rest would be transferred to a third country, the official said.

But Trump said Wednesday that he "wouldn't be comfortable" with either Russia or China taking Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium. The two countries have the closest relations with Tehran, and nuclear analysts have said they could be a potential acceptable third party to the Iranian Republic to take possession of the enriched uranium as part of a potential deal.

Iran has 440.9 kilograms (972 pounds) of uranium that is enriched up to 60% purity, a short, technical step from weapons-grade levels of 90%, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency. Iran has not publicly committed to giving up its uranium.

How Trump's plan affects Israel's war in Lebanon

Another key issue unresolved is whether the ceasefire will also cover Israel's operations against Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed militant group in Lebanon. Iran has insisted that Lebanon must be covered by any ceasefire agreement negotiated with the United States.

The administration appears to leave some wiggle room on the Lebanon question. The emerging memorandum of understanding calls for a ceasefire between the U.S. and its allies against Iran and its proxies, such as Hezbollah, but also underscores Israel's right to act against imminent threats and in self-defense.

Israel's military and Iran-backed militant Hezbollah group continue to clash along a strategic river in southern Lebanon as Israeli troops pushed farther north.

Jonathan Conricus, a former spokesperson for the Israel Defense Forces, said Israel expects that Iran



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would quickly move to direct any sanctions relief to restore its military capability and boost proxy groups, including Hezbollah and Hamas in Gaza.

"We're not done fighting, because the Iranian regime isn't done," said Conricus, who is a senior fellow with the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a hawkish Washington think tank.

'Stunned silence' as Trump ties Abraham Accords to Iran deal

Trump on Wednesday also reinforced his call that the deal should include a requirement for several additional countries, including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Pakistan, to join the Abraham Accords, the U.S.-brokered agreements from Trump's first term aimed at normalizing diplomatic and economic relations with Israel.

"We're, you know, requesting strongly that they join," Trump said.

Trump's optimism that the other Middle Eastern and majority-Muslim countries could soon sign on to the accords might be overly ambitious.

For example, Saudi Arabia, the most significant power in the Arab world and long seen as the biggest prize for the normalization effort, has insisted that establishing a guaranteed path to a Palestinian state remains a precondition. It's something that Israel vehemently opposes.

Trump pushed for the Abraham Accords during a call with leaders of Mideast allies over the weekend.

Barbara Leaf, a retired U.S. ambassador to the United Arab Emirates and senior State Department official during President Joe Biden's Democratic administration, said officials from Gulf countries who were on the call told her that Trump's pitch was greeted by "stunned silence."

A person familiar with the call disputed that characterization and said that some regional allies responded positively to the president's call to join the accords. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity about the private conversation.

## US imposes sanctions on Iranian agency trying to control shipping in the Strait of Hormuz

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

The Trump administration on Wednesday placed additional sanctions on Iran as part of a sprawling economic pressure campaign during the war, this time targeting the country's newly created agency that is trying to control shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

The sanctions were announced late Wednesday after U.S. forces carried out strikes on an Iran military facility after downing Iranian attack drones, according to U.S. officials who were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The sanctions move, first reported by The Associated Press, is the latest U.S. effort to use economic leverage on top of military action to push Iran's leadership into an agreement to end the war and open the waterway where a fifth of the world's oil and natural gas normally passes. President Donald Trump has said a deal is imminent, but talks are ongoing.

Rising energy prices and other costs stemming from Iran's effective closure of the strait have heaped political pressure on Trump and other Republicans ahead of the midterm congressional elections.

"The Iranian military's latest attempt to extort global maritime trade is proof that Economic Fury has left the regime desperate for cash," Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said in a statement.

The sanctions target Iran's Persian Gulf Strait Authority and any person or entity cooperating with the agency, announced earlier this month, that approves transit in the strait and charges tolls that could reach as high as \$2 million per vessel.

Iran's powerful paramilitary Revolutionary Guard has defended this oversight effort, saying the only safe route for transit through the critical waterway is through the corridor it has designated and saying any ships that deviate from that path face a series of attacks and risks.

Iran's chokehold on the strait has caused worldwide energy shocks and followed the U.S. and Israel launching the war on Feb. 28. Prices have spiked for oil, gas and related products, and experts say it would take several weeks or even months for shipping and prices to recover once the waterway reopens.

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In turn, the U.S. has blockaded Iranian ports for over a month, and Trump said it “will remain in full force and effect until an agreement is reached, certified, and signed.”

The latest economic penalties come as Washington and Tehran have been engaged in some of the most intense diplomacy and negotiations in years, aimed at bringing an end to the war and a pathway for a longer-term solution to issues between the longtime adversaries.

Trump said Wednesday that Iran is “negotiating on fumes” and said the sides are closing in on a deal even after the U.S. military said Monday that it had carried out “self-defense” strikes on missile launch sites and boats placing mines. Wednesday’s strikes are likely to cause more complications.

“They want very much to make a deal,” Trump said at a Cabinet meeting Wednesday. “So far, they haven’t gotten there. We’re not satisfied with it, but we will be — either that or we’ll have to just finish the job.”

The Republican president also has reiterated his warning that fighting would resume if no deal is reached but has pulled back from those threats several times now in the last few months.

## AP Exclusive: Trump administration tells prosecutors to stand down on Venezuela leader, sources say

By JOSHUA GOODMAN, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — The Trump administration has quietly instructed federal prosecutors in Miami to avoid pursuing criminal investigations into Venezuela’s acting President Delcy Rodríguez, a longtime target of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, according to current and former U.S. law enforcement officials, in the latest sign of warming relations between the White House and the oil-rich nation.

It’s unclear whether prosecutors had implicated Rodríguez in any crimes or whether investigators were moving toward an indictment. A Justice Department spokesperson said in an email “there was never an investigation into her to shut down.”

But DEA records obtained by The Associated Press earlier this year show she consistently surfaced on the radar of federal law enforcement dating to at least 2018, though she has never been criminally charged in the U.S. like several other senior Venezuelan officials.

The directive to pause scrutiny into Rodríguez was meant to avoid upsetting the administration’s efforts to stabilize Venezuela after the capture of her predecessor, Nicolás Maduro, among other reasons, the official said. It was not clear whether the White House, which deferred comment to the Justice Department, was involved in the decision.

“Everybody has been told to stand down,” one of the former officials said.

The former officials, who had been briefed on the development, as well as the current official all spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss internal deliberations.

Rodríguez, a U.S. attorney representing her and the Venezuelan Communications Ministry didn’t respond to requests for comment.

The move eases pressure on Rodríguez

Removing the threat of potential indictment, even temporarily, eases pressure on Rodríguez as the Trump administration seeks to work with the acting leader to stabilize Venezuela after Maduro’s ouster and open the country to U.S. investment.

President Donald Trump praised Rodríguez as a “terrific person” shortly after the U.S. military took Maduro and his wife to New York to face federal narcotics charges. Both have pleaded not guilty.

In recent months, the U.S. has lifted sanctions against Rodríguez and recognized her as Venezuela’s sole head of state, allowing her to re-establish ties with western banks and more freely work with U.S. investors seeking to tap into the world’s largest petroleum reserves. As ties between the two governments have deepened, some have held out the Venezuelan playbook — characterized by oil blockades, indictments of top leaders, and threats of military intervention — as a model to drive regime change from within as the U.S. pressures other longtime adversaries in Iran and Cuba.

Rodríguez and her brother, Jorge Rodríguez, the head of the National Assembly, were hit with U.S.

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sanctions during Trump's first term for their role in undermining Venezuelan democracy and cementing Maduro's authoritarian rule.

Rodríguez "is doing a great job," Trump wrote on social media in early March. "The Oil is beginning to flow, and the professionalism and dedication between both Countries is a very nice thing to see!"

In recent months, Rodríguez has hosted ceremonies with a steady stream of American oilmen, some of them partaking in high-profile delegations led by U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright and Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum.

Election talk deferred amid Trump's praise

Missing in all the mutual backslapping is any talk of elections, even as Rodríguez last month blew through a 90-day limit set by Venezuela's high court to fill Maduro's position on a temporary basis.

"I don't know," she responded in English when a visiting U.S. journalist earlier this month shouted out a question about her time frame for holding elections. "Some time."

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has demanded the administration explain its favorable treatment of Rodríguez, calling her a "central figure in Nicolás Maduro's repressive regime."

"Sanctions have been lifted on Ms. Rodríguez without any indication that she has taken concrete and meaningful actions to restore democratic order," Sheehan, joined by Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, wrote in a letter to Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Secretary of Treasury Scott Bessent last week.

Rick de la Torre, a former CIA chief of station in Caracas, said that the decision to shield Rodríguez fits well with the Trump administration's foreign policy goals in Venezuela.

"She's a lifelong Marxist and was a senior leader of one of the world's most corrupt regimes but the U.S. is providing her with breathing space and carrots to lay the foundation for democracy and U.S. investment," said de la Torre, the CEO of Tower Strategy, which advises companies on Venezuela.

"There's a shelf life to her utility, however. At some point she will face justice," he added.

Rodríguez has been on DEA's radar since 2018

The DEA had amassed a detailed intelligence file on Rodríguez dating to at least 2018, and has received allegations about her ranging from drug trafficking to gold smuggling, the AP reported earlier this year. One confidential informant told DEA in early 2021 that Rodríguez was using hotels in the Caribbean resort of Isla Margarita "as a front to launder money," the records show.

Her name has surfaced in nearly a dozen DEA investigations — several of which remained ongoing as recently as this year — involving field offices from Paraguay and Ecuador to Phoenix and New York. She had even been linked to Maduro's alleged bag man, Alex Saab, whom U.S. authorities first arrested in 2020 on money-laundering charges, the records show.

Rodríguez deported Saab this month as part of a purge of insider businessmen who are accused of having enriched themselves through corrupt dealings with Maduro.

It's unclear in which Miami investigations Rodríguez's name surfaced. Two of the former officials said Rodríguez has also come up in meetings with investigators in Tampa tasked last year by former Attorney General Pam Bondi with looking into financial crimes in Venezuela.

At the time, Rodríguez was serving as Maduro's vice president. Justice Department policy requires the attorney general to personally approve the charging of any foreign head of state, who are normally immune from prosecution under international and U.S. law.

Halting high-profile criminal probes of foreign leaders

The pausing of the investigations into Rodríguez comes as the Trump administration has similarly tapped the brakes on ongoing federal investigations into another prominent Latin American leftist, Colombian President Gustavo Petro.

The DEA had also designated Petro a "priority target" over alleged ties to drug traffickers that had been probed for months by federal prosecutors. The New York Times reported in March that U.S. officials recently assured the Colombian government Petro does not face charges in those cases.

Duncan Levin, a former prosecutor who worked for the U.S. attorney's office in Brooklyn, said it would be "deeply troubling" for law enforcement to be "told to stand down from a legitimate investigation for



political or transactional reasons.”

“The White House cannot use criminal enforcement as a diplomatic light switch,” Levin told AP. “DOJ decisions are supposed to be based on law, evidence, policy and public safety — not on whether a foreign official is useful to the administration at a given moment.”

## **Iranians are back online after a monthslong shutdown but still face heavy restrictions**

By AMIR-HUSSEIN RADJY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Iranians began to regain internet access on Wednesday after authorities ended a monthslong shutdown. But users said service was slow and spotty in some areas, with apps like YouTube and Instagram heavily restricted, as they were before the cutoff began during nationwide protests in January.

Authorities justified the outage as a military imperative after the United States and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28. Their decision to lift some restrictions this week came as negotiators appeared to be closing in on a more permanent truce. But many Iranians feared access could be cut off again at a moment’s notice.

Internet tracking company Netblocks said Iran’s connectivity, which measures the ability of devices to connect to the internet, is at around 86% of capacity from before the cutoff. Internet analysis firm Kentik said internet traffic, which measures the amount of data transferred and is a good illustration of usage, was at around 40%.

Amir Rashidi, an Iranian cybersecurity analyst, said there were still widespread disruptions. “It’s too early to say the shutdown is over,” he wrote on X.

**An unprecedented shutdown**

Iran’s roughly 90 million people have been cut off from the internet for most of 2026, one of the world’s longest and strictest national shutdowns. Young people with online careers saw their incomes evaporate. Job losses and the closure of online businesses added to the war’s steep economic costs.

The cutoff made it difficult for Iranian families to communicate through months of unrest and war. At some points, phone lines were also cut off, though they were later restored.

A woman living in Tehran said that for months she was barely able to speak to her sons living abroad. She couldn’t believe authorities had restored access, saying she had assumed they would find some justification to prolong the outage.

A taxi driver said service was restored but weak. He expressed hope it would improve so he could use messaging apps with family and friends. Both spoke on condition of anonymity for security reasons.

Prices spiked during the shutdown, with residents in Tehran at times paying around \$7.50 per gigabyte. Prices are back down to around \$2.25 for 30 gigabytes, roughly where they were before the protests.

Even then, Iran tightly controlled access to popular social media sites, leading many to rely on virtual private networks, or VPNs. The cost of those workarounds soared during the shutdown, making them unaffordable for many as the economy was battered.

**A slow return to service**

Businesses have started reappearing online, announcing their return with posts on sites like Instagram and Telegram.

A gamer and tech influencer in the central city of Isfahan said the shutdown had caused him to lose a lot of his audience on YouTube and Instagram, where he had spent years building up a large following.

“All my views and interactions are way down. I’ve been erased from the algorithm,” he said in a voice note sent by WhatsApp, adding that his internet connection was still slower than before the shutdown.

“The situation is such that many content producers have had their income reduced to zero, have moved on to other jobs, or have been forced to sell their equipment to survive,” he said. He spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal.

**Iran claimed the shutdown was a wartime necessity**

Iranian authorities first shut down the internet in January during mass anti-government protests that

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were eventually stamped out in a violent crackdown. Thousands of people were killed and tens of thousands detained.

That cutoff was just starting to ease when the government imposed a complete internet blackout after the start of the war, when U.S. and Israeli strikes killed Iran's supreme leader and other top officials.

The government faced criticism for the prolonged shutdown, which caused even more harm to an economy devastated by inflation, strikes on key industries and a U.S. blockade on Iranian ports.

The internet cutoff cost an estimated \$30-40 million daily, with indirect losses likely twice that much, a member of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Afshin Kolahi, told a local newspaper last month. About 10 million people have jobs that depend on internet connectivity, according to Communications Minister Sattar Hashemi.

Iranians still had access to a national net, but that has a far narrower reach, and users complained of poor service and heavy censorship. Senior government officials are given SIM cards granting them access to the global internet. Under pressure, the government expanded access to the SIM cards to some professions during the shutdown.

## **9 missing after Washington paper mill tank rupture and officials say there's no hope of survivors**

By CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

LONGVIEW, Wash. (AP) — Crews resumed the grim search Wednesday for nine people presumed killed at a Washington state paper mill where a chemical tank ruptured a day earlier in one of the deadliest U.S. workplace accidents in years.

The likely death toll rose to 11, including the missing, after another person who was injured died, authorities said Wednesday.

Authorities said there was no hope of finding more survivors following Tuesday's tank failure at the Nippon Dynawave Packaging Co. in Longview, which also injured another eight people, including a firefighter who was treated and released by a hospital.

If the 11 deaths are confirmed, it would be one of the deadliest industrial accidents in the U.S. in recent decades — alongside a series of blasts that killed 16 people at an explosives plant in Tennessee last fall; a fire and detonation that killed 14 people at a fertilizer plant in Texas in 2013; the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion that killed 11 people in 2010; and an explosion at a West Virginia coal mine that killed 29 people in 2010.

Officials said Wednesday that the paper mill tank spilled more than 500,000 gallons (1.9 million liters) of "white liquor," a highly destructive chemical mixture used in paper manufacturing.

After delaying the search over concerns that the tank might collapse further, crews determined it contained less liquid than initially thought and that the tank was stable enough to resume efforts to find the missing. Fire officials said the search will be slow and methodical.

"We do not know where all nine are," said Scott Goldstein, a Cowlitz County fire chief.

Authorities said the rupture hasn't affected the safety of the air and drinking water in Longview, a Columbia River city of about 40,000 people with long ties to the Washington and Oregon paper and lumber industries.

Some contamination had reached the Columbia River, one of North America's largest waterways, but the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reported that no effects on the river had been observed. Officials warned residents to keep away from ditches and dikes.

It was the second notable issue with a chemical tank in days on the West Coast, following the evacuation of thousands of Southern California residents due to an overheated tank at an aerospace plant before those orders were lifted Tuesday night.

The paper mill tank could hold about 900,000 gallons (3.4 million liters) and was more than half full when it ruptured, Goldstein said. White liquor, which is made mostly of sodium hydroxide and sodium sulfide, is used with heat to break down wood to make kraft paper, a durable material used in packaging, shopping

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bags and other products.

The sprawling plant, which employs about 1,000 people, makes material for tissues, printing paper, cups, plates, and cartons. It sits along the river next to other timber, paper and chemical businesses.

Paper mill worker was always there to help, friend says

The rupture happened at shift change Tuesday morning, causing the huge circular tank to buckle on one side. The cause remained unclear.

Authorities haven't released the names of the dead or missing, but some have begun to trickle out.

Todd Cornwell said his friend, Gilbert Bernal, was an electrician at the plant and was the first confirmed death. They knew each other through church and were in the same Bible study group, he said.

"We actually had our group last night and instead of doing Bible study, we talked about him," Cornwell said. "He was always there willing to help in whatever needed to be done. When the local church school started flooding, he was one of the people there."

Brian Williquette, a chemical supplier for the region's mills, was at the plant Tuesday morning when he heard an alarm over the intercom and first wondered if it was drill. He was able to get out safely and didn't see any of the damage.

"It's just unfathomable," he said at a community vigil Tuesday. "There's not anybody that lives here that doesn't know somebody at a paper mill."

Crystal Moldenhauer, a Longview resident, said she has friends at the plant who remained unaccounted for. She said people called and texted each other all day trying to figure out what happened.

"We're all still waiting for answers," she said. "There's families that have been torn apart, and we don't know why."

Authorities press for answers about the rupture

Nippon Paper Group in a statement said Wednesday that it was offering its "deepest condolences and heartfelt sympathies to the bereaved families."

Some of those who were injured suffered burns or inhalation injuries, authorities said.

Following the tank's rupture, the liquid spilled into a drainage ditch, said Brittny Goodsell, a state Ecology Department spokesperson.

Almost every industry uses chemical tanks like this and they are generally quite safe, said Stephen Kmiotek, a chemical engineering professor at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. But it's important that companies keep up proper maintenance and inspections, particularly after the tanks get older, he said.

The U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board on Wednesday announced an investigation. Its chairperson, Steve Owens, said the goal was to "determine how it happened and what can be done to prevent something like this from happening again."

## 5 things to know about the protests challenging Bolivia's new president

By ISABEL DEBRE and PAOLA FLORES Associated Press

LA PAZ, Bolivia (AP) — Less than six months ago, the inauguration of centrist President Rodrigo Paz seemed to usher in a new reality for Bolivians reeling from the worst economic crisis in a generation and fed up with two decades of almost uninterrupted socialist leadership.

Long lines at gas stations vanished as pro-business Paz secured fuel imports. Bolivia's chronically depreciating currency surged on the black market as stock markets swooned over his plan to shrink the budget deficit. After years of diplomatic isolation, Bolivians took pride in the dozens of international delegations that celebrated Paz's swearing-in as he repaired strained relations with the United States and regional powers.

Now, that optimism has been replaced by dread as violent protests shake the government of the Trump administration ally. Demonstrators wielding dynamite have blockaded major cities, leading to shortages of food, fuel and medical supplies. Indigenous and rural Bolivians who backed Paz's campaign promises to upend the status quo while protecting social welfare have called on him to step down.

Here are five things to know about the protests roiling Bolivia, as Paz threatened Wednesday to declare



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a state of emergency that could pave the way for a harsh security crackdown.

"If they do not want dialogue ... then there is no other way," he said of the protesters in a national address Wednesday, while insisting that he preferred to negotiate. "We have deaths because of the blockades. Someone has to answer for that."

Protesters feel abandoned by Paz's government

Former supporters of Bolivia's long-dominant Movement Toward Socialism party, known by its Spanish acronym MAS, who helped vault Paz to power, have increasingly voiced concern that his government doesn't represent them.

Shortly after entering office, Paz struck deals with right-wing parties in Congress. He shut out the populist vice president widely seen as responsible for his electoral success.

He named no members of Bolivia's Indigenous majority to high-level posts. He supported a land reform bill to boost agribusiness that Indigenous farmers said put them at risk of eviction. He scrapped fuel subsidies, sending prices surging by nearly 90%. Motorists complained the gasoline was contaminated and ruined their cars.

To blunt the blow of price hikes from the Iran war, Paz offered cash transfers to vulnerable families. He hiked the minimum wage 20%. He repealed the controversial land law. But he also rebuffed demands for further salary increases, infuriating the national labor union.

"It's not that from one day to the next he was asked to resign," said Mirian Huarina, a protest leader. "He had time to provide a solution to these problems and to the demands of different social sectors."

Road blockades have brought down governments before

By a quirk of geography, barriers thrown up along the slopes leading down to Bolivia's seat of government, La Paz, can completely isolate more than 1.6 million residents of the city and its surroundings, or over 13% of the country's population.

Indigenous movements have long deployed the siege strategy, popularized during a late-18th-century rebellion against Spanish colonialism.

In 2003 and 2005, demonstrators blockading La Paz in protest over foreign designs on their country's natural gas reserves toppled two consecutive pro-Western governments, paving the way for the rise of former President Evo Morales, founder of MAS.

As road blocks strangling La Paz enter their fourth week, thousands of trucks loaded with food and other essentials, like oxygen supplies for hospitals, remain stranded on highways. Beef, eggs and fruit have vanished from supermarket shelves. Subsidized chicken is being flown into La Paz via military aircraft. The government says at least four people have died for lack of medical care; hospitals are still operating, but staff are rationing supplies and focusing on critical cases.

Shop owners and transport workers opposed to the protests are ramping up pressure on Paz to reopen the roads at any cost. Banging empty pots as they marched downtown on Tuesday, they chanted, "We want solutions! We can't take it anymore!"

Pressure grows on Paz to crack down

Although security forces have used tear gas to disperse demonstrators and arrested over 120 people, Paz has so far resisted calls to deploy greater force to break the blockades. Cognizant that the deaths of protesters at the hands of police may only inflame tensions, Paz has insisted on dialogue as the best way out of the crisis.

Paz has offered bonuses to teachers, reached agreements with some protesting miners and convened a council on Wednesday to include underrepresented social sectors in economic decision-making. He slashed his own salary in half, fired his unpopular labor minister and appointed a lawyer from the country's Indigenous majority to the post.

Calls are growing for Paz to impose a state of emergency, which would put the military in charge of restoring public order for 60 days. After Congress passed a law lifting restrictions on the army's role in quelling civil unrest late Tuesday, Paz now has the constitutional authority to invoke this power. He has described it as an option of last resort.

Ex-President Morales watches from the wings

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Morales, the former union leader who became Bolivia's first Indigenous president in 2006 and ruled for an unprecedented 14 years, is calling for early elections.

"Paz only has two paths left: a suicidal decision like militarization or ... an election in the next 90 days," he wrote on X.

For almost two years now, Morales has been hiding out in Bolivia's central coca-growing Chapare region, evading an arrest warrant on human trafficking charges relating to having sex with a 15-year-old girl. He rejects the allegations as politically motivated.

Some of the unions and Indigenous groups rallying against Paz are allied with Morales, whose attempts to hold onto power longer than the constitution allowed alienated much of his once-vast base and led to his fraught 2019 ouster.

Morales' loyalists — hardened protesters from the coca-growing unions — joined the protest movement last week to demand Paz step down.

Paz's government has accused Morales of funding the demonstrations, which he denies.

Global reactions reveal political fault lines

Trump-allied governments that recently swept to power across Latin America — from Argentina and Chile to Honduras and Costa Rica — have pledged their support for Paz and denounced the protests as destabilizing.

President Gustavo Petro of Colombia — among the few leftist leaders still in power in the region — defended the protests as a "struggle for Latin American dignity." Bolivia expelled the Colombian ambassador in response.

The United States has struck a hard line, characterizing the demonstrations as a coup attempt.

"We will not allow criminals and drug traffickers to overthrow democratically elected leaders in our hemisphere," U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said last week.

The U.S. Embassy in La Paz said it was closing Wednesday and Thursday due to the unrest.

## Key Sens. Cruz, Cantwell look to break college sports logjam in Congress with a bipartisan bill

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two key senators involved in a long-simmering debate over fixing college sports will introduce a bipartisan bill designed to break a congressional logjam that would regulate payments to players, limit them to one "free" transfer over their careers and create a "Lane Kiffin Rule" to restrict coach movement during the season.

Sens. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, and Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., the chair and ranking member of the Senate Commerce Committee that oversees college sports, briefed The Associated Press on details of the bill they crafted in hopes it can get the 60 votes needed to clear the Senate.

"This is a stability bill, not just an NIL bill," Cruz said, referencing the name, image and likeness payments that have led to football rosters with \$30 million payrolls and reshaped the industry.

Cantwell said she and Cruz teamed up on the legislation "because he and I really do believe the college sports system is in a bit of chaos."

The bill looks very much like the "best of" from a pair of legislative proposals — one called SCORE, another called SAFE — that have gone nowhere over the past several months. It contains two elements the NCAA has supported: a limited antitrust exemption and a clause that would preempt much of the patchwork of state laws currently regulating NIL.

Meredith Page, the chair of the NCAA Division I Student Athlete Advocacy Committee and a former volleyball player at Radford, called the bill "a phenomenal step," especially after the latest setback for the SCORE Act, which the SAAC also supported.

"I think this has lots of great protections and gives the ability for us to stabilize the field that is so, so unstable right now," Page said.

NCAA President Charlie Baker said the association was reviewing the bill and looked forward to "further

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productive dialogue with members of Congress.”

## Antitrust help

College sports has been looking to Washington for help as it grapples with rising costs of paying players and an out-of-control transfer portal that have threatened smaller sports, many involving women, that make up the backbone of the U.S. Olympic pipeline.

This bill, called the Protect College Sports Act, would offer what Cruz and Cantwell said was targeted antitrust protection for the likes of the NCAA and the College Sports Commission, which was part of the largely Republican-backed SCORE Act that many Democrats opposed. That would be in exchange for what Cruz said would be “public-facing protections” for athletes in several areas, including guarantees for health insurance and scholarships, more stringent regulations for NIL deals from third parties and agents who broker their deals.

“I think it’s better predictability,” Cantwell said. “Why did we do it? Because when you’ve got thousands of athletes being cut, hundreds of programs being cut, the risk to the whole infrastructure was too high to not try to get better predictability.”

## Rules for players and coaches

The bill would limit players to one unrestricted transfer over the course of their college careers — a widely supported idea across the country — and would adopt something close to the five-year eligibility period that the NCAA appears ready to enact next month.

The bill also tries to regulate coaching movement. Kiffin’s sudden move to LSU from rival Mississippi while the Rebels were preparing for the College Football Playoff last season put a fine point on an issue that has only gotten worse in an era where teams spend millions to fill out rapidly shifting football rosters: Schools have less patience (and more money) to devote to hiring coaches for a quick fix.

Under terms of the bill, midseason coaching changes would be prohibited.

“It’s not fair or right to poach a coach in the middle of the season while the team is still competing,” Cruz said. “There’s a reason the NFL has a rule that you can’t do that. Obviously, NFL teams hire coaches away from each other but they don’t do so in the middle of the season.”

## Media rights money

The bill would rework the Sports Broadcasting Act to allow conferences to pool their TV rights — a move proponents have said could add billions of dollars to the ecosystem in a conclusion the Southeastern and Big Ten Conferences believe is inaccurate.

The senators said leagues wouldn’t be required to join the media pooling but those that do would have to use a percentage of any increase from that to support women’s and Olympic sports. That alone could be a dealbreaker for the SEC, which has reportedly been discussing topics including breaking away from the NCAA and allowing collective bargaining for athletes at its league meetings in Florida this week.

SEC commissioner Greg Sankey, along with Jim Phillips of the Atlantic Coast and Brett Yormark of the Big 12 all said they were reviewing the bill, with Sankey saying “bipartisan engagement in Washington on these issues is critical.”

## Can the measure pass?

The SCORE Act, which garnered little support from Democrats, was on the House schedule last week but was abruptly pulled off when the Congressional Black Caucus and NAACP came out against it. Even if it had squeaked by in the razor-tight House, it had virtually no chance of passing as written in the Senate, where it would need 60 votes to break a possible filibuster.

“The Congressional Black Caucus and I have the same objective: stop the ‘SEC SCORE Act,’” said Cantwell, referencing the SEC as one of dozens of conferences who have supported that bill.

Some Democrats were reluctant to support a bill, like SCORE, that prohibited college athletes from being classified as employees of their schools. The new bill takes what Cantwell said was a neutral stance on the issue of employment.

But it does not resolve all of Democrats’ complaints, as Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., explained in a news release shortly after news of the bill hit.



"It gives the NCAA an antitrust exemption that no other industry gets just so they can keep underpaying the athletes," he said. "Sure, there are some good things for players in this bill, but this seems like a great deal for the NCAA and the rich guys who run college sports, and a bad deal for athletes."

Mit Winter, a Missouri attorney who specializes in sports law, said the proposal was so sprawling he was skeptical it will pass as is.

"When you start getting into the stuff about giving the CSC and NCAA antitrust exemptions and liability protection from enforcing rules on athlete denial of compensation, I think that's where things get a little more dicey," he said.

## What to know about the 5 people convicted in connection with Matthew Perry's death

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The wide-ranging prosecution of those involved in the death of "Friends" star Matthew Perry has come to a close with the sentencing of his personal assistant, the last of the five people who pleaded guilty to playing various roles in supplying the actor with ketamine, the drug that killed him at age 54 on October 28, 2023.

Here's a look at each defendant.

Kenneth Iwamasa

Perry's 60-year-old live-in personal assistant Kenneth Iwamasa was intimately involved in the actor's illegal ketamine use, acting as his drug messenger and personally giving him injections — six to eight per day in the last days of his life — according to his plea agreement.

Iwamasa, a longtime friend, was hired for the \$150,000-a-year job because those surrounding Perry trusted him to help with the actor's sobriety. But he ended up being the actor's chief enabler.

"Shoot me up with a big one," Iwamasa told authorities Perry said to him on the last day of his life. After several injections, Iwamasa left him at his home in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles and returned to find Perry dead in his hot tub. An autopsy found the primary cause of death was the acute effects of ketamine, with drowning as a secondary cause.

Iwamasa made nearly all of the illegal drug buys on Perry's behalf, working in coordination with his co-defendants. One of them, Dr. Salvador Plasencia, taught him how to give Perry the injections.

Iwamasa at first lied about his role and destroyed evidence, but months later became the first to reach a plea deal and became prosecutors' most important informant.

PLEADED GUILTY TO: One count of conspiracy to distribute ketamine causing death.

SENTENCE: Three years and five months in prison.

WHAT THEY SAID: "Kenny at all times acted at the direction of Mr. Perry. Obtained ketamine at the direction of Mr. Perry. Administered ketamine to Mr. Perry at his direction," defense lawyer Alan Eisner said after sentencing. "And as his employee, Kenny wishes he could have had the strength to push back and say no."

Jasveen Sangha

Prosecutors say she was known as "The Ketamine Queen," because of her jet-setting, drug-dealing lifestyle. Her lawyers say authorities made up that nickname to feed a media frenzy.

Jasveen Sangha admitted to running a significant drug operation, selling Perry the dose of ketamine that he took on the day he died, and causing the death of another man, 33-year-old Cody McLaury, in 2019.

Like the other defendants, Sangha had no previous convictions.

But, prosecutors said, and a judge agreed, that unlike the other defendants whose actions were atypical, she had been dealing drugs including ketamine, methamphetamine and cocaine for at least five years from her home.

Sangha, 42, was born in Britain, raised in the United States and has dual citizenship. Her social media accounts showed her in posh spaces alongside rich-and-famous faces in Spain, Japan and Dubai, London and Los Angeles.

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She went to high school in Calabasas, California — perhaps best known as home to the Kardashians — and went to college at the University of California, Irvine, graduating in 2005 and going to work at Merrill Lynch. She later got an MBA from the Hult International Business School in London.

Her lawyers presented that personal history as evidence that she was an otherwise upstanding citizen, but prosecutors used the same facts to argue she didn't need to sell drugs but did so for greed and glamour.

**PLEADED GUILTY TO:** Three counts of distribution of ketamine, one count of distribution of ketamine resulting in death or serious bodily injury, and one count of using her home for drug distribution.

**SENTENCE:** 15 years in prison, more than all the other defendants combined.

**WHAT THEY SAID:** "These were not mistakes. They were horrible decisions," Sangha said at sentencing, adding that her choices had "shattered people's lives and the lives of their family and friends."

Erik Fleming

Fleming, 56, was working as a drug addiction counselor when a mutual friend he had with Perry told him that the actor was seeking ketamine, according to filings from prosecutors.

He was a former television and film producer whose career had been ravaged by substance abuse, and that after gaining hard-won sobriety, he became a counselor.

But he had badly relapsed when approached about Perry, and connected the actor with Sangha to buy her product.

In all, prosecutors say, Fleming delivered 50 vials of Sangha's ketamine for Perry's use, marking up the price to make a profit, including 25 vials sold for \$6,000 to the actor four days before his death.

Authorities found him fairly early in the investigation using information from Iwamasa. He cooperated with prosecutors, giving up Sangha and becoming the first to appear in court and enter a guilty plea.

**PLEADED GUILTY TO:** One count of distribution of ketamine resulting in death.

**SENTENCE:** Two years in prison.

**WHAT THEY SAID:** "This grievous failure will haunt me forever," Fleming wrote in a letter to the court. After he was sentenced, he said: "I want to do everything I can to make sure a tragedy like this never happens again. I don't want anyone to die from ketamine."

Dr. Salvador Plasencia

"I wonder how much this moron will pay?"

That was a text message Plasencia sent to a fellow doctor when he learned Perry was looking for illegal, off-the-books ketamine, according to a plea agreement where the doctor admitted to selling 20 vials of the drug to the actor in the weeks before his death.

Plasencia, a 44-year-old Los Angeles-area doctor known to patients as "Dr. P," was one of the main targets of the prosecution and had been headed for a joint trial with Sangha when he reached the plea agreement last year.

Perry was connected to Plasencia through another patient. The actor had been getting ketamine legally from his regular doctor as treatment for depression, an off-label but increasingly common use of the surgical anesthetic. But he wanted more than that doctor would prescribe.

Plasencia admitted to injecting Perry with some of the initial vials he provided, and left more for Iwamasa to inject, despite the fact that Perry froze up and his blood pressure spiked after a dose.

Plasencia graduated from UCLA's medical school in 2010 and had not been subject to any medical disciplinary actions before the Perry case. He voluntarily gave up his medical license before any action was taken against.

**PLEADED GUILTY TO:** Four counts of distribution of ketamine.

**SENTENCE:** 2 1/2 years in prison.

**WHAT THEY SAID:** Plasencia cried at his sentencing as he imagined the day he would have to tell his 2-year-old son "about the time I didn't protect another mother's son. It hurts me so much."

Dr. Mark Chavez

Chavez, a San Diego doctor who ran a ketamine clinic, was the source of the doses that Plasencia sold to Perry.

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Chavez admitted to obtaining the ketamine from a wholesale distributor on false pretenses and passing it along.

Chavez, 55, graduated from UCLA's medical school in 2004. He has surrendered his medical license.

CHARGE: One count of conspiracy to distribute ketamine.

SENTENCE: Eight months of home confinement.

WHAT THEY SAID: "I just want to say my heart goes out to the Perry family," Chavez said at sentencing.

## Many National Spelling Bee contenders pursue mastery. For a few, it's more about memorization

By BEN NUCKOLS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Shrey Parikh finished third in the 2024 Scripps National Spelling Bee before making a stunning exit from his school bee last year. Now in his final year before he ages out of the competition, he's fully committed.

The 14-year-old from Rancho Cucamonga, California, works with three coaches. He pays for word lists and study guides. He tries to learn every Greek and Latin root, every language pattern, every spelling bee-worthy word he can find. And he competes throughout the year in online bees that pit him against the country's other top spellers.

Shrey's approach has proven effective for spellers seeking to hold the trophy, and on Wednesday he became one of nine spellers who got through the semifinals and will compete in the finals Thursday night.

But at least one other finalist has gone old-school, shunning outside help and using the dictionary as his guide.

Their opposing strategies have revived a long-running if good-natured debate in spelling circles: Which is more important, mastery of languages or rote memorization?

"At the end of finals, most of the words aren't going to have a really clean-cut language pattern or rule that you can pull from. So I think memorization is really important," said Sam Evans, who coached each of the past two champions. "Sometimes it gets a bad reputation, but you have to do it."

Every word is in the dictionary, if you can find it

It's all but impossible to reach the finals without knowing the components that make up words absorbed into English: roots and languages of origin. But some champions have stood out for their incredible recall, the ability to instantly visualize any word they've run across or even recite dictionary definitions verbatim: Nihar Janga in 2016, Zaila Avant-garde in 2021 and Bruhat Soma in 2024.

Sarv Dharavane might be the next of that group.

Sarv finished third in 2025 as a relative unknown in the spelling community. There's a reason for that. The 12-year-old sixth-grader from Dunwoody, Georgia, has no coach. He doesn't participate in online bees. And his only study guide is the source for every word in the competition: Merriam-Webster's Unabridged dictionary.

"The book is my coach," Sarv said.

Given his past success, he saw no reason to change it up. And he's back in the finals.

"I didn't really change anything because my strategy got me far last year, but I did more of what I did before," Sarv said.

"I used to read the dictionary and set aside difficult words to study later," he explained. "I did it a lot, so I got a lot of words and it was really easy just to go through them. I've always been able to remember pretty well, and I can read through long lists without getting tired, so this strategy works pretty well for me."

Simple, right?

Many spellers think there's a better way.

Master the roots, and you don't need to memorize as much

Dev Shah, the 2023 champion, advocates an artistic approach to spelling — the one also championed by his coach, Scott Remer. Master roots, master language patterns, and learn how to spot the exceptions,



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and you can spell a word that you've never seen or don't remember.

Shah accepted that he could never memorize the dictionary — "No one can," he said — and he believed if he got a word he didn't know, he could figure it out.

"The skill of guessing is everything," he wrote in a Washington Post op-ed after his victory.

In an interview Wednesday, Shah said memorization was important, especially for quirky words with obscure origins. He said the best spellers, including Avant-garde, found a balance between memorization and mastery.

Having a conceptual understanding of how words are spelled can also help spellers perform under pressure when their memory fails them, said Shah, who admitted he finds it daunting to memorize a huge volume of words.

Former champion Sohum Sukhatankar, who coaches Shrey, said spellers need to fill their brains with the most useful information.

"When you're at the highest level, you have to be prepared for hundreds of thousands of words," he said. "You want to do as little memorization as possible to avoid the chance that you just forget it, so it's all about efficiency."

After a catastrophic school bee, one speller seeks every edge

Shrey knows he might have to guess when he's at the microphone, but he wants to eliminate variables. That makes sense, given that a year ago, he wasn't even the top speller at his school.

"I had a fever at my school bee last year, and I just blanked on the word 'calipers' ... and I missed it," he said. "I was really devastated."

It took a few months before Shrey was motivated to start studying again. Once he did, he added Sukhatankar to his coaching team. He's learned how to slow down when he's at the microphone because of a bad experience in 2023, when he rushed through a word, didn't enunciate it clearly and judges determined he got it wrong.

He's also a believer in study guides. Shrey said an interactive, AI-assisted platform called Onyma that offers personalized learning and competition with other spellers — launched this month by Sukhatankar and Evans — has helped with his preparation.

He also uses SpellPundit, an online resource created by two former spellers and their parents that made a splash at the 2019 bee when the majority of that year's eight co-champions used it. The company claims every champion since as a customer.

Shrey won the annual SpellPundit bee, the South Asian Spelling Bee and several other online bees, which he doesn't necessarily see as an advantage.

"I feel like it (creates) more pressure to perform," he said.

Evans believes spellers who want to win should use their study time efficiently, but there's no barrier to learning every possible word.

"There's a common joke among spellers that says everything's in the dictionary, so it's all 'on-list,'" he said. "The dictionary is the most basic thing that spellers need to know."

## Uganda closes its border with Congo, where suspected cases of a rare Ebola type are surging

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — Uganda on Wednesday ordered the closure of its border with Congo, where suspected cases of a rare type of Ebola are surging, and as cases have been confirmed at home after Ugandan health workers were exposed to the disease from Congolese patients.

The measure, which goes against the guidance by the World Health Organization, underscores growing fears of contagion in East Africa from Bundibugyo, a rare type of the Ebola virus that is behind this outbreak and that has no approved medicines or vaccines.

Like Congo, Uganda has faced Ebola outbreaks in the past. A local Ugandan task force made the decision on the border closure. The Ugandan health workers were exposed to the virus by Congolese patients

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who had crossed the border before the outbreak was declared in eastern Congo on May 15.

The border closure was temporary, with "immediate effect," Dr. Diana Atwine of the Ugandan Ministry of Health, told journalists. Border crossings will be authorized only in emergency cases, including for the outbreak response, humanitarian, cargo or security reasons, she added.

Anyone entering from Congo under emergency circumstances will be taken into mandatory isolation for 21 days.

Congo says over 100 cases have been confirmed

Tracing and isolating Ebola contacts is seen as key to stopping the spread of the disease, which usually manifests as hemorrhagic fever. The virus is spread through close contact with sick or deceased patients' bodily fluids. Experts say healthcare workers and family members caring for patients face the highest risk.

The number of suspected cases in eastern Congo is nearing 1,000, with at least 220 suspected deaths. Congo's health ministry on Tuesday said 101 cases have been confirmed, and they are looking into over 3,000 possible contacts.

On Wednesday, Congolese authorities said that the first person who recovered from the Bundibugyo virus has been released home from a treatment center in Rwampara, one of the towns in eastern Congo at the heart of the outbreak.

WHO has discouraged border closures with Congo while acknowledging that neighboring countries are at high risk of contagion. The U.N. health agency has declared this outbreak a public health emergency of international concern.

Closures "push the movement of people and goods to informal border crossings that are not monitored, thus increasing the chances of the spread of disease," the agency said.

The Uganda-Congo border is several hundred miles long and crossed by numerous footpaths beyond formal border posts. Many people come and go in the course of a day to visit families or to trade.

Congolese health authorities are struggling to contain the outbreak, which WHO says is outpacing them. The rare type of Ebola was confirmed weeks late as tests were carried out for a more common type. Challenges also include the threat from armed groups in eastern Congo, a large number of displaced people and poor infrastructure.

WHO's Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called on Wednesday for a ceasefire in eastern Congo to allow safe access for responders and others, saying on social media that "attacks on health facilities make tracking cases and their contacts nearly impossible."

Responders in Congo have said they are underprepared and under-protected for this outbreak, while conflict-traumatized residents, long wary of outsiders, have attacked a number of clinics and hurled stones and abuse at volunteers trying to make people aware of the virus and its risks.

Infected people or those who have been in contact should not undertake international travel unless it's a medical evacuation, WHO has said. On Wednesday, the Trump administration said it is planning to send Americans who are exposed to Ebola to a new facility in Kenya instead of flying them to the United States.

Uganda is concerned about exposed health workers

Uganda has reported seven cases of Ebola, including the first case of a 59-year-old man who died in Kampala, the country's capital, on May 14. While the Ebola case load is not spiking, the number of locals exposed to infection via health workers has been rising.

"They have families, and so the number has been increasing," Atwine, the Ugandan health official, said of the health workers.

She also said she was dismayed to see some Ugandans forming crowds to celebrate Arsenal as British Premier League champions. The team has a large following in Uganda. Atwine urged people to be vigilant, avoid shaking hands and use sanitizer.

Congo has had 17 Ebola outbreaks. Health experts say aid cuts last year by the U.S. and other rich nations are devastating for eastern Congo, in part because of the region's unique problems.

Aid groups fighting this outbreak say they don't have the equipment they need, including face shields and suits to protect health workers from infection, testing kits and body bags needed to safely bury victims.

## Matthew Perry's assistant gets more than 3 years in prison for central role in his ketamine death

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Matthew Perry's live-in personal assistant, who had a central role in the "Friends" actor's descent into ketamine addiction and injected him with a fatal dose of the drug, was sentenced Wednesday to three years and five months in prison, bringing an end to the legal saga surrounding the death of one of the biggest TV stars of his generation.

"You were privy to his struggle with addiction," said Judge Sherilyn Peace Garnett, who handed down the sentence to the 60-year-old Kenneth Iwamasa in federal court in Los Angeles. "Your conduct was reckless, not just on the day of his death but in the days leading up to his death."

Iwamasa was the last person sentenced of the five who pleaded guilty in the investigation and prosecution that followed Perry's death at age 54 on Oct. 28, 2023. The group included corrupt doctors and a major street dealer, "Ketamine Queen" Jasveen Sangha, whose 15-year sentence was the only one longer than Iwamasa's.

The assistant was constantly at Perry's side in his final days, acting as the actor's enabler, drug messenger and de facto doctor. He was the last person to see Perry alive, and he was the one who found him dead in his Jacuzzi. He would eventually become prosecutors' most important informant.

How much blame for an assistant to an addict?

Wednesday's nearly three-hour hearing was largely a debate between lawyers for both sides, the judge and Perry's loved ones over the level of responsibility that can be put on the employee of a powerful person when addiction is in the mix.

"His loyalty to Mr. Perry was paramount," Iwamasa's lawyer, Alan Eisner, told the judge. "He worshipped Mr. Perry, he looked up to Mr. Perry. All he did was please and accommodate Mr. Perry."

Eisner argued for a six-month prison term with six months of home confinement.

"Mr. Perry was not blameless," the lawyer said. "Nobody likes to hear that."

When Eisner said Iwamasa was unable to act differently than he did, the judge cut him off and said: "Unwilling. Not unable. He could have said no."

Perry's mother and sisters made it clear in letters to the judge that there is no one, not even Perry himself, who they blame for his death more than Iwamasa — a longtime friend they thought would help the actor maintain sobriety.

Perry's stepfather, longtime "Dateline" journalist Keith Morrison, spoke for the family at the sentencing.

"We really felt that he was part of the family," Morrison said. "We trusted him implicitly."

Morrison acknowledged the power imbalance, but said Iwamasa still had a choice.

"You did the injections. You could have made the phone call," he said. "But you didn't. Because you were living a dandy life." He added, "You were in control of one of the most famous people in the world." "The monster that killed him"

Lisa Ferguson, Perry's business manager for most of his career and now his estate executor, painted a darker picture, saying Iwamasa deliberately drove out everyone else surrounding Perry, including sober-living companions and medical workers, to shore up his own power and influence. She angrily said he used Perry's addiction to his own advantage.

"What you are is the monster that killed him," Ferguson said. She said he had shown "not a shred of guilt or remorse" since Perry's death, and that he ought to "rot in prison."

"Matthew deserved to live," she said. "You don't."

Iwamasa looked right at Morrison and Ferguson throughout their remarks, and made the unusual move of facing Perry's family and friends in the audience when he spoke.

"I'm horribly, horribly sorry, and I offer my condolences to you," he said. "I'm just so sorry to have done these illegal acts that I will forever regret."

Iwamasa wore a charcoal-gray suit, with his long white hair combed back. He had no visible reaction to the sentence. His father and brother sat in the audience with other supporters.



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Iwamasa comes clean to police, faces the spotlight

Perry had hired Iwamasa in 2022, and he was paying him \$150,000 a year. The broad criminal investigation began not long after Iwamasa returned from running errands to find Perry dead. The LA County Medical Examiner found that ketamine was the primary cause of death. Drowning was a secondary cause.

At first, Iwamasa lied to police and got rid of evidence of ketamine use. But after investigators served a search warrant on the house in January of 2024, he began coming clean. By that August he had pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to distribute ketamine resulting in death.

That came quietly before any Perry-related indictments were announced, and Wednesday was Iwamasa's first time under the intense public spotlight surrounding the case. He stood in front of dozens of cameras outside the courthouse as Eisner spoke for him, saying that the sentence was excessive and didn't reflect the dynamic between the two men.

"One person had the power. One person had no power," the lawyer said.

Morrison said outside court he was satisfied that the family could get the sentencing behind them.

But, he added, "It doesn't change the fact that we've lost him, that he's dead, and that my wife is broken."

The sentence was exactly what prosecutors sought, though Garnett disagreed with them on the details. She found Iwamasa did not abuse a position of trust, which could've brought more prison time, saying that category was generally reserved for professionals and experts. She found that he had not benefited financially from the crime, though acknowledged he did from the relationship with Perry.

She also told Iwamasa, "there is no hard evidence that you acted with malicious intent, though some would disagree."

His sentence also included a \$10,000 fine and two years of probation. He was ordered to return to go to prison on July 17.

Perry became a major TV star along with Courteney Cox, Jennifer Aniston, Matt LeBlanc, David Schwimmer and Lisa Kudrow on "Friends," NBC's megahit sitcom that ran from 1994 to 2004.

## Israel's military tells residents across southern Lebanon to leave as it fights Hezbollah

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The Israeli military on Wednesday told residents across southern Lebanon to leave as it expands its operations there, saying in a statement that the military will "work with extreme force" against Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group.

The warning — which fell on the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha — came a day after Israeli troops clashed with the Iran-backed Hezbollah along a strategic river in southern Lebanon, with Israeli forces pushing farther north, days ahead of talks in Washington between Lebanese and Israeli delegations.

Wednesday's warning is the first that orders the Lebanese to relocate from the south since a ceasefire went into effect on April 17 and follows an escalation in the Israel-Hezbollah war.

Israeli troops have crossed the Litani River, edging closer to the southern city of Nabatiyeh. Fighting between Israel and Hezbollah has also intensified in the town of Zawtar al-Sharqieh, along the strategic river. Israel has not struck Beirut or areas near the capital since the truce started.

The war started on March 2 after Hezbollah fired rockets towards northern Israel in solidarity with Iran. Over one million people in Lebanon have since been displaced, and over 3,200 people killed in Israeli strikes according to Lebanon's health ministry. Many displaced people are sleeping in public schools that have turned into makeshift shelters or in tents pitched in encampments across the Lebanese capital.

Earlier, the Israeli military had called on the residents of Nabatiyeh and the city of Tyre along the Mediterranean coast to leave and stay away, saying there were Hezbollah members and military posts there.

Roads have been jam-packed with cars fleeing Tyre and surrounding neighborhoods heading north, seeking shelter. Strikes in the southwestern region have intensified in recent days.

Those who have nowhere to go are staying in the city, said Moussa Nasrallah of Lebanon's Civil Defense.

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He and other first-responders have been helping move the elderly and others living further out in the province to the city.

At least four Israeli strikes hit near Tyre since the warning was announced, Nasrallah said. The Israeli military said it has been targeting what it called "command centers" belonging to Hezbollah without giving further details.

"We can't use our vehicles to evacuate people out of the area and not be available for the wounded," Nasrallah told The Associated Press, fearing his colleagues would be stuck in the traffic, and unable to return to the front lines to help civilians.

Hezbollah has claimed responsibility for several attacks on both Israeli troops in Lebanon and northern Israeli border villages.

Also, amid a surge in Hezbollah attacks with exploding drones, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that the Israeli military will expand the scope of its attacks against Hezbollah. The Israeli military said it has struck 550 targets since the beginning of the week, a significant increase in the number of attacks.

Hezbollah has vowed to fight until the war ends in Lebanon and Israel withdraws its troops that operate across large swaths of the country's south. The Iran-backed group has dismissed Lebanon's direct talks with Israel and has backed Iran's talks with Washington to their war. Among Tehran's conditions is ending the war in Lebanon as well.

Israel's widened attacks in recent days have struck areas in eastern Lebanon along the Bekaa Valley, near the border with Syria. On Tuesday, Israel struck near the Qaraoun Dam, Lebanon's largest, on the Litani River.

## US stocks inch to more records after oil prices drop

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks inched to more records Wednesday after oil prices fell and eased the pressure on households and businesses worldwide.

The S&P 500 edged up by less than 0.1% and added to its all-time high set the day before. The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 182 points, or 0.4%, and the Nasdaq composite gained 0.1% as both indexes also set records.

Stocks of companies with big fuel bills helped lead the way on hopes that lower oil prices will remove a big drag on their profits. Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings climbed 6.1%, and United Airlines rallied 6.3%. Delta Air Lines rose 3% and set an all-time high.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude oil fell 4.6% to \$92.25 after the ceasefire between the United States and Iran appeared to hold despite the U.S. military launching what it called "self-defense" strikes in southern Iran. A barrel of benchmark U.S. crude fell even more, 5.5%, to settle at \$88.68 and is back to where it was in mid-April on hopes that the United States and Iran can reach an agreement to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and allow oil tankers to exit the Persian Gulf for deliveries again.

Stocks have been able to run to records despite the painful inflation and uncertainty caused by high oil prices largely because companies have reported surprisingly strong profits for the start of 2026, and the forecast is for them to continue.

Bath & Body Works rallied 9.7%, and Abercrombie & Fitch climbed 8.9% after both reported bigger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. That's even as U.S. consumers continue to say they're feeling discouraged about the economy and inflation.

Lululemon Athletica rose 2.9% after reaching a deal with its founder, Chip Wilson, where it will add a former chief marketing officer of ESPN and a former co-CEO of On to its board of directors.

On the losing side of Wall Street was Dick's Sporting Goods, which dropped 6% despite delivering a profit for the latest quarter that edged past expectations. Analysts pointed to how much profit it wrung out of each \$1 in revenue, which some called a bit weak.

Oil-and-gas stocks also sank, hurt by the dropping prices for crude. Exxon Mobil fell 1.3%, and Chevron

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slipped 1.3%. Halliburton dropped 3.6% to bring its gain for the year so far back toward 40%.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 1.24 to 7,520.36. The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 182.60 points to 50,644.28, and the Nasdaq composite gained 18.55 to 26,674.73.

In the bond market, Treasury yields eased after falling oil prices took pressure off inflation. The yield on the 10-year Treasury slipped to 4.48% from 4.50% late Tuesday and from 4.67% roughly a week ago.

It's a respite following recent gains for yields in bond markets worldwide, which threatened to slow economies and undercut prices for stocks and all kinds of other investments. High yields have 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 artificial-intelligence data centers that have supported the U.S. economy's growth recently.

In stock markets abroad, indexes were mixed across Europe and Asia. South Korea's Kospi was one of the world's best performers and jumped 2.3% after SK Hynix, which is a big beneficiary of the AI boom, soared 9.3%.

A day before, Micron Technology surged to become the latest Big Tech company to be worth more than \$1 trillion because of AI excitement. Its stock has more than tripled already in 2026, and analysts at UBS said Tuesday it could soar even more because of how fundamentally AI has improved demand for computer memory. It rose another 3.6% Wednesday.

## Alabama asks Supreme Court to allow use of congressional map helping GOP, despite racial bias ruling

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Alabama on Wednesday asked the Supreme Court to allow it to use a congressional map favoring Republicans in this year's elections, despite a lower court's ruling that the redistricting plan intentionally discriminates against Black people.

The state's Republican leadership filed an emergency appeal with the justices a day after a three-judge court refused to let the state use a map it adopted three years ago that has a majority Black population in just one of its seven congressional districts.

The judges instead required Alabama to continue using a court-ordered map that was put in place for the 2024 elections that includes two districts where Black residents comprise a majority or close to it.

Attorney General Steve Marshall told the court that the state did not intentionally discriminate against Black residents and should be allowed to hold elections this year under a map chosen by lawmakers, not judges.

The appeal is the latest development in the fallout from last month's Supreme Court ruling that struck down a Black-majority district in Louisiana and weakened the federal Voting Rights Act. That ruling has led Republicans in several Southern states, including Alabama, to take steps to reshape voting districts with large minority populations that have elected Democrats.

The redistricting frenzy is part of a broader push by President Donald Trump to try to hold on to Republicans' slim House majority in the November elections.

Trump's Justice Department backed Alabama's appeal, noting that Alabama is "highly likely to succeed" in its bid to implement a map the administration says would favor Republicans 6-1 in place of a court-ordered "racial gerrymander."

The Alabama case stretches back several years. The three-judge panel in 2023 ruled that a map drawn by Republican state lawmakers intentionally diluted the voting power of Black citizens. The court said the state, which is about 27% Black, should have two districts where Black voters are the majority or close to it. The court-selected map was used in 2024.

After the Supreme Court's recent ruling in the Louisiana case, Alabama officials moved to implement the 2023 state-drawn map. The Supreme Court's conservative majority agreed to lift the injunction that had blocked the map's use and sent the case back to the three-judge panel for reconsideration in light of the Louisiana ruling.



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In the meantime, voters cast ballots in Alabama's May 19 primaries, and Republican Gov. Kay Ivey set new special primaries for Aug. 11 in four congressional districts affected by the map switch.

Upon further review, the judicial panel said it was standing behind its initial finding that there was "undisputed evidence" of intentional racial discrimination, a holding that was independent of and unaffected by the Supreme Court ruling on the Voting Rights Act.

It said the special congressional primaries should instead proceed under the previous court-approved districts.

The use of the court-ordered map led to the 2024 election of U.S. Rep. Shomari Figures, a Black Democrat. State Republicans are seeking to use a map that would give the GOP an opportunity to reclaim the south Alabama seat.

The state is asking for Supreme Court action by Monday as it makes preparations for the special vote in August.

## Teen charged with killing stepsister on Carnival Cruise remains free after hearing

By DAVID FISCHER Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — A federal judge on Wednesday allowed a teenager charged with sexually assaulting and killing his 18-year-old stepsister on a Carnival Cruise ship to remain free for now as the judge considers arguments following a hearing in Miami.

Timothy Hudson was initially arrested and charged as a juvenile, and U.S. Magistrate Judge Edwin Torres ruled in February that the 16-year-old could live with an uncle and be electronically monitored. But after the case was transferred to adult court, prosecutors wanted Hudson in custody.

Minors are rarely prosecuted in federal court, and this case landed there because Kepner apparently died in international waters, outside any state's jurisdiction.

The judge ended Wednesday morning's hearing without making a final decision, saying he wanted to speak with the U.S. Marshals Service about the logistics of detaining Hudson in central Florida, closer to his family, rather than South Florida, where the trial is taking place.

It's unknown when Torres will announce his decision. In the meantime, Hudson walked out of the courthouse after the hearing, rather than being immediately taken into custody.

Hudson has pleaded not guilty to charges of first-degree murder and aggravated sexual abuse. His federal public defenders have declined to comment on the charges.

Hudson's stepsister, Anna Kepner, had been traveling on the Carnival Horizon ship in November with her family, including Hudson. Before the ship was scheduled to return to Florida, her body was found concealed under a bed in a room she was sharing with Hudson and another teen, a criminal complaint said.

The cause of Kepner's Nov. 6 death was determined to be mechanical asphyxia, which is when an object or physical force stops someone from breathing.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Alejandra Lopez argued Wednesday that the crimes Hudson is accused of are so serious that the court shouldn't risk another violent attack. An autopsy determined that Kepner had been pinned down and forcibly raped, the prosecutors said. She also noted that it likely took 3-5 minutes for Hudson to strangle Kepner until she was dead.

"I believe there is clear and convincing evidence that this defendant is a danger to the community," Lopez said.

The prosecutor also argued that Hudson was a much greater flight risk because he now faces a possible life sentence if convicted of the adult charges. As a juvenile, he would have been released at age 21, regardless of what counts he was found delinquent on.

Evan Kuhl, with the Federal Public Defender's office, told the judge that Hudson has abided by the conditions of his release for months without issue.

The judge acknowledged that an adult facing these charges would almost certainly be detained until

trial, but he still needed to consider the reality of Hudson's age, despite the adult charges. While the judge said he agreed with the defense that Hudson was a low flight risk, he still hadn't decided whether the teen posed a threat to the community if certain pre-trial restrictions remained in place.

Kepner's father, Christopher Kepner, previously released a statement, saying the family was placing "trust in the justice system to pursue the truth with care and integrity."

"The situation is deeply painful and complex for the entire family," Kepner said.

Anna Kepner was a high school cheerleader at Temple Christian School in Titusville, Florida, about 40 miles (65 kilometers) east of Orlando. At her memorial service in November, family members encouraged people to wear bright colors instead of the traditional black "in honor of Anna's bright and beautiful soul."

## **Don Lemon seeks grand jury transcripts in Minnesota civil rights case, citing misconduct**

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

Attorneys for former CNN host turned independent journalist Don Lemon argued in a court filing Wednesday that recent examples of grand jury misconduct by the U.S. Department of Justice across the country warrant the release of transcripts from the normally secretive proceedings in his case.

Lemon pleaded not guilty in February to federal civil rights charges, following a protest at a Minnesota church where an Immigration and Customs Enforcement official is a pastor. He is one of 39 people charged in the January incident.

Lemon insists he was at the Cities Church in St. Paul to chronicle the Jan. 18 protest but was not a participant.

Lemon and another independent journalist, Georgia Fort, filed a motion in February seeking transcripts of the grand jury proceedings that resulted in the indictments against them and seven others.

In the latest filing in U.S. District Court in Minneapolis, Lemon's attorneys argue that "the past 15 months have seen an unprecedented and growing distrust in the Justice Department's use of the grand jury process." For that reason, the transcripts from Lemon's grand jury should be released, his attorneys said.

"In the past two weeks alone, several courts have chastised Justice Department prosecutors for irregularities in the grand jury process and gone so far as to dismiss indictments for grand jury misconduct," Lemon's attorneys said in the Wednesday filing.

A spokesperson for the Justice Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Lemon cites the May 21 dismissal of all pending charges against four remaining activists who protested outside a federal building during last year's immigration crackdown in Chicago. The dismissal came after a judge scrutinized allegations of grand jury misconduct by the prosecutor's office.

Lemon also cites the May 15 dismissal of nine felony grand jury indictments by three federal judges in Wyoming. The judges cited misconduct by the interim U.S. attorney that could have prejudiced the jurors, including comments he made to the grand jurors.

Lemon cites a third case out of Rhode Island where a federal judge on May 13 blocked the Trump administration's sweeping demands for confidential transgender patient information from the state's largest hospital that provides gender-affirming care to minors.

In that case, the judge rebuked actions by prosecutors, saying the Justice Department can no longer be trusted to enforce its power fairly and honestly.

Finally, Lemon's attorneys referenced the denial of search warrants sought by the Justice Department related to Lemon's YouTube channel and YouTube account and cellphone information related to four other defendants. The magistrate judge held that the government did not establish probable cause to believe that evidence of a crime would be found in what the Justice Department wanted to search.

The search warrants were rejected in February, but the court record was unsealed on Tuesday.

Several judges — including the chief federal judge for Minnesota — found no probable cause to support the complaints that prosecutors first tried to file against the two journalists, so they refused to sign arrest warrants for Lemon or Fort before the government turned to the grand jury.

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Lemon's attorneys argue they should be allowed to see the grand jury records because of the "checked history of this case" and "numerous examples of grand jury misconduct by DOJ around the country."

Lemon is "entitled to see whether the government allowed the grand jury to serve its role or whether, as elsewhere, the government interfered with the proper function of the grand jury," his attorneys argued.

## Millions of people have been placed in new voting districts. Here's where the redistricting stands

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

A frenzied redistricting effort ahead of the November elections has reshaped congressional voting districts for millions of Americans — and it isn't over yet.

Since President Donald Trump urged Texas Republicans to redraw U.S. House districts last year, Republicans in Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Florida and Tennessee also have enacted new maps that could help the party win additional seats in the midterm elections. Louisiana is expected to join those ranks soon, and Alabama Republicans are appealing a court decision blocking a map they support.

So far, Republicans think they could gain as many as 14 seats from their redistricting efforts while Democrats think they could gain six seats from new districts in California and Utah.

Trump hopes the unusual mid-decade redistricting can help Republicans retain control of the closely divided House, despite negative approval ratings and historical tendencies for the incumbent's party to lose seats in the midterms.

Here's a look at the latest developments in the redistricting battle:

Louisiana House to vote on redistricting

The U.S. Supreme Court in April struck down Louisiana's congressional map, which contains two majority-Black districts held by Democrats, as an illegal racial gerrymander. That prompted Republican Gov. Jeff Landry to postpone Louisiana's May 16 congressional primary until later this summer to allow time for redistricting.

The state House is expected to consider a revised congressional map this week that gives Republicans a better chance of winning one of those two seats. The Senate already passed a different version of the new map. The two chambers are trying to agree on a redistricting plan before the June 1 end of their legislative session.

Alabama seeks permission for new map

Republican Attorney General Steve Marshall on Wednesday asked the U.S. Supreme Court to allow the state to use a Republican-drawn congressional map in the midterm elections. Marshall wants to set aside a preliminary injunction issued Tuesday against the map by a federal judicial panel.

The lower court judges said the plan, which includes only one majority-Black district, "intentionally discriminated based on race." They ordered the state to continue using a court-imposed map containing two districts where Black residents compose a majority or close to it. Both of those seats currently are held by Democrats.

Missouri court upholds new map — again

The Missouri Supreme Court on Wednesday rejected a legal challenge from the NAACP that claimed no extraordinary occasion existed for Republican Gov. Mike Kehoe to call lawmakers into a special session on redistricting last year. The court ruled unanimously that the state constitution gives governors discretion in calling special sessions.

The Supreme Court already has rejected two other challenges to a new U.S. House map that gives Republicans an improved chance to win another seat by reshaping a Democratic-held district based in Kansas City. Opponents have one more possibility to stop the plan, with an initiative petition to put it to a statewide referendum.

South Carolina pulls the plug on redistricting

As early in-person voting began Tuesday in South Carolina's June 9 primaries, the Republican-led state Senate ended efforts to redraw the state's congressional districts this year. A plan previously passed by



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the House sought to redraw the state's only Democratic-held district to give Republicans a better chance at winning it.

But some Republican senators said it was too late to make changes. Others expressed reservations that the plan could backfire by adding too many Democratic voters in districts held by Republicans.

Florida judge lets GOP map stand

Voting rights groups contend Florida's new congressional districts should be struck down for violating a state ban on intentional partisan gerrymandering. But a state judge on Tuesday declined to issue a preliminary injunction against using the map in the midterm elections.

The judge said the plaintiffs hadn't shown their claims of partisanship are likely to succeed. Voting rights groups said they would quickly appeal to a higher court and would continue pursuing the case all the way to the state Supreme Court, if necessary.

Tennessee map faces several challenges

A state court panel dismissed a lawsuit Tuesday alleging the Republican-led legislature went beyond the special session agenda set by Republican Gov. Bill Lee when it passed a new congressional map. Meanwhile, a federal court on Tuesday declined to issue a temporary restraining order in a separate lawsuit contending that Tennessee's new U.S. House districts are racially discriminatory.

The new Republican-drawn map carves up a majority-Black district in Memphis — a city where more than half the population is Black — giving Republicans an improved chance to win the state's only Democratic-held seat. Several lawsuits are still pending in federal courts.

## Trump's latest immigration move clouds the path to green cards

By REBECCA SANTANA and GISELA SALOMON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When President Donald Trump's administration announced last week that it would require green card seekers to apply from their home countries instead of in the U.S., immigration attorney Flavia Santos Lloyd's phone began ringing off the hook with clients worried about the implications for them.

Lloyd wasn't sure what to tell them, but she knew the confusing new policy would slow down applications. "It has a chilling effect because we have some cases that we were going to proceed and I can tell already, we should wait and see what's going on," she said.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services announced Friday that foreigners in the U.S. who want a green card will need to leave and apply in their home country, barring some unspecified exceptions.

The announcement, which potentially affects hundreds of thousands of green card applicants a year, was the latest immigration policy unveiled by Trump's Republican administration to stun and confound lawyers, advocates and immigrants. It's also part of a pivot by the administration to target legal pathways to immigration, after focusing since last year mostly on migrants in the U.S. illegally.

"This is simply an attempt to try to limit and scare people away from the legal immigration process," immigration attorney Charles Kuck said, adding that he expected legal action against the change. "This is a scare tactic."

As worried immigrants and their employers flood immigration law offices with questions, it's unclear what the effect will be, what exceptions might be allowed and how the policy will play out on the ground.

Some green card seekers were already facing questions about why they should be allowed to apply from the U.S.

A confusing rollout for the new policy

For more than half a century, foreign nationals with legal status have been able to apply for and complete the process for permanent residence in the United States — including people married to U.S. citizens, holders of work and student visas, and refugees and political asylum-seekers, among others.

That appeared to change suddenly on Friday, when USCIS announced the shift on its website.

"From now on, an alien who is in the U.S. temporarily and wants a Green Card must return to their home country to apply, except in extraordinary circumstances," the agency said.

USCIS also issued a more detailed policy memo designed as guidance for its staffers who decide these

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cases. Immigration experts who were trying to decipher the news said the memo was more nuanced, leading to confusion over what the change actually entailed.

In response to questions from The Associated Press, the Department of Homeland Security said Wednesday the shift wouldn't prevent anyone "who legitimately and properly" qualifies from obtaining a green card although it will result in some people having to apply overseas with the State Department. The department said the policy would have "no noticeable impact on highly qualified applicants and skilled professionals who have followed the law."

One immigration law firm, Boundless Immigration, in a blog post on its website stating its interpretation of the policy, said officers were being instructed to "apply existing discretionary standards more rigorously" but surmised that the policy doesn't completely stop the adjustment of status process for "eligible applicants" depending on the category of visa they have.

The company cited previous policy memos about citizenship acquisition that had not prompted harsher steps in practice.

Immigration firms and advocates left guessing who'll be impacted

Shev Dalal-Dheini, senior director of government relations at the American Immigration Lawyers Association, said the guidance may be targeting people who overstayed their visas, such as the parent of a U.S. citizen who remained after a visa expired, an employee of a company who transferred to the U.S. or people in the country on visas specific to clergy and other religious workers.

"It seems like maybe who they're targeting is potentially those whose period of stay lapsed while they were here," she said.

Kevin Miner, a partner with the immigration law firm Fragomen, said he expected that people on employment-based visas, like H-1Bs, would be exempt. Known as dual-intent, these visas allow people on nonimmigrant visas in the U.S. to seek a green card. Those dual-intent visas were specifically mentioned in the memo as areas of possible exception.

"Those probably are cases that will continue to precede business as usual and that we won't see a significant impact," said Miner, who said the announcement Friday took people by surprise.

Matthew Soerens, the U.S. director of church mobilization for World Relief, an organization that helps resettle refugees in the U.S., said language in the memo referring to cases in which immigrants have to adjust their status in the U.S. gives the organization "hope" and "expectation" that the guidance doesn't apply to refugees.

Refugees are people who are fleeing their homeland who meet a specific set of criteria to be admitted to the U.S. after lengthy vetting. They are required to do that green card processing a year after arriving in the U.S. and can't go home because of the risks they'd face there, Soerens said.

Trump's administration has slashed the number of refugees admitted into the U.S. this year and limited them to white South Africans.

People who entered the country under humanitarian parole, which allows presidents to admit people for humanitarian reasons and which President Joe Biden's Democratic administration expanded dramatically, could also be impacted, Soerens said.

Many of those people might have already had family in the U.S. or they married a U.S. citizen — both of which potentially give them pathways to apply for a green card that could now be complicated.

All of these nuances make it difficult to provide general legal advice to people, said Dalal-Dheini.

"It's going to be a very case by case specific thing," she said.

Immigrants facing questions about their applications, group says

The American Immigration Lawyers Association said several people in green card interviews under the new guidance faced questions Tuesday that haven't previously been asked of applicants.

One person who was applying to get a green card based off their marriage to a U.S. citizen was asked why they applied to adjust their status in the U.S. instead of going back to their home country and applying at the embassy there. They were asked if there were any factors that would prevent them from applying back at their home country and if they still had family there.

Another person was asked to file a form demonstrating why they should be allowed to apply from the

U.S. and were told evidence should prove they wouldn't be a financial burden or a "public charge" on the U.S. and could include their 2025 tax return, a letter from an employer stating their salary and bank statements.

Lloyd, the immigration attorney, said she has sent emails to her corporate and noncorporate clients telling them that she is monitoring the situation and she will reach out to them as soon as she has more guidance and practical applications.

She said she thinks the policy will deter some companies from pursuing green cards for their clients.

"I don't want everybody to panic," she said. "My advice to them is wait and see."

## **US will need years to replenish stockpiles of advanced weapons used in Iran war, new analysis finds**

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. military contractors need at least three years to replenish stockpiles of three key weapons systems used heavily in the Iran war, according to an analysis released Wednesday, adding to concerns that American forces would have limited firepower in any future conflict with China.

The weapons systems are Tomahawk cruise missiles, which are used to strike targets deep inside enemy territory, and Patriot and THAAD interceptors that defend against incoming missiles and drones.

"The United States has enough munitions for any plausible scenario in the Iran war, but the depleted inventories have created a window of vulnerability for a potential Western Pacific conflict," the Center for Strategic and International Studies said in its new report, provided to The Associated Press. "The time needed to rebuild those inventories has thus become a major concern."

China has a stated goal of ensuring its military is capable of taking Taiwan by force if necessary by 2027, which experts see as more aspirational than a hard deadline. But Chinese President Xi Jinping warned this month that if Washington mishandles its relations with the self-governing island, the U.S. and China could end up clashing or even in open conflict.

Trump administration is boosting funding, but production takes time

The analysis by the Washington think tank factors in the Republican Trump administration's historic \$1.5 trillion defense budget proposal for 2027, which significantly accelerates spending on high-end munitions that began under the Democratic Biden administration. While there's bipartisan agreement in Congress to boost inventories, "the problem today isn't money; it's time," the report said.

"It takes time to expand production capacity and to build these complex systems," the report said, adding that the window of vulnerability will last "for several years until inventories return to their previous levels and another several years before they get to the levels that war planners desire."

Although munitions inventories are classified, CSIS said sufficient public information exists in Pentagon budget materials to estimate production timelines.

President Donald Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth have insisted the U.S. is capable of fighting any war. They have pushed defense contractors to speed up munitions production, with Hegseth telling lawmakers last month that military spending under Trump will help manufacturers double or even triple their capacities.

During Trump's Cabinet meeting Wednesday, Hegseth lauded the president's efforts to expand the nation's defense manufacturing sector, with private contractors investing in new plants and production lines "so that we're getting weapons faster than ever."

Chief Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said in a statement that the military "has everything it needs to execute at the time and place of the President's choosing."

"We have executed multiple successful operations across combatant commands while ensuring the U.S. military possesses a deep arsenal of capabilities to protect our people and our interests," Parnell said.

Some military experts have pushed back. Pentagon officials "knew the reality of our military stockpiles and hopefully told someone, 'Hey, if we go to this fight, even in the most conservative estimates, we are drawing down our stockpiles to a critical level,'" said Virginia Burger, a senior defense policy analyst at the

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Project On Government Oversight watchdog group and a former Marine officer.

Concerns about diminished stockpiles were a theme at recent congressional hearings. For Democrats, the munitions supply is a damning metric against the Iran war, which Trump launched without lawmakers' approval. Some Republicans argue that the problem stems from the U.S. sending Patriot missile defense systems to Ukraine after Russia invaded in 2022, although several American allies use those systems.

The roots of the predicament can be traced to the end of the Cold War, said Mark Cancian, a retired Marine colonel and senior adviser at CSIS who co-authored the study with research associate Chris H. Park.

After the fall of the Soviet Union in late 1991, the U.S. assumed future wars would be short and regional with little need for large numbers of such high-end weapons, Cancian said in an interview. The Pentagon ordered relatively low numbers, assuming the military would not need many of them. Military contractors responded in kind, relying on a relatively small manufacturing footprint to build them.

Russia's war with Ukraine showed that wars could be protracted and require deep inventories of advanced weapons, Cancian said. At the same time, U.S. military strategists were war-gaming possible conflicts in the western Pacific.

"The thinking started to change, but it just takes time to build inventories," Cancian said, adding that part of the challenge is bringing up to speed a complicated web of supply chains and subcontractors that produce very novel components.

President Joe Biden's administration should get some credit for starting conversations with the defense industry, putting money into the industrial base and ramping up production, said Cancian, who oversaw acquisitions of military hardware at the Office of Management and Budget under Presidents George W. Bush, a Republican, and Barack Obama, a Democrat.

"A lot of people in the Trump administration are inclined to say that everything was terrible until they arrived, and that's not true," Cancian said. "Now, it is true that the Trump administration really increased funding."

How long it will take to rebuild key stockpiles

The U.S. fired 1,000-plus Tomahawk missiles at Iran, and it could take until late 2030 to fully replenish the prewar inventory, CSIS estimates show.

Fewer than 200 Tomahawks are made a year because of small orders in the past, the report says. However, manufacturer Raytheon has a goal of ramping up capacity to more than 1,000 per year.

RTX, Raytheon's parent company, declined to comment on the CSIS findings because it had not yet seen the report. But RTX pointed to investments of several billion dollars to boost production, including expanding facilities in Alabama and Arizona.

For in-demand air defense systems, replacing as many as 290 THAAD, or Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, interceptors that shot down incoming Iranian drones and missiles could take until the end of 2029, CSIS estimates. Replenishing more than 1,000 Patriot interceptors should wrap up in mid-2029.

Lockheed Martin is significantly boosting production of rounds for both systems, while deliveries of THAADs "were apparently re-sequenced to prioritize U.S. needs over those of allies and partners," CSIS noted.

"Patriot deliveries pose a dilemma for the United States because of the need to replenish its own inventories, help Ukraine defend against Russian missile attacks, and meet the needs of 17 other countries that use the interceptor," the report said.

Lockheed Martin said in a statement that it's investing \$9 billion through 2030 and "is already delivering tangible results to meet heightened munitions demand, including a new facility in Alabama announced last week along with more than 20 others across the United States."

In the meantime, CSIS said a potential conflict with China is "not all bleak," with the U.S. military recently displaying its capabilities against Iran, Venezuela and the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

"China is deeply aware that it has no recent combat experience and that it performed poorly in its last war — against Vietnam in 1979," the report said. "That difference in experience may preserve deterrence until munitions inventories are restored."



## For one Ukrainian war amputee, rebuilding is painful after a Russian strike killed her husband

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KRYVYI RIH, Ukraine (AP) — After Iryna Nakonechna lost her left leg last year in a Russian missile attack that also killed her husband, the Ukrainian woman decided everything tied to her former self had to go.

She cut off her dark wavy hair and removed furniture, clothes, trinkets and photographs from her home. Just one reminder of her previous life remained: a portrait of herself and her husband, Serhii Nakonechnyi.

Shedding her old identity was necessary, she said, to endure the painful reinvention required to build a life with a prosthetic.

Today, Nakonechna is quick-witted and effervescent, her laughter loud and sudden. She wears a pixie haircut and bold red cat-eye glasses, and knits small toy capybaras — an animal that has become an unofficial symbol among amputees in Ukraine. But beneath the sparkle in her eyes lies a grief woven into the painful process of becoming someone new. It's an often unspoken reality beneath the narratives of resilience surrounding the tens of thousands of people in Ukraine who have lost limbs in the war that began more than four years ago when Russia launched a full-scale invasion.

"The hardest thing was accepting myself with these injuries, wounds that are not only physical," she said. "Coming to terms with how much my life has changed has been very difficult."

The exact number of war amputees in Ukraine is unknown, but it continues to rise as landmines, artillery, and missile and drone strikes inflict catastrophic injuries on soldiers and civilians. The increase has fueled an expansion of rehabilitation and prosthetics services, while also reshaping Ukrainian society. Prosthetic limbs have become increasingly visible and powerful symbols of survival and defiance.

Nakonechna, 50, still walks with a limp and uses a cane as she learns to trust the prosthetic that reaches her upper thigh. The airstrike also left her with limited mobility in her arms, making it difficult to lift heavy objects.

Walking with confidence

The next step in Nakonechna's rehabilitation is learning to walk without a cane, her physical therapist, Anastasiia Stetsenko, said.

She must not only build her strength, but also her confidence. She must trust herself through movements most people take for granted: climbing stairs, squatting to pick something up, navigating uneven streets, or chasing after her 2-year-old grandson at the playground.

Nakonechna's weekly hourlong sessions with Stetsenko begin with removing her prosthetic and resting it against the wall.

Then, Stetsenko has Nakonechna lift a plastic bar while seated, timing the movement to her breathing.

"You are a demon," Nakonechna says to Stetsenko, when the exercises become taxing.

Later, Stetsenko has Nakonechna lie back and rotate her amputated limb in slow circles, testing the limits of her range of motion.

"This feels like an extreme sport," Nakonechna jokes.

Finally, Stetsenko suggests she squat while gripping a ballet barre, one of the hardest movements for her to relearn.

"I will respond as my grandson would," Nakonechna says. "Just no."

The two women break into peals of laughter, sounding more like old friends than therapist and patient.

The day of the attack

The attack happened on March 5, 2025. After dinner, Nakonechna and her husband took advantage of unseasonably warm spring weather with an evening stroll.

They were near the entrance of hotel in central Kryvyi Rih when a Russian missile tore through the building, hurling them in opposite directions.

Her ears rang as her husband, now several meters away, screamed.

She pushed herself upright and felt her left shoulder crunch. The bones were broken. She reached for her left leg but couldn't feel it.

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The couple ended up at different hospitals. Her husband died the next day.

"I never got to say goodbye," Nakonechna said. "I wasn't even at the funeral."

Over the next two months, the days dissolved into a blur as Nakonechna underwent two surgeries a week.

By May of that year, she could finally sit up again.

She felt relieved, she said, but it was only the beginning.

A new life

The apartment Nakonechna once shared with her husband is now almost unrecognizable.

"I had to get rid of everything from the past," she said. "And focus on living my life, even if it was half the life I had before."

Nakonechna invited her 77-year-old mother, who has dementia, to move in with her. At lunch, her mother carefully sets a pot of borscht on the table. Nakonechna said such tasks are no longer easy for her.

She laments that she still cannot lift her grandson, Tymofii. One day, the boy placed a sticker of a cartoon capybara wearing a prosthetic leg onto her own prosthetic. She left it there.

A meticulous craftswoman, she later began knitting toy capybaras through Superhumans, a modern war-trauma center specializing in prosthetics and rehabilitation. During the war, veterans started putting the toys and stickers of the fuzzy, playful animals on their limbs to put strangers at ease. The capybara has since come to symbolize resilience and the determination to reclaim joy after devastation.

Nakonechna's toys quickly became popular, and she spends hours knitting them. Her favorite part is assembling the pieces at the end, when the toy becomes whole.

"When I count the stitches, I think only about the stitches, not about the life that could have been and unfortunately is not," Nakonechna said.

Recently, she marked a personal victory: For the first time since her injury, she wore shorts.

The small act marked a powerful shift.

"I accepted myself as I am," she said.

## Today in History: May 28, Jackson signs Indian Removal Act

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, May 28, the 148th day of 2026. There are 217 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On May 28, 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, which forced nearly 50,000 Native Americans, primarily in the Southeastern U.S., to move to designated territories west of the Mississippi River.

Also on this date:

In 1863, the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, made up of free Black men, left Boston to fight for the Union in the Civil War.

In 1892, the Sierra Club was founded in San Francisco by naturalist John Muir.

In 1918, American troops fought their first major battle during World War I as they launched an offensive against the German-held French village of Cantigny; the Americans succeeded in capturing the village.

In 1959, the U.S. Army launched Able, a rhesus monkey, and Baker, a squirrel monkey, aboard a Jupiter missile for a suborbital flight which both primates survived.

In 1972, burglars working on behalf of the Nixon White House broke into the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C., installing surveillance devices on telephones and taking photos of DNC documents. The ensuing scandal led to President Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974.

In 1977, 165 people were killed when fire raced through the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate, Kentucky.

In 1987, to the embarrassment of Soviet officials, Mathias Rust, a teenage West German amateur pilot, landed a private plane near Moscow's Red Square without authorization. (Rust was held by the Soviets until he was pardoned and freed the following year.)

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In 2013, in one of the biggest money-laundering schemes in U.S. history, federal prosecutors charged seven people with effectively running an online, underworld bank, saying Liberty Reserve handled \$6 billion for drug dealers, child pornographers, identity thieves and other criminals worldwide. Its founder, Arthur Budovsky, was later convicted in the scheme and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Today's Birthdays: Former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani is 82. Singer Gladys Knight is 82. Musician Billy Vera is 82. Musician John Fogerty (Creedence Clearwater Revival) is 81. Country singer-songwriter Phil Vassar is 64. Singer-actor Kylie Minogue is 58. Actor Justin Kirk is 57. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio is 55. TV personality Elisabeth Hasselbeck is 49. Actor Jake Johnson is 48. Singer-songwriter Colbie Caillat is 41. Actor Carey Mulligan is 41. Actor Lukas Gage is 31. Pop singer Dahyun is 28.