

Groton Daily Independent

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Friday, June 5

Senior Menu: Stuffed pepper soup, ham salad sandwich, fruit, cookie.

Falk Field: U12

Groton vs Clark 4:30

Clark vs Milbank 6:00

Groton vs Milbank 7:30

Nelson Field: U10

Groton vs Clark 4:30

Clark vs Milbank 6:00

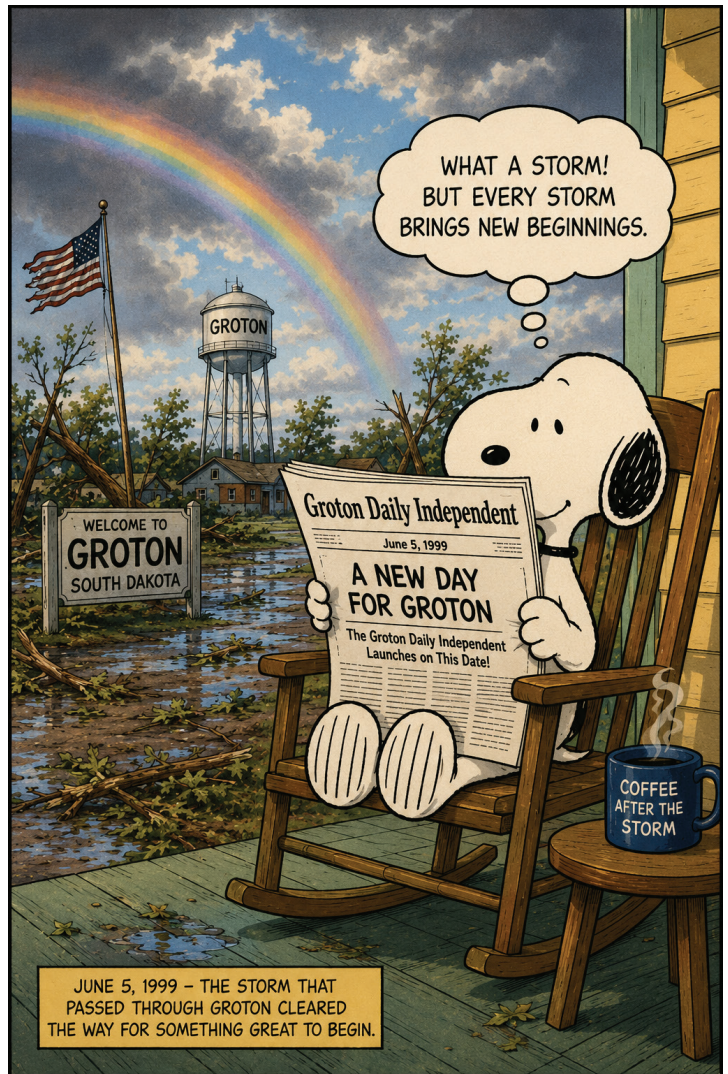
Groton vs Milbank 7:30

Groton Daily Independent

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Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

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Saturday, June 6

605 American Legion Riders, 8:30 a.m., Legion DAY OF PLAY

U14 Legion hosts Redfield

Sr. Legion hosts Redfield

Jr. Legion hosts Redfield

U12 Baseball hosts Britton, DH, 1 p.m., Falk Field

U10 Baseball hosts Britton, DH, 11 a.m., (All), Falk Field

U8 Baseball host Britton, 9 a.m. (Red)

U8 Baseball host Britton, 10 a.m. (Blue)

U14/U18 Softball Mix Scrimmage in Groton, 3:30 p.m.

U12 Softball hosts Britton, DH, noon, (All)

U10 Softball hosts Britton, DH, 10 a.m., (All)

U8 Softball hosts Britton, 9 a.m.

"WINE on 9" at Olive Grove is Cancelled.

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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.

Pest From the Past Returns

US officials have confirmed the first case of New World screwworm in US cattle in more than 60 years, found in a 3-week-old calf in Texas near the border with Mexico.

The parasitic fly's larvae feed on living tissue, infesting open wounds in livestock and causing severe injury or death. It can also affect pets, wildlife, and, rarely, people; the most recent US case involved a traveler returning from El Salvador last year. While officials say the parasite does not threaten the food supply, they warn a broader outbreak could cost the livestock industry billions and raise prices. The US cattle herd stands at about 86 million head, its lowest level in 75 years.

Officials are releasing millions of sterile males to halt reproduction, a method that eradicated the pest in the 1960s by ensuring females—which mate only once but can lay up to 3,000 eggs over a 10- to 30-day lifespan—produce no viable offspring. A 12-mile quarantine zone has also been established, restricting animal movement.

Border Bill Vote-A-Rama

The Senate began voting yesterday on a \$70B Republican-backed bill that funds both Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection through 2029. Passage is expected as soon as today, before the bill heads to the House.

The legislation includes more than \$38B for ICE, \$26B for CBP, and additional funding for the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice. The money would go toward hiring and training additional personnel, upgrading technology, and supporting state and local law enforcement. The bill was delayed for weeks by GOP infighting over two provisions that were ultimately stripped: the \$1B White House ballroom security and a nearly \$1.8B DOJ anti-weaponization fund.

Republicans are using budget reconciliation to bypass the Senate's 60-vote threshold, allowing the bill to advance with a simple majority rather than requiring bipartisan support. It must first clear a "vote-a-rama," where senators can propose unlimited amendments to change or strike parts of the bill, often used to force political votes.

Six-Day Survival

A missing Nepali guide was found alive on Mount Everest six days after he was last seen. A cleaning crew discovered 52-year-old Dawa Sherpa while closing up routes at the end of Everest's climbing season.

A British climber said Sherpa had paused to rest during the descent, and although it was common to take rests, this time the guide didn't catch back up. He was last seen on May 29 above Camp 3, at an altitude of roughly 24,000 feet, where oxygen is low. Search efforts were reportedly delayed, and helicopters failed to find him. When Sherpa was spotted days later, he was on Khumbu Icefall, crawling toward Base Camp. He was airlifted to a hospital with frostbite but was otherwise reportedly in good health.

This year's climbing season was the busiest on record, with more than 1,000 climbers reaching the summit. Nepali guides typically earn around \$5K per season.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

World No. 114 Maja Chwalińska becomes the lowest-ranked French Open finalist in history after defeating Diana Shnaider in the semifinals; will face Mirra Andrejeva tomorrow.

Marjane Satrapi, the French-Iranian graphic artist and author behind the "Persepolis" series, dies at age 56; no cause of death given though French media said she died "of sadness".

Texas beats Texas Tech 4-1 to win the Women's College World Series for the second consecutive year.

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Science & Technology

Astrophysicists find first evidence of a cosmic "wind" blowing outward from the Sagittarius A*, the super-massive black hole at the center of the Milky Way; effect had been theorized for 50 years but not confirmed.

Electrical pulses delivered to sea squirts reverse damage in the creatures' stem cells, extending their lifespan by more than a year; findings could shed light on anti-aging therapies for humans.

Artificial leaf produces methanol using only sunlight, water, and carbon dioxide as inputs.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.4%, Dow +1.7%, Nasdaq -0.1%).

Quantinuum, a quantum computing firm, debuts on Nasdaq after raising nearly \$1.7B in an upsized initial public offering.

Private equity firm Blackstone reinstates 5% withdrawal limit on its \$79B flagship private-credit fund after investors seek to pull out \$4.4B amid concerns over access to cash in the private market.

Database startup Supabase raises \$500M in funding at \$10.5B valuation; the company makes back-end tools for building AI apps.

Politics & World Affairs

House Oversight Committee releases full, 111-page transcript of interview with former Attorney General Pam Bondi about the Epstein files.

President Donald Trump says he will nominate acting Attorney General Todd Blanche to serve in the role permanently; Blanche previously worked as Trump's personal lawyer.

Former national security adviser John Bolton will plead guilty later this month to one count of retaining classified national security information, pay \$2.3M fine; Bolton criticized President Donald Trump in his 2020 memoir (More)

★ GROTON ★

TRANSIT

FUNDRAISER



Join us for an evening of great food,
good company, and community support!

 WHEN: Thursday, June 11, 2026	 TIME: 5:00 pm - 7:00 pm	 WHERE: Groton Community Center
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 Groton Community Center— 109 N 3rd Street
One block East of Groton Transit

★ LET US DO THE COOKING FOR YOU! ★

 BURGERS	 BRATS	 BEANS	 WATERMELON	 CHIPS
--	--	--	---	--

AND THE FAMOUS MINI DONUTS! 

★ FOOD ★ FUN ★ DOOR PRIZES ★

FREE WILL DONATION

Please join us & Help support Groton Transit!



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Ride 605 to stop in Groton in support of veterans and youth programs

The Groton community will welcome participants in the American Legion Ride 605 this weekend as riders travel across South Dakota raising funds to benefit veterans and youth programs.

Ride 605 is an annual fundraising event organized by the South Dakota American Legion Riders in support of the South Dakota American Legion Foundation. The four-day motorcycle ride, scheduled for June 5-8, covers approximately 1,000 miles across the state, bringing together members of American Legion posts, auxiliaries, Sons of the American Legion, and American Legion Riders chapters.

The ride begins and ends at Capitol Lake in Pierre and includes stops in communities across South Dakota. Along the route, riders visit veterans memorials and collect donations to support American Legion programs. Organizers have set a fundraising goal of \$10,000 for this year's event.

The Groton American Legion Post will host the Ride 605 participants on Saturday morning, June 6, at the Legion Hall. Breakfast, prepared by members of the American Legion Post, Auxiliary, and Sons of the American Legion, will begin at 8:30 a.m. A program will follow at 9:30 a.m., during which local donations will be presented to the Ride 605 participants.

This year's ride also serves as a celebration of America's upcoming 250th birthday. Individuals who contribute to the fundraising effort will be entered into a drawing for a Vietnam War-themed painting created by artist John C. Green. Donors contributing \$250 or more will receive additional entries into the drawing. Donations may be made at any Ride 605 stop or mailed through June 12. The drawing will be held during the South Dakota American Legion Department Convention Banquet.

The South Dakota American Legion Foundation, established in 2010, serves as the charitable arm of the organization. The nonprofit foundation raises and manages funds to support veterans programs, youth activities, and other American Legion initiatives throughout the state. Foundation donations are invested through the South Dakota Community Foundation to help ensure long-term growth and sustainability.

Since Ride 605 was launched in 2021, the event has generated nearly \$25,000 to support the foundation's mission.

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The American Legion Ride 605 – “#Ride605forVets”

Contacts: Fred Nelson 605-641-7959 or Micheline Nelson 605-645-1346

Thursday, June 4 @ 6:00 pm, 6th annual ALR meeting, calling all Chapters, Ft. Pierre Pizza Ranch. Tentatively, planning a ride to Onida to remember Steve Stier, following the dinner & meeting. Lodging on your own.

Ride 605 - Day 1: Friday, June 5 (±270 miles) Pierre - Groton

9:30 am: **Pierre Capitol Lake** – “Benediction of the Bikes” & Donations

10:30 am: Pierre to Gettysburg (60 miles) – **arrive at 11:30 am in Gettysburg** for Program

12:00 pm: Fuel and KSU Gettysburg to Herreid (65 miles) – **arrive at 1:15 pm in Herreid** for Lunch and Program

2:45 pm: Fuel & KSU Herreid to Hosmer (50 miles) – **arrive at 3:45 pm in Hosmer** for Program

4:30 pm: Hosmer to **Aberdeen** Willie Park (60 miles) – Display of the America/South Dakota 250 Flag and 50 States arrive at 5:20 pm for group photo opportunity followed by a picnic hosted by Aberdeen.

Lodging: 7:30 pm: Two options (1) Stay in Aberdeen or (2) Ride to **Groton** (20 miles) Hunting Lodge (12 beds) plus accommodations for 5 couples. 605-645-1346

Ride 605 - Day 2: Saturday, June 6 (±200 miles) Groton - Madison

8:30 am: Breakfast provided by Groton

9:30 am: **Groton** Post for the Program

10:00 am: Groton to Raymond (45 miles) – **arrive at 11:00 am in Raymond** for Lunch & Program

12:30 pm: Raymond to Huron (45 miles) – **arrive at 1:30 pm in Huron**

2:00 pm: Fuel and KSU Huron to DeSmet (45 miles) – **arrive at 3:00 pm in DeSmet** for Refreshments & Program

3:45 pm: DeSmet to Arlington (35 miles) – **arrive at 4:30 pm in Arlington** for Program

5:00 pm: Arlington to Madison (30 miles) – **arrive at 5:45 pm in Madison** for Dinner & Program

Hotel: AmericInn **Madison**, 504 SE 10th St. Call: 605 646-2689

Ride 605 - Day 3: Sunday, June 7 (±275 miles) Madison to Burke

8:30 am: Fuel

9:00 am: Madison to Garretson (60 miles) – **arrive at 10:00 am in Garretson** for Breakfast Fundraiser and Program

10:50 am: Garretson to Sioux Falls (30 miles) – **arrive at 11:20 am in Sioux Falls** for Monthly Pancake Fundraiser/Lunch and Program

12:15 pm: Fuel & KSU Sioux Falls to Ethan (55 miles) – **arrive at 1:30 pm in Ethan** for Program

2:30 pm: Fuel and KSU Ethan to Wagner (50 miles) - **arrive at 3:30 pm in Wagner** for Program

4:45 pm: Fuel and KSU Wagner to Gregory (70 miles) – **arrive at 6:00 pm in Gregory** for Dinner & Program

Hotel Change: L Two Lodging, 743 W 7th St, **Burke** (8 miles) Group for Ride 605 \$75 +tax - \$82.78 Phone: 605-775-2654

Ride 605 - Day 4: Monday, June 8 (±225 miles) Burke to Pierre

8:30 am: Fuel & KSU Burke to Winner (35 miles) – **arrive at 9:30 am in Winner** for Breakfast and Program

10:30 am: Winner to Oacoma (60 miles) – **arrive at 11:30 am in Oacoma**

11:30 am: **Al's Oasis** for Lunch

12:30 pm: Fuel & KSU Oacoma to Chamberlain Veterans Park (20 miles) – **arrive at 1:00 pm in Chamberlain** for Program

1:30 pm: Chamberlain to Pierre (Ft Thompson, Lower Brule, Route 1806 – scenic route (110 miles)

3:30 pm: Arrive in Pierre – Capitol Lake – end of the ride

The Ride 605 starts and ends in Pierre: about 1,000 miles.



The Ride 605 will celebrate America's 250th birthday. The ride is one of the largest fundraisers to benefit veterans and children & youth programs from the South Dakota American Legion Foundation. Each donor will receive a chance at this beautiful Vietnam original painting from John C. Green donated by Hugh Holmes. Donations of \$250 or more will receive an additional chance. Donations can be presented at any of the stops on the ride, at the department joint banquet, or sent to the department headquarters by June 12. Please address checks to the SDAL Foundation, include Ride 605 in the memo. Drawing will be during the Joint Banquet at the Department Convention. **THANK YOU!**



Groton Legion U14 sweeps Milbank in home doubleheader



Kyson Kucker pitching for the Groton 14U team.

(Photo courtesy Tara Hill)

Groton Legion 14U baseball team picked up a pair of victories over Milbank on Thursday in Groton, using aggressive base running, patient hitting and strong pitching performances to complete the sweep.

Groton opened the day with an 8-2 victory before following with an 11-3 win in the nightcap.

In the opener, Groton received contributions throughout the lineup, especially from the bottom third of the batting order. Carter Boerger, Keegan Kucker and Kyson Kucker combined for four of the team's eight hits while scoring two runs and driving in two more.

Groton grabbed the lead in the first inning when an error allowed a run to score and never looked back.

Bentley Ehresmann earned the win on the mound, allowing just one hit over five scoreless innings while striking out five and walking two. Trayce Schelle closed out the game with 1 1/3 scoreless innings of relief, striking out three.

Keegan Kucker led Groton with two hits, while Boerger, Schelle, Easton Larson and Hank Hill each drove in a run. Groton was aggressive on the basepaths, stealing 16 bases in the contest. Keegan Kucker, Schelle, Larson, Ehresmann, Hill and Mason Locke each recorded multiple stolen bases.

Defensively, Groton also turned a double play.

The momentum continued in the second game as Groton rolled to an 11-3 victory behind a balanced offensive attack and another strong pitching effort.

Milbank briefly took a 2-1 lead in the second inning, but Groton answered immediately. Knox Mulder singled home a run, Schelle drew a bases-loaded walk and Owen Tewksbury delivered a two-run single to put Post 39 back in front.

Groton then broke the game open with a six-run fourth inning. Easton Larson singled in a run, Tewksbury added an RBI groundout, Hudson Eichler drew a bases-loaded walk, Mulder delivered another RBI single, Asher Zimmerman earned a bases-loaded walk and Larson later added another run-producing groundout.

Kyson Kucker started on the mound and picked up the win, allowing two runs on two hits over four innings while striking out six. Keegan Kucker worked in relief to help secure the victory.

Tewksbury drove in three runs to lead the offense, while Mulder enjoyed a big game from the bottom of the order, collecting three hits in three at-bats. Zimmerman showed tremendous patience at the plate, drawing three walks, and Groton finished with 13 walks as a team.

The bottom portion of the lineup again played a major role, as Mulder, Eichler and Gavin Hanten combined for four hits, five runs scored and two RBIs.

Boerger and Zimmerman each stole multiple bases as Groton swiped 10 bags in the second game.

With the two wins, Groton Post 39 showcased depth throughout its lineup and strong pitching performances from Ehresmann and Kyson Kucker while improving its early-season record. Groton was scheduled to host Redfield on Friday.



Trayce Schelle and Graham Rose making the play at second.

(Photo courtesy Tara Hill)

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GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

School Board Meeting

June 8, 2026 – 7:00 PM – GHS Conference Room

AGENDA:

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

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approve of minutes of May 12, 2026 school board meeting as drafted.
2. Approve of May 2026 Financial Report, Custodial Accounts, and Investments.
3. Approve of May 2026 District bills for payment.
4. Approve of May 2026 School Lunch Report.
5. Approve of May 2026 School Transportation Report.
6. Authorize Business Manager to publish FY2027 Groton Area School District Budget with 7:30 PM public hearing set for July 13, 2026.
7. Authorize the Business Manager to pay district bills up to \$75,000 in advance, using the custodial advance payment account to be approved by the board for reimbursement at the following regular board meeting.

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Discussion regarding ongoing Facilities Master Planning process.
3. Consider proposal from Co-Op Architects for Pre-Bond Services.
4. Consider RFP for Construction Manager at Risk.
5. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Approve Cahill Bauer and Associates to conduct the Groton Area School District FY2026 Audit.
2. Approve list of surplus property.
3. Authorize Business Manager to create custodial account for Football.
4. Approve Supplemental Budget #FY26-4.
5. Authorize Madi Neiber, Business Manager, as custodian of all District accounts, to continue existing funds, establish new accounts, and continue to invest in local institutions which serve the greatest advantage to the District.
6. Approve EMC Insurance as District property/liability carrier for FY2027 and authorize Business Manager to make District property/liability insurance payment to EMC Insurance for \$195,467.00 on July 1, 2026.
7. First reading of recommended handbook changes – MS/HS Student Handbook.
8. Approve ESY Agreement for Todd Peterson - \$33.16/\$33.50
9. Approve hiring Tanya Dargatz, MS Math Teacher, for the 2026-2027 school year.
10. Approve hiring Sam Markley, MS/HS Social Studies Teacher, for the 2026-2027 school year.
11. Approve hiring Shaun Wanner, JH Football Coach, for the 2026 season.
12. Approve hiring Kelly Oswald, Yearbook Advisor, for the 2026-2027 school year.
13. Approve hiring Trinity Smith and Aubray Miller, cheer coaches, for the 2026-2027 school year.
14. Issue Off-Staff Coaching/Advisor Agreements for the 2026-2027 school year.
15. Approve hiring Aaron Tvinnereim, Maintenance Director, beginning July 15, 2026.

ADJOURN



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Seven recounts possible in South Dakota legislative races, but only one candidate considering

BY: JOHN HULT

The results from seven state legislative races were close enough to trigger possible recounts after Tuesday's primary election in South Dakota.

Six of the candidates entitled to ask for a recount don't intend to, though, and one is undecided.

Under South Dakota law, losing candidates can request a recount if the number of votes separating them from the winner does not exceed 2% of the total number of votes cast for all candidates in their race.

Rep. Kent Roe of Hayti, who'll lose his seat after coming in third in his rural Watertown-area race, told South Dakota Searchlight that a recount would likely be "a waste of time for everyone." The top two vote-getters were former Rep. Fred Deutsch of Florence and Milbank newcomer Ryan Kohl.

Kohl beat Roe by 131 votes in the Republican primary for the district's two seats in the state House of Representatives.

Deutsch lost a 2024 state Senate primary to Sen. Stephanie Sauder in a race close enough for a recount. There was a 64 vote margin, and Deutsch asked for a recount.

Not much changed.

"I think the recount in six different counties with six different committees changed maybe two or three votes total," Deutsch wrote in a Wednesday text message to South Dakota Searchlight. "I learned from that experience that the machines are highly accurate."

Tim Begalka, a Clear Lake Republican and former lawmaker who lost by 105 votes to Sauder in their Senate primary, told Searchlight the margin of Sauder's victory was too large to justify a recount.

"It wasn't close enough, and I am so busy that I don't have the time," Begalka said.

Rep. Tony Kayser may go through the petitioning process to pursue a recount, but told Searchlight in a brief phone call that he's yet to decide. He lost by 52 votes to the man he'd ousted in the 2024 primary, Tyler Tordsen, who came in second in their Sioux Falls-area Republican primary.

The closest margin in a legislative primary came in a four-way race for two Rapid City-area seats in the House of Representatives.

In that race, longtime legislator Phil Jensen came in first by around 300 votes. Rep. Curt Massie took second, earning five more votes in the Secretary of State's unofficial vote tally than former Adjutant General of the South Dakota National Guard Jeff Marlette.

Marlette said he'd have pursued a recount if he'd been that close to Jensen, but called Massie a solid lawmaker.

"I was really targeting Phil. I applaud anyone who runs for public office, but I don't think he's an overly effective legislator," Marlette said.

The four-way race for the Republican nomination for governor was close, but not close enough for a recount. U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson had 2,454 fewer votes than Gov. Larry Rhoden, who will face Aberdeen businessman Toby Doeden in a July 28 runoff election.

The deadline to request a recount is June 12.

Recount-eligible legislative candidates and spread

District 33 House: Curt Massie over Jeff Marlette, 5 votes

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District 34 House: Becky Drury over Heather Baxter, 46 votes
District 14 House: Tyler Tordsen over Tony Kayser, 52 votes
District 16 House: John Shubeck over Jason VanDenTop, 68 votes
District 4 Senate: Stephanie Sauder over Tim Begalka, 105 votes
District 23 House: Dick Werner over Amber Werdel, 115 votes
District 4 House: Ryan Kohl over Kent Roe, 131 votes

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.

Afterschool demand outpaces supply, advocates say, even as state scores high in access

Four-day school weeks, partnership in Sioux Falls drive uptake of out-of-school care

BY: JOHN HULT

South Dakota parents who want afterschool care for their kids have better access to it than they do in nearly any other state, according to a national nonprofit organization, and the kids in those afterschool programs spend an outsized number of hours taking part.

Even so, about two-thirds of the South Dakota kids who could be in afterschool care aren't.

Childcare advocates in South Dakota say the state's rankings in the national report highlight both a growing need for programming outside of school hours and that programming's value to taxpayers.

Drops in absenteeism and improvements in academic performance for kids in an expanded afterschool program in Sioux Falls are promising, said Billy Mawhiney, director of the South Dakota Afterschool Network, but "the demand is still outgrowing the supply."

"Yes, we're doing great things, and this is still happening," Mawhiney said. "We still have more work to do."

The network's own report, titled "Practical Pathways for Supporting Working Families Through Out-of-School Time," was released last week.

Child care is "essential for working families" in South Dakota, the report says, because about 78% of kids in the state live in homes where all available parents work.

What's needed, it concludes, is more access to afterschool care, particularly in rural areas, as well as more mapping on where gaps in care may be and a coalition of pro-childcare lawmakers willing to stump for steady government funding.

South Dakota's standing

The network leaned on data from a state-by-state "America After 3 p.m." report from the Washington, D.C.-based Afterschool Alliance to build its own report and recommendations for the future of childcare in South Dakota.

The D.C. group surveyed families and providers in every state. It found that around 22,000 of the 64,000 kids whose parents want after school or summer care in South Dakota are getting it, that the average cost of that care is \$3,300 per year per kid, and that pay of less than \$15 an hour for staff members contributes to high turnover at afterschool programs. The barriers to uptake were tied to the expense and access to quality programming.

But the report also found that South Dakota fares better than most states in some ways. Weighing several factors, the nonprofit ranked the state third nationwide in afterschool program participation, behind Washington, D.C., and Hawaii. The state ranked fifth in access to programming, behind Washington, D.C., Kansas, New Mexico and Alaska.

In Washington, D.C., the report says, high rankings for participation and access are both tied to municipal investment in afterschool programming. In Hawai'i, the scores are linked to the use of federal and state

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grants to expand programming and participation.

Influence of four-day weeks

South Dakota's high ranking in participation wasn't tied as closely to the raw number of kids participating. By that metric, South Dakota is above average, with 14% of the kids whose parents want afterschool programming participating in it at the time parents were surveyed. But the nonprofit's methodology for participation also factors in the "dosage rate," meaning the number of hours per week that kids are in afterschool care. In South Dakota, that figure is 7.7 hours a week. The national average is 5.3.

That's a unique path to a top 10 participation score, according to Nikki Yamashiro, research director for the Afterschool Alliance. But the dosage rate is meaningful, she said, as it offers nuance and acts as a nod to the significance of the amount of time kids spend with experienced caregivers.

"When we think about ranking for participation, it's not just someone who goes one hour a week," Yamashiro said. "We wanted to include that in our calculation. Because South Dakota has such a high average for number of hours a week that kids participate compared to the other states, that's what bumps it up."

That high number may be tied in part to four-day school weeks, the report says, based on the interviews with South Dakota afterschool advocates that helped guide its findings.

For the 2024-25 school year, 45 of the state's 159 public school districts had four-day weeks, according to the state Department of Education. That trend has pushed some school districts to open their doors to Friday afterschool programs run by outside entities. That, in turn, may have helped push the number of hours kids spend in afterschool programs.

The "America After 3 p.m." report's addendum on high-performing states cited the Burke School District, which got a \$211,000 grant from the Governor's Office of Economic Development in 2024 to help launch an afterschool program that runs for a full-day on Fridays, when school is out.

Kelsea Sutton, a banker who helped her county secure the startup grant, said the program is now self-sustaining and funded by parents' tuition fees.

"The school provides a free satellite location," for the nonprofit child care center that staffs the afterschool program, Sutton said, "which has been essential to the partnership."

"It would not work if the school hadn't been a good partner," she said.

Sutton noted that communities like hers didn't have much choice but to expand out-of-school programming. The same has been true for childcare in smaller communities, she said, where businesses, cities and schools have cobbled together options to keep families working.

Out-of-school care in Burke still costs more than many parents can afford, she said, and the staff still don't make enough money.

"What's been going on for a really long time is that working moms are figuring it out in their communities, and just busting their asses to fundraise, go to board meetings, hire staff at poverty wages, all so that people can get to work," Sutton said. "That's what is continuing to happen."

Success story in Sioux Falls

"America After 3 p.m." links South Dakota's high ranking for access to efforts by group's like Mawhinney's to map programs and connect parents to them. But it also pointed to a reworked afterschool program in the state's largest city that's grown the number of kids getting care.

For years, the Sioux Falls School District operated an in-house afterschool program that competed with outside providers. Many of those providers would collect kids from the playground and truck them to their own buildings for afterschool care, making space in facilities used for younger kids all day long.

In 2023, the school district disbanded its program and brought the largest of those nonprofit care providers into all 22 of its elementary schools. The afterschool programs, now called Community Learning Centers, are staffed by the providers, who no longer need to pay for transportation or find space in their own facilities for older kids.

The school district offers its buildings, maintains a small team to manage enrollment and billing and

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shares information on individual student needs and in-school performance with the providers.

The model expanded into middle schools in 2024. Middle school students nationwide are less likely to have access to afterschool care, the national report says.

Additional funding also expanded access.

Families can get subsidies for afterschool care from the state Department of Social Services if they make up to 209% of the federal poverty guidelines. For the Sioux Falls program, families with incomes up to 300% of the federal poverty guidelines are eligible for scholarships, funded through a combination of funding from federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants and money from the Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation.

The federal funding also pays for additional tutoring time for students who struggle academically.

But there's only so much scholarship money, said Rebecca Wimmer, coordinator of community partnerships and afterschool programs for the Sioux Falls School District. Schools that serve more lower-income families tend to have openings in their afterschool programs — even as other schools have waiting lists.

"We max out our budget every year, as far as scholarships go," Wimmer said. "If we had more resources, we could certainly enroll more kids."

The current federal grants expire next year. The school district and its partner providers have separately applied for more, Wimmer said, but don't know if they'll get it.

Hope for funding, and a corrections connection

Because the schools hold both afterschool participation data and data on academic performance, Wimmer's team has been able to crunch numbers and show improvements in those areas for the kids who stick around after the closing bell.

Particularly when tutoring is directed in the areas where teachers say kids need it most, Wimmer said, "what we're seeing is that these best practices are actually resulting in differences."

Wimmer hopes the district's data encourages more collaborative models across the state, and can help draw in funding from municipal and philanthropic sources.

Mawhiney, the afterschool network's director, also sees the data as a way to reopen the funding conversation at the state level. Chronic absenteeism and low academic engagements are some of the most reliable markers for kids who wind up involved in the criminal justice system, he said.

The state's decision to invest \$650 million in a new men's prison in Sioux Falls was wise for public safety, Mawhiney said, but he'd like to see the state invest in programs that help prevent kids from growing up and going there.

"If we're going to be honest, the kids that are in that category, where we'll be covering that cost of incarceration later, are the kids who are not getting that afterschool care," said Mawhiney.

State Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, sponsored a trio of bills in 2025 meant to expand access to childcare. One of them passed both the state Senate and House of Representatives, but failed to override a veto from Gov. Larry Rhoden. The others didn't make it that far.

Reed didn't attempt to revive those bills this year, but said the need for both early childhood education and afterschool care remains. The next time the issue comes up, Reed said, he and the other lawmakers who support state funding need to point to data from Sioux Falls as proof of a return on investment.

"It is the place to go, to talk about this in an upstream kind of way," Reed said. "And then you actually start talking about it in terms of kids doing better in school."

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.

Tribal leaders call for sovereignty as federal support wavers

BY: MARY STEURER

North Dakota tribal leaders say greater sovereignty is key to protecting their communities amid uncertain federal support.

"We come from a proud people who have always stood up for our rights, for our lands, for our resources," Steve Sitting Bear, chair of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, said during a Wednesday presentation.

The comments came during the eighth annual Government to Government Conference in Bismarck. The event brings leaders of the five tribal nations that share geography with North Dakota and state officials together to discuss ways they can collaborate more effectively.

Jamie Azure, chair of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, called on leaders to do more than pay lip service to this idea, especially given the unpredictable future of federal programs under President Donald Trump's administration.

"We ask that we get past the words — we ask that we have true partnerships moving forward because of the threats to our ways of life with potential cuts at the federal level," he said.

The federal government is legally obligated to provide certain ongoing support to tribal nations.

The U.S. Department of the Interior, led by former North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, has recommended cutting more than \$1 billion in funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Bureau of Indian Education for the 2027 budget year.

The proposal includes a more than \$150 million reduction for tribal higher education. In a congressional budget hearing last month, Burgum questioned the cost-effectiveness of tribal colleges and universities compared to other institutions.

Azure in his Wednesday speech said tribal higher education institutions support Native students in ways that other schools can't.

"It's community — it's not only a college," he said.

Azure said he's proud of how North Dakota tribes have navigated interruptions and cuts to federal support so far. For example, the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa set aside \$1.5 million to support tribal citizens when the federal government shutdown temporarily suspended major safety net services, he said.

Azure said tribal, state and federal leaders must do more to promote public safety in tribal communities. He urged the state of North Dakota and tribes to improve the implementation of the Feather Alert, the alert for missing, endangered or abducted Indigenous adults created by the state Legislature in 2025.

Billy Kirkland, assistant secretary for Indian Affairs for the Trump administration, delivered the keynote address for the conference. Kirkland is a citizen of the Navajo Nation.

He said the Department of the Interior's focus is cutting red tape that prevents tribal nations from exercising their independence.

"Indian Country isn't a problem to be solved, but a partner to be empowered," he said.

One priority of the Department of the Interior is working to eliminate the ongoing backlog of tribal probate cases, Kirkland said. The agency will soon establish a platform that allows people to submit and track their cases online, he said.

Another one of the Interior Department's goals is making tribal land safer, Kirkland added. He noted that Burgum last month signed a secretary's order establishing the Indian Country Violent Crime Task Force.

Mark Fox, chair of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation, in his presentation said tribes should pursue policy changes that enable them to develop their own economies and infrastructure, and not count on the federal government for financial support.

"Never will the United States come in and put enough capital — in my estimation, somewhere around maybe a trillion dollars — into all the Indian reservations and build back what they destroyed," Fox said. "Never, ever, ever, ever are they going to do that. They're basically going to hand feed you enough to survive."

Sisseton-Wahpeton Chair J. Garret Renville in his presentation urged federal officials to consult with tribal leaders on policy decisions that affect their communities.

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"I know this administration wants to make things more efficient, and so do we," he said.

He applauded new federal rules implementing the Tribal General Welfare Exclusion Act, which supporters have celebrated as a win for tribal economic development. Renville said federal officials worked with him and other tribal leaders to develop the rules.

Burgum in 2018 started the first Government to Government Conference with former North Dakota Indian Affairs Commissioner Scott Davis.

This year's conference wraps up Thursday.

Reach North Dakota Monitor reporter Mary Steurer at msteurer@northdakotamonitor.com

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

US Senate launches marathon session to pass nearly \$70B for ICE, Border Patrol

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Republicans fended off an attempt Thursday to block the Department of Justice from using an "anti-weaponization" fund to pay people who feel they were wrongly prosecuted, as well as another proposal that sought to require congressional authorization for a new White House ballroom.

Debate on amendments and motions, by Democrats and Republicans, is a required part of the special process GOP leaders are using to approve nearly \$70 billion for immigration enforcement and deportation activities, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Border Patrol, through the end of President Donald Trump's term.

Votes were expected to last into the evening and possibly overnight as Democrats look to challenge their Republican counterparts on policy while also making their case for control of Congress ahead of this year's November midterm elections. The U.S. House adjourned for the week Thursday, meaning the measure will not head to the president's desk until next week at the earliest.

Senators voted 49-50 to reject an amendment from Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., that would have prevented the Department of Justice from carrying out the "anti-weaponization" proposal by Trump to use \$1.776 billion to pay people who feel they were wrongly prosecuted.

Several Republicans facing tough reelection campaigns joined Democrats in voting for the amendment, including Alaska's Dan Sullivan, Maine's Susan Collins and Ohio's Jon Husted.

Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche testified earlier this week the administration had scrapped plans for the "anti-weaponization" fund, following intense criticism from both Republicans and Democrats, but Trump later said he wasn't sure and would have to check with his attorneys.

"Trump won't give Americans a penny to help offset the skyrocketing costs he brought on our country," Schumer said. "But he's more than happy to charge them nearly \$2 billion to line the pockets of his families, his billionaire friends, and the criminals who mauled police officers on January 6. If Republicans truly oppose this corruption, then prove it."

North Carolina Republican Sen. Thom Tillis then offered an amendment of his own that would have transferred the funding the administration had proposed for its so-called "anti-weaponization" fund to the Justice Department's fraud division.

"We heard over the last 48 hours that the acting attorney general said that this fund's not moving forward," Tillis said. "All this amendment does is codify what I believe the policy of the DOJ is."

South Carolina Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham raised a procedural objection to Tillis' amendment, arguing it didn't comply with the strict rules of the process.

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Tillis tried to waive that maneuver, but a 15-84 vote didn't achieve those goals and the amendment failed.

White House ballroom construction

Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley offered an amendment that would have required congressional authorization to proceed with Trump's White House ballroom renovations.

"All of us here have a responsibility to follow the power of the purse responsibility in the Constitution. Let's all support the idea that it must proceed, if it's to proceed, with a congressional authorization," the Democrat said.

Kentucky GOP Sen. Rand Paul called the amendment a "poison pill" and raised a procedural issue on the grounds that Merkley's measure is not under the jurisdiction of the Judiciary Committee.

"There is no money in this bill for a ballroom," Paul said.

Merkley tried to waive the procedural objection, but it failed in a 53-46 vote, which required at least 60 to agree in order to move forward.

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

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

Trump to pump \$700M into coal power in the states, as he again blasts renewable energy

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

The federal government will spend \$700 million on building or refurbishing coal power infrastructure across the country in a boost to "clean, beautiful coal," President Donald Trump said Thursday in the Oval Office.

Trump said he was invoking the Cold War-era Defense Production Act, which gives the president authority over domestic industry, to save 13 existing power plants and build two new ones. He said the move would save 14,000 coal jobs and lower energy costs, though the spending will not lower the price of gasoline or diesel fuel, which has spiked since Trump launched a war with Iran in February.

Trump criticized subsidies for wind power championed by Democrats, including his predecessor, Joe Biden, characterizing coal as the most important energy source to cultivate.

"It's real power," Trump said. "In terms of power, there's really nothing like it. We have so many different alternatives. You talk about some, there's no real alternative."

New coal plants would be built in Alaska and West Virginia, Trump said. A defunct plant in Maryland would also be restarted. Those projects would be funded with \$200 million in Department of Energy grants.

Coal plants receiving a combined \$425 million in Defense Production Act funding are in West Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Indiana, Tennessee, Arkansas, Arizona, Oklahoma, North Dakota and Wisconsin, according to the White House.

Coal mines benefiting from the move are in Pennsylvania, Kentucky, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wyoming, North Dakota and New Mexico, according to the White House.

The administration would also spend \$75 million, authorized by the Defense Production Act, to help open a long-delayed new coal export terminal in Oakland, California, the White House said.

Administration officials said Thursday's announcement built on a record of the past 18 months in which the administration has saved dozens of coal production facilities.

"It is hard to overstate the magnitude of this," Energy Secretary Chris Wright said. "If you look at our efforts across the whole government, so far 45 coal plants are open today that would not be open."

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Republican approval

Trump Cabinet members, congressional Republicans and two governors, Wyoming's Mark Gordon and West Virginia's Patrick Morrissey, joined Trump for the Oval Office announcement, with several extolling the importance of the coal industry after Trump spoke.

Wright, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin praised Trump for intervening to help the industry and refocusing federal energy policy away from renewables.

Wright said Democratic policies were more responsible for high energy costs than the war in Iran, even though Republicans have held unified control of the federal government since January 2025 and the Trump administration has consistently touted its moves to encourage fossil fuel production.

"We wish they were lower, but gasoline prices in the U.S. are a little over \$4. They're \$10 in Europe, they're higher in Asia, they're very high in California," Wright said. The national average price for regular gasoline Thursday was \$4.24 per gallon.

"The bigger threat to energy prices in the United States is Democratic green energy policies," Wright continued. "They have driven up energy prices far more than a conflict in Iran."

Burgum said the president was perhaps the strongest advocate for coal in the country's history.

He echoed Trump's statements that the coal industry needed to be reinvigorated after the Biden administration focused more on renewable energy production.

"The prior administration, under Biden, had gone so far down the path of pursuing the highly subsidized, intermittent, weather-dependent sources of electricity that our grid was at risk. You understood that and you understood how key coal is," Burgum told Trump. "It's the backbone of having affordable, reliable and secure American energy to power our country, our electric grid, power our competitiveness in AI, and power all the manufacturing that's coming back."

Morrissey said the moves would benefit his state.

"We believe your policies are going to allow America to compete and win," Morrissey said. "West Virginia is going to supply the coal, the gas, the nuclear to help make that happen. So I'm very excited by everything you're doing."

Greens decry 'polluter handout'

Environmental groups blasted the move, saying it propped up a failing industry and would have little long-term impact on energy prices or reliability.

Jesse Lee, a senior adviser with the advocacy group Climate Power, said the spending on coal projects would not lower utility prices, which he said have climbed 18% during Trump's second term.

"He's gaslighting the American people by claiming that this move will lower electricity prices in the middle of an energy affordability crisis that he created," Lee said.

Environmental groups noted the coal industry heavily contributed to Trump's 2024 campaign.

Several environmental advocates, including Lena Moffitt, the executive director of the climate group Evergreen Action, suggested that relationship drove Trump to promote coal at the expense of renewable energy sources.

"Spending \$700 million to bail out the coal industry is like throwing a lifeline to a ship that has already sunk," Moffitt wrote. "Trump is handing out taxpayer money to coal barons and leaving us with nothing but higher energy costs. ... There's no coal revival waiting around the corner—just polluters collecting a handout while their friends run the White House and Americans foot the bill."

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

Trump picks acting AG Blanche to stay on full time

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump will nominate acting Attorney General Todd Blanche, his former personal lawyer, to fill the top role at the Department of Justice on a permanent basis, he said Wednesday night.

Trump revealed Blanche as his choice at an outdoor event at the White House, saying “we are going to make him permanent attorney general” and adding that he expects Blanche’s nomination process to “go very quickly.”

Blanche has been leading the department in an acting capacity since former Attorney General Pam Bondi exited the administration in early April.

Blanche, of Florida, will almost certainly have that state’s two Republican senators, Rick Scott and Ashley Moody, supporting his nomination.

The GOP-led Senate confirmed Blanche as deputy attorney general in early March 2025 on a party-line vote.

Blanche represented Trump in 2023 and 2024 during a New York state hush money case. A jury convicted Trump two years ago on 34 first-degree felony counts of falsifying business records.

The close tie between the president and his pick for attorney general is a major reason Democrats will oppose the nomination, U.S. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said Thursday.

“Trump picked Blanche because he’s loyal to the president alone – not the Constitution, not the rule of law, and certainly not the American people, and not to the values that this country has had for 250 years,” Schumer said on the Senate floor. “For years, Blanche has been Trump’s personal lawyer and attack dog, and that didn’t stop when Blanche joined the department.”

Anti-weaponization fund

Blanche has taken heat in recent weeks, including from Republicans, for the department’s settlement in Trump’s \$10 billion lawsuit against his own IRS.

Trump dropped the suit in exchange for the department establishing a nearly \$1.8 billion “anti-weaponization” fund for persons Blanche described on May 18 as “victims of lawfare.” The settlement revealed that the fund would be governed by five commissioners hand-chosen by Blanche, with only one involving consultation from congressional leadership.

Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle quickly objected to the proposal, noting the possibility that people convicted — then pardoned by Trump — of assaulting police during the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol could receive reparations from the fund.

When pressed at a May 27 Senate hearing on whether violent Jan. 6 defendants who were pardoned could reap taxpayer dollars from the fund, Blanche replied, “Anybody can apply.”

“The commission will set rules, I’m sure,” he continued. “That’s not for me to set, that’s for the commissioners, and whether an individual, an Oath Keeper, as you just mentioned, applies for compensation, anybody in this country can apply.”

Several lawsuits quickly challenged the legality of the fund, including one from former police officers who deployed to the Capitol on Jan. 6, and another from legal advocates who argued the fund would be illegally shielded from transparency laws.

After intense pressure, Blanche testified to a House Appropriations subcommittee Tuesday that the administration was “not moving forward with the fund, period.”

The concession cleared the way for reluctant Senate Republicans to support a roughly \$70 billion immigration enforcement package. Senate Democrats plan to stall the bill on the floor Thursday with a marathon of amendments, including proposals to curtail or outright ban such funds going forward.

The administration is still facing questions from lawmakers about a provision in Trump’s IRS settlement that absolves him, his sons Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump, and the Trump Organization, from tax audits.

Epstein files

Blanche has also come under scrutiny for the DOJ's handling of the release of files related to the deceased sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. The botched release last year, when Bondi headed the department, initially exposed names of sexual abuse victims.

Democrats claimed Bondi told the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee during a closed-door interview last week that Blanche oversaw the legally mandated release of the files and made the decision to not investigate any possible leads.

Bondi refuted the claim on social media following the interview.

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

Inspection shows sanitation, use-of-force transparency lacking at La. ICE detention center

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — A Louisiana detention center that houses roughly 1,500 immigrants failed to ensure sanitary conditions, properly store perishable food, properly notify use-of-force incidents and maintain medical records of detainees, according to a report published Thursday by the Department of Homeland Security's internal watchdog.

The findings stem from an unannounced visit from federal inspectors in March 2025 to the Winn Correctional Center in Winnfield, Louisiana.

The report from the DHS Office of Inspector General comes on the heels of multiple hunger strikes from immigrants at detention centers, protests outside facilities, a rise in deaths in detention and calls from Democratic lawmakers to shut down certain sites due to poor and inhumane conditions.

In a statement, a Department of Homeland Security spokesperson characterized the report as showing only "minor infractions" at the facility, but did not address the reports of improper use of force.

"These minor infractions included failing to provide detainees exercise equipment, record keeping errors, and leaking vents," the DHS spokesperson said. "Another infraction included providing a shared computer for legal research that would allow other detainees to see other detainees' case information."

The spokesperson said that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is working to address the issues laid out in the report, including "by adding additional training to facility staff."

Use-of-force reporting

Facility staff did not properly notify the ICE field office of several use-of-force incidents, and videos of the incidents that inspectors tried to review were incomplete, according to the report.

The incidents the OIG reviewed included "applying a choke hold around a detainee's neck," and "puncturing a detainee's skin with a pen to gain compliance."

In the first video reviewed by inspectors, an officer applied a chokehold to stop an altercation between detainees. OIG investigators noted that the facility agreed "that the officer should receive remedial training."

In a second video, "an officer could not close and secure a housing unit because a detainee would not remove his hand from the unit's door. After verbally ordering the detainee to remove his hand, the officer then stabbed the detainee's right thumb with a pen, puncturing the skin."

OIG detailed that the "facility investigated the incident and determined that the officer required disciplinary action."

But because the facility does not have a process to document when staff received extra training or disciplinary actions, inspectors argued they could not tell if staff who used prohibited practices or did not follow standards during use-of-force incidents received the appropriate follow-up training or disciplinary actions.

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"This could lead to staff repeating inappropriate use-of-force tactics that could potentially result in property damage, injury, and death," according to the report.

Sanitation and recreation

The report recommended that detainees be provided some recreational activities or equipment and noted that ICE complied, adding soccer balls, beanbag toss and pull-up bars.

The OIG report also found three leaking vents in the kitchen area, and raised concerns about sanitation. "Because Winn did not conduct maintenance sufficient to prevent the leaks or repair or remove these leaking items, the facility risks food-safety hazards, such as residue leaking onto food preparation materials or into prepared food," according to the report.

Inspectors also found the refrigerators and freezers that stored the food were not at proper temperatures. "Storing perishable food at temperatures above the required ranges could cause food spoilage or rotting and potentially place staff and detainees at risk of food borne illnesses if served and consumed," according to the report.

OIG made recommendations to ICE to fix the leaks and food temperature, and the agency agreed. OIG could not determine if ICE fixed the leaks, but did find ICE resolved the issue of food being stored at the proper temperature.

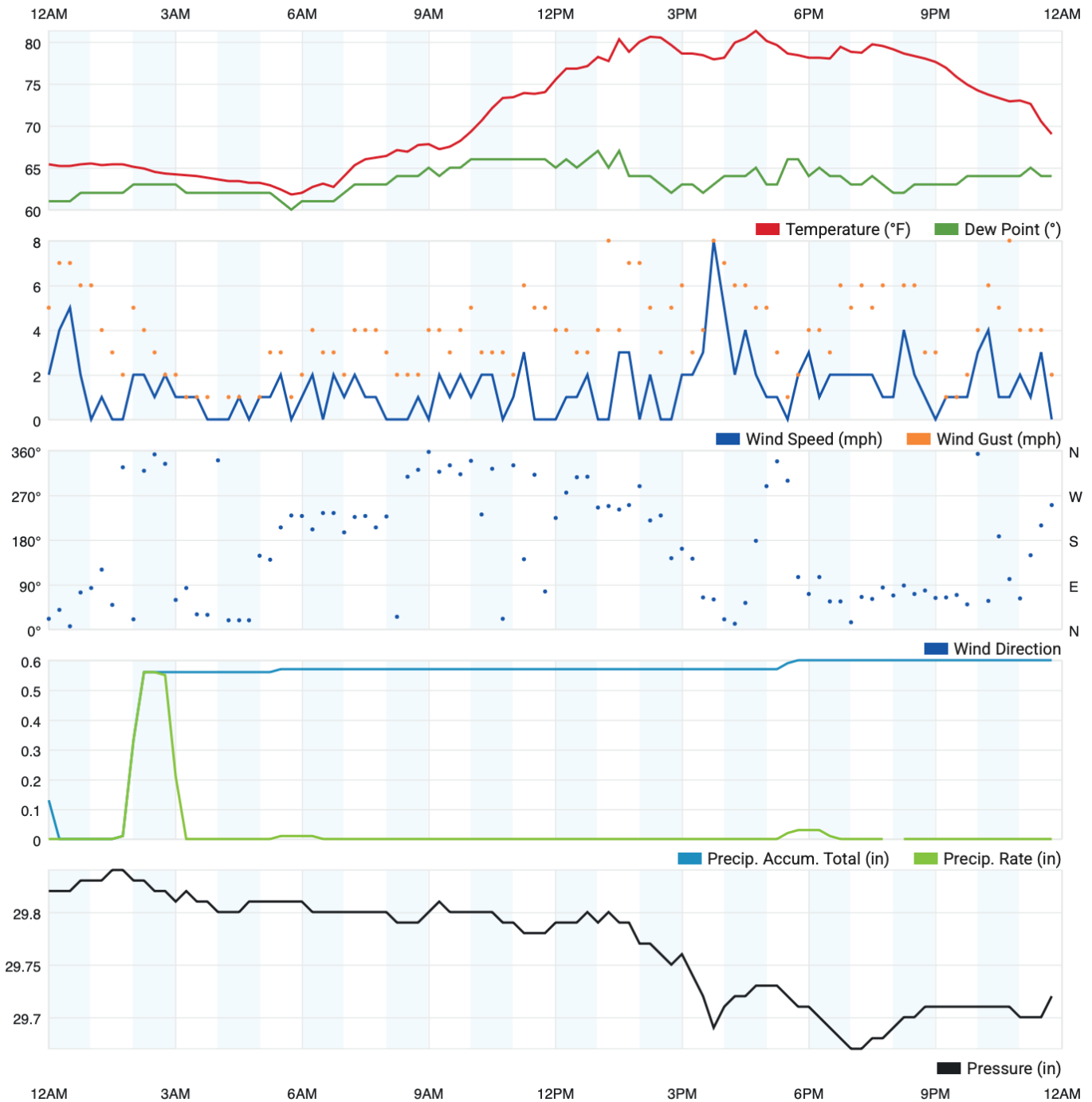
Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include immigration, congressional policy and legal challenges with a focus on how those policies impact the lives of immigrants and migrants coming to the U.S.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

June 4, 2026



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Today



High: 82 °F

Partly Sunny
then Chance
T-storms

Tonight



Low: 55 °F

Mostly Clear

Saturday



High: 89 °F

Sunny

Saturday Night



Low: 64 °F

Mostly Clear

Sunday



High: 93 °F

Hot and
Breezy

Today



30-50% chance for afternoon storms
across northeast SD and west central MN

77-85°

Weekend Outlook

Sat

Sun



Windy

Windy

84-94°

86-98°

Chance for storms late Sunday
afternoon and Sunday night

June 5, 2026

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION



The active the weather pattern will begin to relax over the next couple of days. However, some of us will still see some afternoon showers and thunderstorms, especially across northeast SD and west central MN. No organized severe weather is expected, although it wouldn't be surprising to see some small hail or brief gusty winds with this activity. Any storms left over into this evening will diminish and set up a mostly dry weekend forecast. Windy conditions and warmer temperatures are expected Saturday and Sunday. Next chance for showers and storms will arrive late Sunday into Monday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 82 °F at 4:47 PM

Low Temp: 62 °F at 5:40 AM

Wind: 10 mph at 3:48 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 104 in 2021

Record Low: 34 in 1964

Average High: 77

Average Low: 52

Average Precip in June.: 0.55

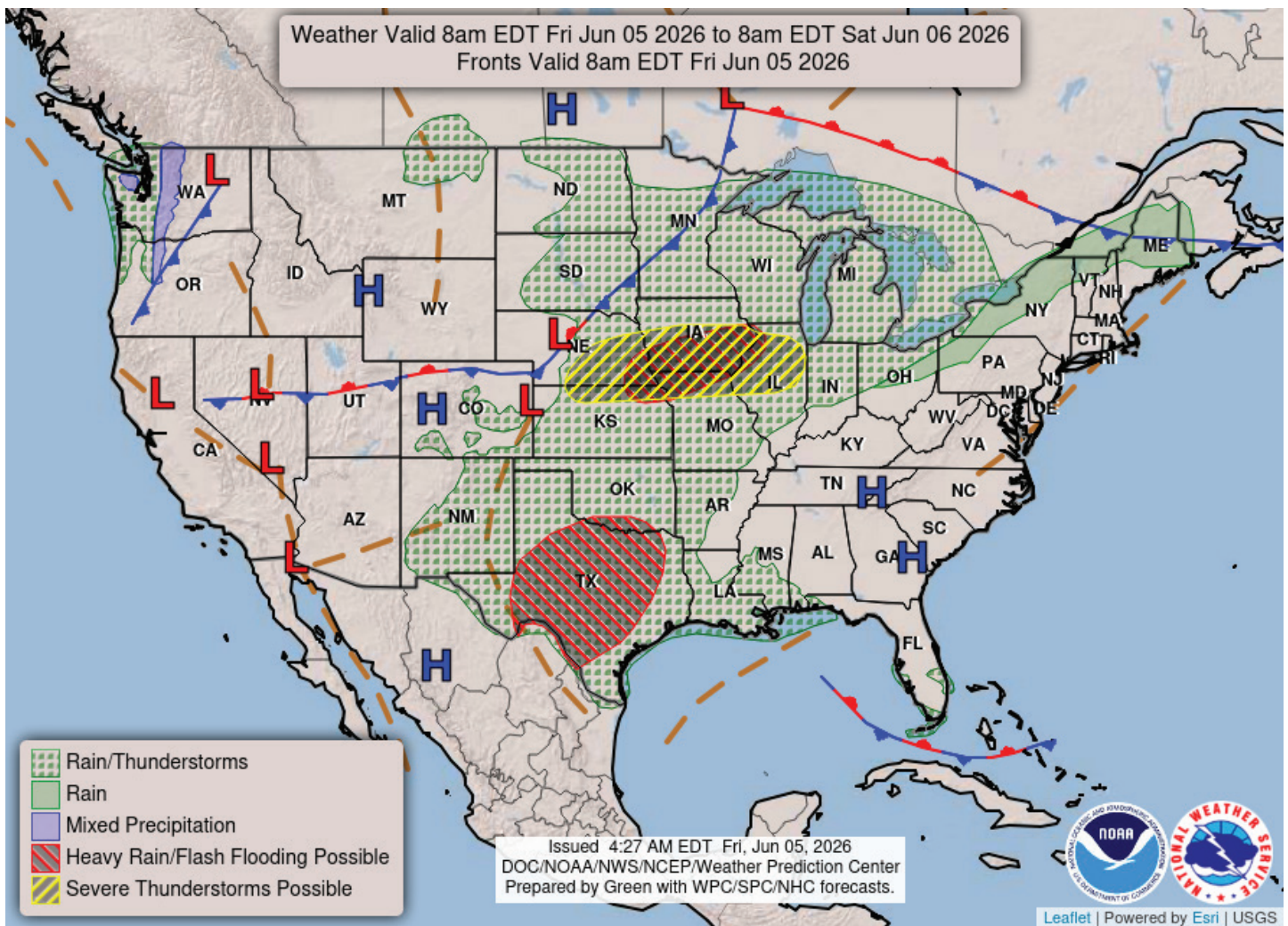
Precip to date in June.: 0.56

Average Precip to date: 7.80

Precip Year to Date: 6.92

Sunset Tonight: 9:16 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:45 am



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Today in Weather History

June 5th, 1925: A severe thunderstorm that probably produced multiple small tornadoes moved northwest from Presho in Jones County. There were significant gaps of about 15 miles at times between tornadoes. One of these tornadoes passed 10 miles north of Ree Heights and ended north of Miller. Half a dozen barns suffered damage west and north of Ree Heights. The strongest of the tornadoes was an estimated F2 strength. Also, on this date, a tornado moved from the southern edge of Fargo, North Dakota, and on into Moorhead, Minnesota.

June 5th, 1996: Hail, between a golf ball and tennis ball size, broke many windshields and dented vehicles in Watertown. Some houses in Watertown had windows broken out because of the large hail. Golfball-sized hail also covered most of the ground at the Watertown Airport.

June 5th, 1999: Winds gusting to 74 mph knocked down several trees throughout Groton. One tree removed a major transmission line and ripped the electrical service line off a house. Power was out for parts of Groton for several hours. The high winds shattered the windows at a store on Main Street and tore a standing board on a loose sign, which damaged five new vehicles at a dealership in Groton. The high winds also destroyed a small service building and the surrounding fence at Groton's main juncture of natural gas pipelines. Winds up to 70 mph brought several trees and many large tree branches down in Henry. Winds gusting to 80 mph snapped off several trees, blew a garage down, and brought power lines down in Hazel. In Watertown, winds gusted to over 70 mph, blowing a portion of a roof off a house and destroying the attached garage on another house. Near Watertown, a pole barn was destroyed, a hay bale was blown into a home's basement window, and part of their deck was torn away. Near Florence, winds up to 80 mph tipped over and damaged a small shed, destroyed another storage shed, and also wholly demolished a three-stall garage.

June 5th, 2008: Very heavy rains of 3 to 7 inches caused extensive flooding throughout Dewey County. Many roads, bridges, dams, and culverts, along with some buildings, were damaged or destroyed by the flooding. One man, west of Promise, used a boat to get back and forth from his ranch. A federal disaster declaration was issued for Dewey County and the Cheyenne River Reservation.



The Father's Good Gifts

Every answer God gives to our prayers is worth celebrating because He always acts for our good.

Matthew 7:7-11: 7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

8 "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

9 "Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?

10 "Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?

11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

One of God's most generous assurances to His children is found in today's passage. Not only are we granted permission to come to the Father with our requests, but He also promises to answer our prayers. However, you may be thinking, If this is true, why hasn't He given me what I asked for?

The key to understanding this passage is verse 11: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" The God who made us is more keenly aware of our needs than we are (Matthew 6:8).

We may ask for what we perceive as good and necessary when it isn't truly in our best interest. But our Father gives what He knows is more beneficial. The qualities of Christlike character are among His best gifts, and these develop through trials and testing.

When it seems the Lord isn't answering your requests, remember that He's a loving Father, and consider what good gifts He is giving instead. Although it may take years to gain a godly perspective, in time you'll say, "Lord, You were right. Thank You for giving me exactly what I needed."

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

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The Groton Independent

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.04.26

6 13 19 28 34 5

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 41 Mins 40
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.02.26

15 26 43 48 60 12

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$368,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 26 Mins 40
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.03.26

2 5 19 22 24 6

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$28,580,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 41
Mins 40 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.03.26

2 23 24 28 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$119,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 56
Mins 41 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.03.26

26 28 31 56 64 13

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 25
Mins 40 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.03.26

14 16 38 55 64 12

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$212,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 25
Mins 40 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

As Ebola spreads in Congo, a radio station tries to stop health misinformation

By JUSTIN KABUMBA and OPE ADETAYO Associated Press

BUNIA, Congo (AP) — The rare Bundibugyo type of Ebola that Congo is battling took locals by surprise after weeks of spreading unnoticed. Hundreds of cases were suspected when the outbreak was declared in May, but many dismissed the news as a “Western conspiracy.”

Congolese authorities announced the new Ebola outbreak on May 15. At least 63 people have died from 381 confirmed cases, Congolese Health Minister Samuel Roger Kamba said late Thursday. Yet the outbreak has been challenged by skepticism, attacks on health workers and misinformation.

Vérité Johnson, a journalist and editorial secretary at the Radio Télévision Mont Bleu station in Bunia, the eastern Ituri province capital where the outbreak is concentrated, decided to produce a new program to combat rumors.

The radio show has emerged as a vital tool to win over some residents who have been unaware or skeptical about the facts of Bundibugyo.

The 45-minute program runs daily at 10 a.m., reminding people of the dangers and regularly featuring health specialists providing updates and answering questions. The show’s jingles about the virus also play intermittently throughout the day and residents are able to call in with questions.

“So far, there’s still a layer of resistance within the population, and that’s where the media plays an important role,” Johnson said.

Resistance to protocols during public health emergencies is common in Congo, which is battling its 17th Ebola outbreak since the virus was first identified there in 1976. There currently is no approved vaccine or treatment for the Bundibugyo type of Ebola, which has added another layer of fear.

Widespread rumors, often arising from fear and misinformation, discourage residents from adhering to health warnings or seeking medical help during an outbreak, health officials say. People often hear about a disease through the media as authorities and international partners scramble to contain the outbreak.

Unfounded rumors link Ebola to money

Some residents allege illnesses like Ebola are elevated by opportunists trying to profit.

“They don’t separate people who have Ebola from those who have the flu at the hospital. Given the manner in which people are treated, we deduce it is about money,” said Samson Gerson, 52-year-old Bunia resident and father of seven children. “I can never take the vaccine, I prefer to die because if the vaccine arrives, it can scare us even more.”

Analysts say some people in Congo have been receptive to disinformation due to mistrust of the health-care system and because some local officials have not become actively involved in containing the disease.

“What is key is to involve the local actors at all levels. If we try to impose what we think is right to the community, we are running towards failure,” said Basile Rambaud, emergency programs director for Mercy Corps in Congo. “If people do not trust the response, they end up delaying to seek care, rejecting protective measures, or avoiding working with health teams, giving the virus more time to spread.”

Ituri province residents have launched at least three attacks against health centers, demanding the bodies of deceased patients. Some people who are believed to have Ebola left the centers during the attacks and health workers could not account for their whereabouts.

“We don’t even know what the body of a person who died of Ebola looks like, but we just see images and montages on our phone,” said Bunia resident Chantal Francine, who expressed doubts over the reported deaths.

Full scale of the outbreak is unknown

The virus has rapidly spread from an initial three health zones to 24, according to World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who said Wednesday that the virus “had a big start.”

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Experts and WHO officials have warned the numbers might not reflect the true scale of the epidemic as weeks of testing for the wrong type caused a delay in containing the virus.

The outbreak has been worsened by an ongoing armed conflict between Congo's government and the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group, as well as attacks by the Islamic State-affiliated group the Allied Democratic Force, which killed 16 people in Beni territory in North Kivu on Tuesday.

The attacks by both groups have caused massive displacement of people living in the conflict areas, officials said.

Despite the growing Bundibugyo outbreak and the conditions that are enabling the disease to spread, Johnson said Radio Télévision Mont Bleu continues providing residents with vital facts.

"Everyone is free to think what they want, but the information remains the same. The epidemic is here," Johnson said.

Senate blocks extending key surveillance program following backlash over Trump pick to lead intel

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate blocked an extension early Friday of a key surveillance program used by U.S. intelligence agencies as concerns mounted over President Donald Trump's selection of federal housing finance regulator Bill Pulte to serve as director of national intelligence.

Some Republicans joined Democrats in the 47-52 vote against a procedural motion that would have set up a final vote on the extension next week, complicating efforts to extend the critical program before it expires on June 12. The vote came after an overnight session on separate legislation funding immigration enforcement agencies.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune said following the vote that the Senate "will take another run at it" next week but that Democrats' opposition is a "terribly irresponsible position."

"The naming of Pulte to that position, although the timing arguably wasn't the best, I still don't think it ought to derail something that's this important," Thune said.

The vote marked the latest setback for Trump and intelligence officials, who have spent months pushing to extend a key provision of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act that allows agencies such as the CIA, National Security Agency and FBI to collect communications from foreign targets without a warrant.

Concerns that the program can incidentally sweep up Americans' communications left Republican leaders only able to pass short-term extensions while negotiations continued. Critics wanted a warrant requirement when those communications are accessed.

Seven Republican senators joined nearly all Democrats in voting against the bill, with Sen. John Fetterman voting for it.

Sen. Mark Warner, the top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee who had worked to negotiate the bill, voted against it. He said earlier Thursday that he and committee Chair Sen. Tom Cotton had reached what he described as a "compromise" on a "strong bill," but that the "complete irresponsibility of putting forward" Pulte had changed the equation.

Pulte has seen pushback to his appointment from both Democrats and Republicans for his lack of experience and past controversies. Thune said the position shouldn't be "weaponized" and should be led by "professionals."

"Does anybody think it makes good sense to give him the keys to the 18 intelligence agencies?" Warner said.

Trump on Thursday said Pulte would not be his "permanent" choice for the critical security post.

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., a longtime critic of the surveillance system, said the bipartisan vote was proof that "reform efforts transcend red and blue."

"It's a message that Americans aren't going to stand for law abiding people being spied on," Wyden told The Associated Press.

The Senate is expected to revisit the legislation when lawmakers return next week.

Any agreement would still need to clear the chamber's 60-vote threshold before heading to the House, where lawmakers have yet to resolve differences over a provision restricting a central bank digital currency that House Republican leaders added to secure support for the bill.

Pope Leo's visiting Europe's migration hot spots. Catholics hope he'll ease political tensions

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO and RENATA BRITO Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Pope Leo XIV is delving into the hotly contested issue of migration by visiting two flashpoints — Spain's Canary Islands in the Atlantic next week, and Italy's Lampedusa island in the Mediterranean in early July.

These rocky, remote outposts of Europe have struggled with the arrival of tens of thousands of mostly African migrants through some of the world's deadliest migration routes. Even as numbers decreased this year, especially in the Canaries, the issue continues to roil politics in these historically Catholic countries.

Many Catholics and migrants hope the upcoming papal trips will refocus attention on solidarity and support — and away from divisive political debate that is splitting the right in addition to pitting it against the left.

"Stuck in the middle are the migrants," said the Most Rev. José Mazuelos, the bishop of Canarias, whose diocese includes several of the islands. "So the church says, 'Let's give them a face, because we're talking about people, not numbers.'"

Among them is Eslim Jallow, 27. Dreaming of a more prosperous future, Jallow and his younger brother left Gambia and landed in the Canary Islands in 2023. At first, Jallow struggled to adapt, but he quickly learned Spanish, took courses and now earns a living as a programmer and web developer in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

"Perhaps the pope will change the way in which people here look at immigrants," Jallow said. "Immigrants should be treated with dignity and respect, not ignored."

Like most migrants arriving in the islands, he isn't Catholic. But he feels that Leo "speaks for us, he reminds the world we are also human beings."

The Catholic Church's ministry to migrants

Advocating for migrants globally was a priority for Pope Francis. He went to Lampedusa in 2013 on his first pastoral visit outside Rome and, three years later on the Greek island of Lesbos, he brought back with him a dozen Syrian Muslim refugees.

Under Leo, the Catholic Church has continued to call for their humane treatment around the world, including decrying mass deportations in his home country, the United States.

"Pope Leo is signaling how important immigration is to him by doing these two trips early in his papacy," said Michele Pistone, a Villanova University professor who leads its new center on immigration.

In the Canaries, Leo is expected at the port of Arguineguín, on the island of Gran Canaria, on June 11 to pay homage to thousands of migrants who died or disappeared en route. The next day, he will meet migrants at a camp on the island of Tenerife.

The archipelago has been the epicenter of a humanitarian crisis that in 2024 saw the arrival of nearly 47,000 migrants from North and West Africa, including several thousand unaccompanied minors.

Like Jallow, half of them landed in El Hierro island — nearly triple its population, said the Most Rev. Eloy Santiago, bishop of Tenerife, whose diocese includes that smaller island. Its resources were strained to a breaking point, even though most migrants only stayed a few days.

"If a boat arrives, the couple of local doctors have to go out running to take care of them, and then the local residents who had their medical appointments can't have them," Santiago said.

Catholic organizations are among those that aid migrants from the moment they step out of rickety, overcrowded boats.

Arrivals have slowed dramatically this year, in part due to stricter controls along the African coast. But the most challenging task remains — how to help those who arrived as minors, were entrusted to state care, and are thrown out into the streets when they turn 18, often with no job prospects and no support.

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Caya Suárez, secretary-general for the Catholic charity Caritas in the Canaries, has seen firsthand how migrants coming of age on the islands are the most vulnerable.

"That's a very bad moment, even though they'd been waiting for it with hope, because they see they are still stuck without alternatives," she said.

Caritas tries to help the young adults find housing and jobs, she added. It's also relocated a few young migrants to Madrid, a small village in the largely rural region of Galicia, and elsewhere on the mainland, with the help of parishes there even as the governments of other Spanish regions have been reluctant to take on underage migrants.

Spain's migrant amnesty and continuing challenges

Many residents in the Canaries feel like they've been abandoned to cope with an unsolvable problem — how to stretch even farther resources for migrants who thought they'd be within reach of economic prosperity and free to travel across the European Union, and instead end up on the street, struggling to send remittances home but also to leave.

Compounded with the perception that national and European political institutions tend to see it as an exclusively "island problem," the situation is generating a growing malaise even among generous islanders who have long been accustomed to migration to and from Latin America, the Canaries' bishops said.

"The pope's word can help so that in the middle of this fatigue, people can buck up again because they see they are supported," said Santiago, who was born and ordained a priest on the islands.

At the national level, Spain's Catholic Church also backed a new measure giving temporary residency permits to potentially more than half a million foreigners in the country illegally, many from Latin America.

They often work in hospitality, agriculture and eldercare, boosting the economy, according to the socialist government of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez — and to the church.

"In the matter of immigration, the church's position gets into a head-on collision with the position of the right," said Pablo Simón, a political science professor at University Carlos III in Madrid.

That has created a rift between the church and far-right parties, like Vox in Spain, which has criticized the church on immigration, despite often couching its anti-migrant rhetoric in religious terms.

Days before she is expected to meet Leo, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, the firebrand Popular Party conservative regional leader of Madrid, described the migrant legalization push as "importing mass poverty."

The Rev. Fernando Redondo, who leads the migration department of the Spanish bishops' conference, said the church's stance is in line with the Christian mandate to welcome the stranger. But he added it needs better understanding among the many faithful who believe migrants come to steal jobs or live off welfare.

"We have a big challenge, which is raising awareness among our faithful ... that from the viewpoint of faith, to welcome a migrant person is to welcome Christ himself," Redondo said. "Then, of course, there needs to be ways, proper social and political ways, so that migration doesn't become a total mess."

Hoping for words of reconciliation in the Canary Islands

In the Canaries, ordinary people have been on the front lines of that often life-endangering chaos — fishermen who hand out drinking water to migrants on ramshackle rafts, sunbathers who run into the sea to help landing migrants, the volunteers who greet them in more than a dozen languages.

But they have also seen that integration can work, as in a small mountain village that was emptying out until a center for three dozen migrant children was opened, creating jobs and filling up the school — and the local church's annual feast day procession.

That's why many look forward to Leo bringing a simple but crucial message of reconciliation that focuses on the people impacted, not on the politics.

"The pope doesn't support this slogan of 'let's go, open doors for the whole world here.' Nobody supports that," Mazuelos said. "When here comes a gentleman in a wooden boat after five days in the Atlantic, what are we supposed to do, kick him back? We've got to find a way to welcome him."

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World shares mostly decline, with South Korea's Kospi down more than 5%

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — World shares were mostly lower and South Korea's benchmark dropped more than 5% on Friday after sharp declines for some big artificial intelligence-related stocks in the U.S.

U.S. futures were also trading mixed. The future for the S&P 500 lost 0.5%, while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average edged 0.1% higher.

In early European trading, Britain's FTSE 100 gained 0.3% to 10,389.74. Germany's DAX was nearly unchanged at 24,950.24, while France's CAC 40 gained 0.3% to 8,269.98.

On Wall Street on Thursday, computer chipmaker Broadcom's shares sank 12.6% when it gave a forecast that fell short of investors' expectations, raising concerns over the wider AI and technology sector. U.S. memory chip maker Micron Technology dropped 7.7%, and cybersecurity company CrowdStrike Holdings fell 3.8%.

The sell-offs led investors in Asia to dump AI-related shares.

South Korea's Kospi sank 5.5% to 8,160.59. The index has roughly doubled in the past year, lifted by gains for big tech companies like SK Hynix, which lost 9.9%, and Samsung Electronics, which shed 6.4%.

Japan's Nikkei 225 slipped 1.3% to 66,588.12, with technology shares leading the decline, even as official data showed that Japan's real wages rose for the fourth straight month. Chip equipment maker Tokyo Electron's shares fell 6.6%.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng declined 1.2% to 24,961.95, while the Shanghai Composite index lost 0.7% to 4,027.74.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 fell 0.7% to 8,625.10.

Taiwan's Taiex gave up 1.3%, while India's Sensex was down 0.3%.

Oil prices continued to fall. Brent crude, the international standard, gave up 0.8% to \$94.23 per barrel. It was approximately \$70 per barrel before the war began in late February.

Benchmark U.S. crude dropped 1.1% to \$92.04 a barrel.

On Thursday, the benchmark S&P 500 climbed 0.4% and the Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 1.7% to a record. The tech-heavy Nasdaq composite edged 0.1% lower.

Strong corporate earnings and excitement about AI demand have helped push U.S. stocks and some other markets to new heights, despite repeated jolts from the Iran war. Oil prices are still under pressure as the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway crucial for global oil and natural gas transport, remains effectively closed, and the war-caused energy shock is threatening to slow economic growth and fuel inflation in many countries.

American and Iranian negotiators reached a tentative deal last week to extend their ceasefire, but the agreement has not been finalized, as meanwhile developments in Lebanon have cast doubt on prospects for a permanent end to the conflict.

On Thursday, the Iran-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah rejected the latest ceasefire agreement between the Lebanese and Israel governments.

"While there are few signs of progress in US-Iran talks, the oil market continues to trade on expectations of an imminent deal that would resume flows through the Strait of Hormuz," ING commodities strategists Warren Patterson and Ewa Manthey wrote in a report.

Hopes regarding the U.S.-Iran negotiations may have been "overly optimistic," they said.

In other dealings early Friday, the U.S. dollar fell to 159.94 Japanese yen from 160.03 yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1638, up from \$1.1610.

Senate passes \$70B immigration enforcement bill without limits on Trump settlement fund

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate passed legislation to fund President Donald Trump's immigration enforcement agencies early Friday morning, after weeks of delays and fierce backlash to an unrelated \$1.776 billion settlement fund that threatened to derail the bill.

Senators voted 52-47 for the \$70 billion legislation to fund Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol for the next three years, through the end of Trump's term. The final vote came just before 5 a.m., after Republicans narrowly defeated multiple attempts by Democrats and Republicans to add language to the bill that would permanently ban Trump's settlement fund for political allies who believe they have been politically persecuted.

Republicans cleared a major hurdle overnight when they defeated an amendment proposed by one of their own members, Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy, that would have redirected payments from the settlement to members of law enforcement who were injured in the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol.

The amendments were a test of party unity that complicated what should have been an easy vote for Republicans who wanted to keep the focus on immigration enforcement in an election year. Instead, they spent almost a full day haggling among themselves over whether to block the settlement fund, even after acting Attorney General Todd Blanche had said earlier this week that it would not go forward.

"This would have been done several hours ago if we weren't having to deal with some of the issues around the fund," Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said shortly before midnight.

Thune himself has criticized the judgement fund, which was part of a settlement that resolves Trump's lawsuit against the IRS over the leak of his tax returns and has angered many of his GOP colleagues. But he has been pushing GOP senators for weeks to keep the bill focused on the funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol, which Democrats have blocked since early this year, and to avoid adding new provisions that could complicate its passage in the House.

Still, a group of Republican senators pushed all day and into the night to block the settlement's payouts through legislation. That effort came after Trump raised new doubts about the settlement's future Wednesday afternoon — just after the Senate had voted to start debate on the immigration bill — when he told reporters that the settlement is "very important" and said "I don't know" whether it is dead or on hold.

"I'd have to ask the lawyers," he said.

Senators push back multiple attempts to ban settlement fund

The first vote on Thursday morning, a Democratic effort to ban the settlement, was held open for several hours as three senators, including Cassidy, decided whether to support it. The Democratic motion was narrowly defeated when Cassidy eventually voted against it and the two other GOP senators — Jon Husted of Ohio and Dan Sullivan of Alaska, both of whom are up for reelection this year — voted for it.

The Senate then rejected a second amendment from Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina that would also have banned the settlement fund but moved the money to a separate anti-fraud fund at the Department of Justice. Most Democrats voted against the amendment, guaranteeing its defeat, but more than 10 Republicans supported it.

Tillis said the fund is a political liability for the party.

"If Blanche says this is largely inoperative, why not use this moment to codify that?" Tillis said. "Otherwise, you're exposing every one of our members who are in cycle to having to deal with this between today and Election Day, and that makes no sense for something that the DOJ says they're not moving forward with."

Cassidy's amendment to compensate the injured police officers was a pointed rebuke, as payouts from Trump's fund could have potentially gone to Trump supporters who beat police and attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Despite Blanche's comments, Cassidy said that the fund is still part of an active settlement and "absolutely can be used."

The Senate rejected several other Democratic efforts to try to block or limit the fund, including amend-

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ments to ban payments to Jan. 6 defendants who injured law enforcement officers.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Republicans are now "leaving taxpayers to rely on nothing more than a promise from Donald Trump's personal fixer. That is not accountability. That is a permission slip."

ICE and Border Patrol money has been delayed for months

Enactment of the roughly \$70 billion bill to fund ICE and the Border Patrol would end the blockade by Democrats who demanded policy changes after the fatal shootings of two protesters by federal agents in January. The bill would fund the agencies for three years, through the end of Trump's term.

Senate Republicans used a complicated procedural maneuver to get around the filibuster and pass the budget legislation with no Democratic votes. But it took weeks to get the bill to the Senate floor as Republicans navigated various obstacles to passage created by Trump and the White House — including a \$1 billion proposal for White House security and Trump's ballroom that they eventually scrapped and the fierce bipartisan backlash to the settlement fund.

Democrats say any funding bill for the Homeland Security Department should place restraints on federal immigration authorities, including better identification for federal officers and more use of judicial warrants, among other asks.

After federal agents shot Renee Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis, Trump agreed to a Democratic request that the Homeland Security bill be separated from a larger spending measure that became law. But bipartisan negotiations went nowhere, and the department funding lapsed in mid-February with no agreement on changes to the Trump administration's immigration enforcement tactics.

Congress eventually funded the rest of the Homeland Security Department at the end of April with Democratic support, but ICE and Border Patrol has remained without regular funding.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping will travel to North Korea next week in first visit since 2019

By KEN MORITSUGU and HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese leader Xi Jinping will travel to North Korea next week, both countries announced Friday, in what will be his first visit in nearly seven years.

His trip will be the latest in a series of steps by China to reinforce its close ties with its nuclear-armed neighbor. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has reached out to Russia in recent years, notably by sending troops and conventional weapons to support its war against Ukraine.

But in the past year, Kim has likewise been trying to improve ties with China, the North's biggest trading partner and provider of aid.

"As North Korea builds closer ties with Russia, China seeks to use Xi's trip to reassert its influence over Pyongyang and safeguard its strategic interests in northeast Asia," said William Yang, an analyst for the International Crisis Group.

Xi will make a state visit from Monday to Tuesday, Chinese and North Korean state media said in brief dispatches. His last visit was in June 2019.

The trip will serve to advance ties and strengthen regional peace and stability, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said Friday.

"The traditional friendly and cooperative relations between China and the DPRK have continued to develop in a sound and stable manner, bringing tangible benefits to both countries and their peoples," spokeswoman Mao Ning said, using the abbreviation for North Korea's full name.

The trip is coming just a few weeks after Xi hosted U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin in quick succession in Beijing.

North Korea's nuclear weapons program has long been a major concern for the United States, which opposes it. The U.N. has imposed economic sanctions on North Korea because of its nuclear and missile development.

The announcement of the trip came a day after North Korea unveiled a new facility to produce the

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material for nuclear bombs. It is believed to be a uranium enrichment plant, though North Korea has not confirmed that.

During a visit to the plant, Kim announced plans to bolster the country's nuclear forces "at an exponential rate." Experts say the plant's disclosure implies that Kim was eager to cement his country's status as a nuclear weapons state ahead of Xi's visit.

The experts say Kim wants international recognition as a nuclear state so he can demand the lifting of the sanctions. They say Kim would ultimately push for arms reductions talks with the U.S. to win concessions in return for a partial surrender of his country's nuclear capability.

Kim has been focusing on expanding his nuclear arsenal since his high-stakes diplomacy with Trump collapsed in 2019.

Trump has repeatedly expressed his desire to restore diplomacy with Kim, but the North Korean leader has said the U.S. must first drop its demand for North Korea to denuclearize as a precondition for talks.

Analysts will be watching to see what if anything China says during Xi's visit about calls for North Korea's denuclearization.

Xi and Kim met in Beijing in September and pledged mutual support and enhanced cooperation. Kim was in the Chinese capital to attend a Chinese military parade alongside other foreign leaders including Putin.

Russia and China, both veto-wielding members of the U.N. Security Council, have previously frustrated efforts by the U.S. and others to toughen international sanctions on North Korea, despite its banned weapons tests.

At their meeting in Beijing last month, Putin and Xi expressed their opposition to "foreign policy isolation, economic sanctions, military pressure and other methods of creating threats to the security" of North Korea, according to a statement from the Kremlin.

Embracing the ideas of a "new Cold War" and a multipolar world, Kim has pushed for a more assertive foreign policy by expanding ties with countries locked in confrontation with the United States.

The trip abroad is a relatively rare one for Xi, who has curtailed his international travel sharply since the COVID-19 pandemic. His last overseas visit was to South Korea last fall for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, where he met Trump.

Putin says Russia will bolster its air defenses in response to Ukrainian drone attacks

By JAMES JORDAN and HARRIET MORRIS Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia (AP) — President Vladimir Putin said Thursday that Russia will strengthen its air defenses to counter recent Ukrainian drone attacks, which have reached deep inside his country and cast a cloud over his showcase economic forum in his hometown of St. Petersburg.

Speaking in response to a question from The Associated Press during a meeting with heads of international news agencies, Putin acknowledged the damage from Ukrainian drone attacks.

"To our regret, some of them break through," Putin said of the drone strikes. "Russia has an air defense system, we need to improve it, strengthen it, and we will do that."

The wide-ranging media session came on the sidelines of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, his annual showcase for investment. Hours before the forum opened Wednesday, a Ukrainian drone attack set ablaze an oil terminal in the city and also hit a nearby naval base.

Putin also said Russia is open for a compromise on Ukraine in line with understandings reached at his summit with U.S. President Donald Trump in Anchorage, Alaska, adding that Ukraine needs to accept them to make a deal to end the conflict, now in its fifth year.

Zelenskyy proposes talks

Also on Thursday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy proposed face-to-face negotiations in a public letter addressed directly to Putin. Zelenskyy acknowledged shifting U.S. priorities, saying it would be wrong to wait for the U.S. to return its attention to Ukraine while it remains heavily focused on the Iran war.

In Washington, Trump said it "would be great" if Putin and Zelenskyy meet.

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Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin hadn't seen the letter yet and repeated his statement that Zelenskyy could come to Moscow if he wants talks. Putin said last month he doesn't exclude a meeting in a third country, but only when there is a deal to sign.

Putin dismissed the idea that European Union countries could mediate Russia-Ukraine peace talks because "mediation assumes neutrality. Where is the neutrality here?"

Any potential third-party mediators needed to be trusted by both sides, Putin said.

"How can Russia trust people who have been harping about the need to inflict a strategic defeat on Russia for years?" he said.

Putin's battlefield update

Commenting on Russia's use of its Oreshnik intermediate range ballistic missile, Putin said it was fired at targets that allowed it to test its capability and precision before using it against objectives closer to residential areas.

"We hit the area where it was convenient to see the results," he said. "It was important for making a decision on the future on the full-format use of the Oreshnik on designated targets, including those in populated areas."

Putin emphasized his push for control of the entire Donetsk region in eastern Ukraine, noting that Ukraine controls about 15% of its territory.

Putin declared that the "patriotism and will of the Russian people" will ensure the achievement of goals that Moscow set in Ukraine.

"Russian troops are advancing along the entire line of contact," he said.

Putin said he has accepted Trump's compromise proposals from the Alaska summit, saying they could "serve as a basis of agreements between Russia and Ukraine and put an end to the conflict."

Moscow wants a comprehensive settlement, not a temporary truce, he said.

"There is no need to suspend the hostilities to start negotiations," he said. "Naturally, the Ukrainian side would like us to suspend the advances made by Russian troops. But it would be better to end the war by agreeing to the compromises that were discussed in Anchorage."

Putin dismisses sabotage accusations

Asked about an AP investigation tracking 191 incidents across Europe, including sabotage, cyberattacks, attempted assassination and other activity that Western officials say are part of a Russian-masterminded campaign, Putin replied there was no detailed proof of Moscow's involvement.

"What are the specific facts? What has been proven?" he said, adding that the accusations showed that Europe was not ready to talk to Russia as an equal partner.

"This only shows that certain political figures in the West are trying to carry out aggressive plans against the Russian Federation," he said.

Asked whether Russia could contribute to a settlement of the war in Iran, Putin responded that Moscow's proposal to take enriched uranium from Iran for storage remains on the table. He noted Russia did so as part of the 2015 deal between Iran and world powers, "and we are ready to do it now."

His future as president

Putin, 73, who has held power in Russia for over a quarter-century, was asked if he planned to run for another term that would keep him in office until 2036, when he'll be 83. He laughed and said he's "not even thinking about it."

"Only God knows if any of us will be healthy enough ... to survive until tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, much less solve the problems we face and achieve the goals we set for ourselves," he said.

In 2020, Putin ordered amendments to the Russian Constitution that essentially reset his term limits, keeping him in power.

Drone attacks on St. Petersburg

Wednesday's drone attack hit the nearby Kronstadt naval base and an oil terminal, sending a plume of black smoke above Russia's second-largest city — an embarrassing blow to Putin's efforts to cast the conflict as a distant event that doesn't affect Russian daily life.

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It also underscored Kyiv's growing ability to hit deep inside Russia and showed the vulnerability of its cities. Scores of flights were delayed or diverted at St. Petersburg's airport and authorities cut cellphone internet service to try to prevent drone attacks.

Putin had scaled down Russia's annual Victory Day parade on May 9, fearing Ukrainian strikes. Days later, a massive drone attack on Moscow's suburbs killed three and showed the capital's vulnerability.

Peskov said Russia's forces were carrying out "systematic" strikes on Kyiv. On Tuesday, Russia launched deadly attacks on Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities.

Russia's version of Davos

Putin has used the St. Petersburg forum, likened to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, to showcase his country's economic advances and encourage foreign investment. While Western officials and business leaders have stayed away after Putin sent troops into Ukraine in 2022, Russia has sought guests from elsewhere to underline its declared goal of promoting a "multipolar world."

Saudi Arabia sent a large delegation this year, and the presidents of Uzbekistan and Tanzania and vice president of China also are present. A U.S. official, Rodney Mims Cook Jr., head of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, is attending for the first time in years.

Russia's economic outlook has clouded as the initial boost from military spending has fizzled. The government raised taxes and increased domestic borrowing to keep its budget deficit under control.

Asked at the media session if Russia's economy was struggling because of the military action, Putin paraphrased Mark Twain that "rumors of my death are highly exaggerated."

He said the economy was growing but admitted that inflation was a concern.

"We've deliberately taken steps to cool the economy," Putin said of Russia's Central Bank putting the country's key interest rate at 14.5%, which he called "a difficult decision."

"You can say we've cooled off, or you can say we haven't done everything yet, but these are deliberate steps. We don't want inflation — hyperinflation — to reach 60-80%, as it is some countries," he said. "We're fighting for the health of the Russian economy as a whole."

Actors' union approves 4-year contract with studios and streamers

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Television and movie actors on Thursday voted overwhelmingly to ratify a four-year contract with studios and streaming services, a month after their union leaders negotiated a deal they say provides protections against synthetic actors created by artificial intelligence.

The ratification was widely expected and a walkout never seemed to be in the cards during drama-free negotiations, but the vote assures there will be no repeat of the 2023 actor and writer strikes that seriously shook the entertainment industry.

More than 90% of votes from members of the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists approved of the agreement, with about 19% of eligible voters casting ballots.

Like the Writers Guild of America, whose members approved their own contract on April 24, the actors' new deal is for four years instead of the usual three, providing an extra layer of labor stability in the industry.

Actor Sean Astin, president of SAG-AFTRA, said in a statement that the contract "delivers meaningful gains in compensation, strengthens protections around artificial intelligence and digital identity, reinforces the long-term security of members' benefit plans and recognizes the realities of how performers work today."

The contract says AI performers must bring "significant additional value" over a live actor or a digital capture of them if producers are to use them. Union leaders say this and other provisions will keep use of AI actors minimal.

The Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, which negotiates for a coalition of Hollywood's major studios, streamers and production companies, congratulated the union on the ratification.

"SAG-AFTRA's leadership brought a genuine commitment to partnership, and together with the WGA agreement, these deals demonstrate what is possible when the industry works toward practical solutions," the alliance said in a statement.

AMPTP negotiators have been in contract talks with the Directors Guild of America since May 11. The negotiations are the first under new DGA president Christopher Nolan. That contract is set to expire June 30.

Longtime CBS correspondent Scott Pelley lived many workers' fantasy: Telling your boss off

By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — As if Scott Pelley's years in a glamorous, globetrotting, seven-figure dream job weren't enough, he's pulled off one more thing to stir your envy: a cutting takedown of his boss that went loudly public.

The "60 Minutes" correspondent's searing rebuke of CBS management this week, in which he questioned his bosses' credentials and motives, may have ended in his firing, but amounted to the sort of mouthing-off that workplace peons typically only fantasize about.

"That's the American dream — to be able to tell off your boss and walk out the door," says Zach Tyra, a 40-year-old data analyst from Jones, Oklahoma, who found a kindred spirit in the newsmen, recalling his own experience with a former boss he said was clueless. "I couldn't do what Scott Pelley did because I didn't have the safety net or the resources or the network that he has. I couldn't tell my boss to stick it. I just had to sit there and eat it."

Pelley's message may have been delivered in the measured baritone of someone polished by decades on the airwaves. But his backtalk stirred many who've felt the simmering rage of feeling a clueless boss was turning their days into a nightmare.

"It's also kind of weird, like, Pelley isn't some blue-collar hero. There's a wide gap between, like, Pelley and your local everyday guy down at the hardware store," Tyra says. "But I think everyone can relate to standing up for what they believe."

A staff meeting that went deeply awry

Pelley's dressing-down came in a Monday staff meeting with the new executive producer of "60 Minutes," Nick Bilton, brought aboard by Bari Weiss, who became CBS News' editor-in-chief in October. The correspondent reportedly grilled Bilton about the firings last week of Bilton's predecessor, Tanya Simon, and correspondents Sharyn Alfonsi and Cecilia Vega, accusing management of "murdering" the program, a revered cornerstone of TV journalism and a mainstay of Sunday nights for nearly six decades.

"She has no qualifications for her job," Pelley said of Weiss, according to the media news site Status, which reported he then turned his ire at Bilton. "You have slender qualifications for this job."

In firing Pelley, Bilton called his outburst an "ambush" of "remarkable incivility and contempt." But, with Pelley becoming a proxy for the American worker, others cheered.

Parry Headrick, who runs a public relations firm in Boston, was immediately transported to his days as a young reporter at a small newspaper, where he had been carefully chronicling the trials of people who fell ill from what was believed to be exposure to toxic waste.

He had earned the trust of one family only to find editors plastered a headline on the story that reduced the sick child to a "toxic boy" and caused Headrick to lose all faith in his bosses. He screamed at the paper's publisher and editor-in-chief before quitting.

"I lost my goddamn mind when they did that. And the story with Pelley resonated so hard specifically because of that," says 57-year-old Headrick, who thinks many people can see Pelley's point of view. "There exists in most Americans the desire to speak truth to power."

That such an outburst arose in the news business may be no surprise; journalists pride themselves as a truth-to-power, voice-for-the-voiceless bunch. Staff meetings with reporters sassing editors are common, and in newsrooms everywhere, managers have been subjected to the type of tough questions they pay their people to ask others.

The threshold for dismissal varies from place to place

The line separating acceptable discourse with fireable offense is as different in each workplace as the

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settings themselves, whether a dive bar or diocesan chancery.

"In the real world, there are layers of politeness and cordiality that don't really exist in journalism," says Headrick, who cheered Pelley "pushing back on something larger."

Clare Haynes had a middle-management role at a nonprofit when she had her Pelley moment two decades ago. She was three weeks into a job where she thought she'd been brought aboard to institute changes that would achieve an innovative work culture. But every suggestion she made was dismissed. Her boss said his boss wouldn't buy the idea.

"Are you saying you're too weak to ask?" she snapped. His mouth fell open. He stared at her silently for a full minute.

Haynes survived, lasting three more years at the firm, but things were never the same.

"I didn't lose my job, but I paid the price, being seen as maverick," says 55-year-old Haynes, of Royal Leamington Spa, England, who now runs a coaching firm that trains executives how to handle difficult workplace conversations.

Johan Konst was working at a Swedish media company when he felt pushed to the limit seven years ago. After years of high-stress, hard-selling days pushing advertising he didn't believe in, he finally said his piece, delivering a blunt, profanity-dotted message to his boss.

He was promptly shown the door.

"It's the best thing that ever happened to me," says 34-year-old Konst, of Amsterdam, who walked away with a nice severance check. "At some point, this had to happen."

Graham Platner to hold Maine rally with Rep. Ro Khanna as scandals shake up campaign

By PATRICK WHITTLE and KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Graham Platner, the insurgent Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate in Maine, will hold his first major campaign rally on Friday night as reports continue emerging about his history with women.

Last weekend, his campaign wrestled with stories about sexually explicit messages that Platner sent to several women while he was married. Then on Thursday, The New York Times reported about his relationships with previous girlfriends. Some viewed him positively but others described him as volatile and insulting.

One woman said Platner twisted her arm during an argument and locked her in a room. Platner called that allegation untrue.

But with Maine's primary around the corner Tuesday and Democrats desperate to rally behind a candidate who can defeat Republican Sen. Susan Collins in November, there's been little sign of voters or political allies backing away from Platner, who has pitched himself as an imperfect person who has redeemed himself.

Some dismissed news of the text messages as a private matter, one that should be addressed solely by the married couple. Others argue that the need for Democrats to take back control of the U.S. Senate from Republicans is too important to cast aside imperfect candidates.

Yet they're also wrestling with the question of whether more controversial information surrounding Platner could come out ahead of the November election.

"I think a lot of people are afraid," said Deb Dagnan, chair of Maine's Piscataquis County Democrats. "They're waiting for the other shoe to drop after he gets the nomination. Then what do we do?"

Key to the Senate

Platner is key to Democrats hopes' to take back the U.S. Senate this year. Yet he's been bedeviled by near-constant controversies involving his disclosure of a since-covered tattoo of a Nazi symbol, his history of inflammatory online comments and the texting revelations.

Nevertheless, Platner's most prominent supporters have continued to back the candidate, including Sens. Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and Ruben Gallego. Platner is scheduled to appear in Bar Harbor Friday evening with progressive Rep. Ro Khanna of California, as well as Democratic candidates for U.S. House and governor, as a part of a "get out the vote" rally in the coastal resort town.

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The event is taking place just days ahead of the state's June 9 primary election, where Platner is expected to secure the Democratic nomination. His top opponent, Gov. Janet Mills, suspended her campaign in late April.

He'll do so under reignited scrutiny amid reports that he and his wife, Amy Gertner, have had marital difficulties and sought counseling after he allegedly sent sexually explicit text messages to other women.

According to The Wall Street Journal, Gertner had told the campaign in August about the messages, which she had discovered on his phone last year, to make sure they weren't a liability to the campaign. Platner's campaign team reportedly decided that the texts were private and being handled by the couple, who were married in 2023.

Genevieve McDonald, a former campaign staffer for Platner, told The Associated Press that the candidate was "sexting multiple women while married" and that "the campaign tried to assess that as an election vulnerability."

Shortly after the news came out, Platner posted a five-minute video taken by Gertner, who avoided speaking directly about her husband's reported texts but dubbed the broader coverage as "gossip" and said "being married is hard."

Voters worry that more scandals lurk

Gertner's emotional comments about working on her marriage have resonated with some women, who say they are shocked that a former campaign aide would betray someone's trust and the issue should remain between the couple.

"It's none of my business as far as I'm concerned," said Joanne Mason, a local Democratic leader from south-central Maine. "And I would hope that people wouldn't judge any one person on their own private marriage."

Valerie Tate, a Democrat from Belfast, described Gertner's honesty about trying to work on their mental health and marriage as admirable.

"That is not a scandal," Tate wrote in an email. "That is integrity. Personal growth is not a disqualification from public life. For many of us, it is precisely what made us worthy of it."

However, Tate conceded that her mind wasn't fully at ease. With the public still learning about Platner's past, there is a chance something could emerge as a dealbreaker for voters.

"Of course, there is that concern as there would be in any race with somebody we don't know all the dramas and the journeys they've been on," she wrote. "Something could come out that would be disqualifying."

Past controversies simmer

This isn't the first time Platner has faced questions about his past. He had a tattoo recognized as a Nazi symbol, which he had covered up after starting his campaign.

Platner has said he didn't realize the meaning of the tattoo. However, a former girlfriend told the Times he joked about it being a Nazi symbol and called it "my Totenkopf."

There's also been much attention on Platner's former Reddit posts, which were dismissive of military sexual assaults and used homophobic slurs, for which he has apologized.

Platner has never held elected office and has fashioned a straight-talking, progressive, populist-style campaign focusing on issues such as income inequality, lack of health care accessibility and the rising cost of housing. In return, he's attracted thousands at his rallies and campaign events and collected millions in campaign funds to further boost his messaging.

"People want somebody new," said Paige Zeigler, a former Maine Democratic lawmaker and head of the Waldo County Democrats, on why Platner's staying power has remained strong. "They want somebody that they feel that they can embrace. And Platner is riding that wave." ____

Kruesi reported from Providence, Rhode Island.

US employers likely added 105,000 jobs in May with labor market stable despite costly Iran war

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The American job market has climbed out of a rut. But it's still trudging along tepidly, frustrating young people and others out of work.

The Labor Department is expected to report Friday that companies, non-profits and government agencies added 105,000 jobs last month, according to a survey of forecasters by the data firm FactSet. That would be solid by the labor market's recent, diminished standards -- but down from 115,000 in April.

Hiring has bounced back this year from a miserable 2025, showing unexpected resilience in the face of economic uncertainty and painfully high energy prices caused by the Iran war.

Unemployment is expected to have remained at a low 4.3% in May, FactSet says. But despite the improvement from last year, job creation is way down from the boom that followed pandemic lockdowns.

Workers, jobseekers and employers are stuck in an awkward "no-hire, no-fire" labor market. "Those who have jobs are clinging to them, while those without are left wanting," Diane Swonk, chief economist at the tax and consulting firm KPMG, wrote in a commentary ahead of the jobs report. "The result is a sense of being frozen or left in a sort of labor market purgatory."

Many young people are finding it tough to break into a stagnant job market. And workers who have been laid off struggle to get back to work. More than a quarter of the unemployed in April had been jobless for more than six months, up from less than 20% two years ago.

Seeing their prospects diminished, Americans are reluctant to leave their jobs and seek something better elsewhere. In April, the number of people who quit dropped to the lowest level since the frightening days of August 2020, when the COVID-19 was running rampant.

Last year, employers added 9,700 jobs a month, fewest outside a recession since 2002.

This year, hiring has rebounded, averaging 76,000 new jobs a month from January through April. Big tax refunds — the product of President Donald Trump's 2025 tax cuts — have given the economy a lift, offsetting the impact of higher energy prices since the United States and Israel attacked Iran in late February. But the refunds have mostly been pocketed, and gasoline prices remain above \$4 per gallon.

Healthcare companies have been propping up the job market.

Over the past year, they've added more than 456,000 jobs; all other U.S. employers have collectively cut 205,000.

Martha Gimbel and Ryan Nunn of Yale University's Budget Lab note that strong healthcare hiring isn't surprising as Americans age and need more prescriptions and trips to the doctor. In fact, the industry's job growth is in line with Labor Department predictions from a decade ago. "The question is not why healthcare has kept hiring—it is why other industries have not," they wrote in a report published Tuesday, suggesting that one explanation might be an immigration crackdown that has reduced the supply of foreign-born workers.

At least the United States doesn't need as many new jobs as it used to. The drop in immigrants and rising Baby Boomer retirements mean that fewer people are competing for work. As a result, the so-called break-even point — the number of new jobs required to keep the unemployment rate stable — has likely dropped to near zero, from the 155,000 new jobs per month that was typical two or three years ago, according to a Federal Reserve report.

Some analysts fear that artificial intelligence will wipe out entry-level jobs. But economists Gregory Daco and Lydia Boussour of the tax and consulting firm EY-Parthenon wrote in a commentary Tuesday that AI "adoption is proving more gradual and costly than many anticipated. Firms are increasingly using AI to enhance productivity and control labor costs." But AI, they wrote, has reduced hiring rather than "triggering broad-based layoffs."

And a new study by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York identified a different culprit for young people's struggle to land jobs after college: the rise of remote work. Businesses, it seems, are reluctant to hire

new grads for work-at-home jobs because it is harder to train and mentor them when they aren't coming into the office.

Trump administration has separated dozens of children from their parents for a second time, AP finds

By GARANCE BURKE and SONIA PÉREZ D. Associated Press

Eleven-year-old Ederson Galicia Alva had just stepped off the plane and into the Miami airport's dim hallways when federal agents pulled his mother aside for questioning. Again.

Panic welled up. His excitement at soon being back at recess with his Florida classmates fell away. Would the government take her away again?

This was not his first trauma. In 2018, when he was just 3 years old, Ederson was taken from his mother's arms at the U.S.-Mexico border under the first Trump administration's family separation policy and kept apart from her in a government facility for months. They were finally reunited after lawyers intervened. Then, in June of last year, he and his mother were separated a second time, despite legal protections meant to keep them and families like theirs together.

He later joined his mother in Guatemala. After a destitute, torturous 11 months in the indigenous highlands, Ederson's family was allowed to return to Florida last week, following a federal judge's order that the government had acted illegally.

Now, eight years after President Donald Trump's forcible border separations came to an official halt following global outrage, an Associated Press investigation has found that the government has re-separated dozens of children from their families, despite a landmark legal settlement meant to reunify them. Some of their parents have been locked in immigration detention facilities for months, others deported back to their home countries after being taken from their families once again. In some cases, immigration officials conducting interior arrests deported people despite discovering they were legally off limits for removal, according to emails obtained by AP.

"Not only has the government refused to acknowledge the horror of the initial separations during Trump I, but it is now detaining and deporting these same families," said Lee Gelernt, an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union and lead counsel in the lawsuit that ended the policy. "These children have suffered enough without re-traumatizing them."

Trump successfully ran for reelection on an anti-immigration platform. Under his second term, the administration has vowed to deport more than 1 million people per year. Federal agents have been plucking people from their communities so swiftly that, according to the Brookings Institution, now the parents of tens of thousands of children have been detained.

This time, family separations often look different from Trump's first term. In 2018, Ederson and other children at the border were taken from their parents, who were detained separately and overwhelmingly charged criminally with illegal entry. Then, the government was unable to reunite them for months because adults and children's information was kept in different computer systems. A judge barred the government from separating most families at the border and ordered the government to bring the families back together after the ACLU filed a class action lawsuit. Later, a court settlement banned most family separations to deter immigration until December 2031.

Today, if parents are arrested or deported under the president's push for mass deportations, they are being made to choose whether to leave their children behind in the United States.

"DHS complies with all court orders, even as radical NGOs shop for the most favorable forum and activist judges seek to thwart our operations," acting Assistant Secretary Lauren Bis, a Department of Homeland Security spokesperson, said in response to AP requests for comment about the government's policies toward separated families.

Government attorneys have argued in recent court filings that there are no legal restrictions on "the government's statutory authority to execute orders of removal." Bis added that enforcing immigration law was "not optional," and that "every removal of an illegal alien helps restore order and reinforce the rule

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of law.”

Ederson’s family recently was allowed to return, but their status is still on shaky ground.

Separated at the border, then again in Florida

After being taken from his mother, Mirsy Maricela Alva López, and confined to a government shelter in Arizona as a toddler for four and a half months, Ederson barely recognized her once they were reunited, she said. Vivid nightmares haunted him throughout his time in elementary school, where he learned to read in English in classrooms amid lush lawns and palm trees less than 10 miles from Mar-a-Lago, Trump’s Winter White House.

Once a federal judge approved a settlement to the class action suit under the Biden administration, Ederson’s family and those like his got legal status to stay in the U.S., with pathways for residency and asylum, and his mother got a work permit. And after months of mental health services to address his ongoing fear that his mother would never return, in early June last year — about five months after the beginning of Trump’s second administration and the president’s resumed anti-immigration push — his therapist finally said he had made so much progress he could put his weekly sessions on pause.

Two weeks later, Alva López was stopped by federal agents as she and co-workers were en route to a landscaping job near Mar-a-Lago. The agents, wearing brown uniforms, never gave a reason for the stop or identified themselves before transferring Alva López to two Florida jails, then to ICE custody in Louisiana, and finally to a plane full of shackled deportees heading to Guatemala City, she said.

“I felt the very same thing I went through the first time,” Alva López said, weeping. “I was living it all over again.”

Alva López was separated from Ederson and his older sister, Briseidy, for a week, and not given the chance to speak with an immigration official about her status or legal protections, said Kelly Kribs, an attorney with the Young Center for Immigrant Children’s Rights, which has supported Alva López’s family’s return to the U.S.

When she finally managed to call Ederson and Briseidy, they couldn’t stop sobbing. Alva López said she asked her sister to buy airplane tickets to send them to Guatemala City. She met them the next day at the airport and traveled with them nine more hours down highways and rutted roads to reach San Martín Cuchumatán, a hamlet in the highlands where the children were born.

The three of them shared a tiny bedroom with a dusty floor with Alva López’s parents and brother in an adobe brick home with a sheet metal roof, nothing like the leafy cul-de-sacs of South Florida. The school, where all lessons are in Spanish, was a mile’s walk, and none of the children in town spoke English, Ederson said.

Instead of clocking in to trim the gardens of West Palm Beach estates, each day Alva López fed the chickens and ducks in a small coop behind the house, washed the family’s laundry by hand and cooked meals on an open fire.

And Ederson was back to waking up at night fearing his future. At Northmore Elementary School, he had been doing well in fifth grade. In Guatemala, he repeated fourth grade, this time in Spanish, and was quizzed on the history and culture of a country he barely knew. His friendships weren’t as close as in West Palm Beach. Sometimes when he felt sad, he watched the school’s online videos to see his old friends.

“We used to play and chat. Sometimes they would help me when I didn’t understand the lesson, and I would help them with math,” he said, fighting back tears. “I have very few friends here.”

Ederson still doesn’t want to talk about the separations, and he can’t stop asking his mother why she went to work that day. But he is clear on one thing: he never wants to be apart from his mother again.

‘Lasting, excruciating harm’

In late 2017, immigration officials began forcibly separating parents and children at the U.S.-Mexico border, under a policy championed by Stephen Miller, Trump’s then-senior policy advisor who is now White House deputy chief of staff. After advocates got word, the ACLU filed a lawsuit in February 2018 to halt the practice called *Ms. L v. U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement*, on behalf of a Congolese mother the Trump administration separated from her 7-year-old daughter for four months. It later became a class action suit.

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It wasn't until thousands of families were torn apart that a judge ordered the government to end separations, saying it caused "lasting, excruciating harm." According to the ACLU's most recent accounting, the number of separated parents and children, and their impacted family members covered by the settlement is far greater than had been previously reported — over 11,800 — and because the government deported so many people before the practice was banned, the full scope may never be known. The ACLU also provided AP with new information surrounding Ms. L class members who have been detained and deported during the second Trump administration, including that dozens of children were re-separated. Legal filings in the Ms. L case and other immigration attorneys working with separated families also detailed the re-separations of children.

Under a 2023 settlement agreement signed by the Biden administration, Ms. L class members — including separated parents, children and other close relatives — received special legal protections, pathways toward asylum and access to attorneys, work permits and support services. And over eight years, advocates and attorneys have been trying to help the families reunite and recover, traveling to the Guatemala rainforest and remote Honduran villages to inform class members of their rights, and offering them to apply for everything from humanitarian parole to work authorization permits to psychological counseling, benefits meant "to prevent any ongoing harm caused by the initial separation," according to the settlement.

That changed when Trump began his second term. Support for separated families was never encoded by an act of Congress, and soon it started shrinking.

First, funding for legal services temporarily ended. Instead, the Trump administration said it would charge families \$1,000 each to enter or stay in the country. Then, attorneys said, some parents were told to appear for more frequent ICE check-ins, and ordered to wear ankle monitors to record their movements. Many class members lost access to counseling.

By late last year, emails show the government had deported some protected family members even after being told by the ACLU that they were off limits as protected Ms. L class members.

Seven days before Christmas, ACLU attorney Natalie Behr wrote an urgent email to Department of Justice contacts, saying her team had learned that a protected relative was once again in ICE custody.

"We ask that you tell us why we were not notified of this class member's detention within 24 hours. ... this class member should not be removed," Behr wrote.

A Washington DOJ trial attorney emailed back, saying he would ask ICE. ACLU attorneys followed up.

By the day after Christmas, it was already too late. He had been deported.

The problem is still surfacing. While the government is required by judge's orders to immediately tell the ACLU when Ms. L class members are detained and to return re-separated families who have been deported, the Trump administration only disclosed in April that it had deported another protected person to Guatemala back in September, court filings show.

The same thing nearly happened to one of Alva López's neighbors, who was picked up in West Palm Beach a few months after her deportation. The father also had done landscaping near Mar-a-Lago and had been separated at the U.S.-Mexico border in 2017 from his daughter. Under the first Trump administration, he was swiftly returned to Guatemala. As ACLU attorneys and government lawyers hashed out what separated families were due, he came back to Florida in 2021 to reunite with his children, one of whom had been released after spending months in a government detention facility.

In October, the government locked him up, first in Alligator Alcatraz, an immigration detention center in the Florida Everglades, then inside Camp East Montana in Texas, Kribs said.

At Camp East Montana, he was fed moldy food with worms, berated by guards and learned that a fellow detainee died after being mistreated by ICE officials, he said, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of government reprisal. ICE said the detainee died after experiencing "on-site medical distress," and the El Paso medical examiner's office later ruled the detainee experienced "asphyxia due to neck and torso compression." Christmas and New Year's Eve came and went, and by January he found it hard to keep up his hopes when his children called.

The ACLU filed a motion about Ms. L parents being detained, and the father was released from govern-

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ment detention in April. While he's grateful to be back home in Florida with his children, he told AP he feels like he is still being tracked through his ankle monitor and the ICE check-ins he's required to do every two weeks. His children still worry he won't be there when they get out of school, he said.

Bis said DHS could impose conditions on parole, including electronic monitoring, regular reporting requirements, and even detention.

'A place where we can all be safe'

Sinri Baltazar, a mother from Honduras who was first separated from her then-5-year-old daughter in 2018, also was allowed under a judge's order in April to return to Louisiana with her three children, including her youngest, a U.S. citizen.

It has not been easy. Baltazar, a member of the Afro-indigenous Garifuna community that faces discrimination in Honduras, was deported with her children last year after she said immigration officials told her to sign a document they said would permit her to keep her family together — only if they all left. Back in New Orleans, she said she was grateful her children could seek a better life, but they have been struggling to get by while living with an acquaintance from church.

"The only thing my children say is that they want to be home, in their own house," Baltazar said. "I'm just trying to get us to a place where we can all be safe, and I hope for that for all the other families."

As deportations have risen in the last year and a half, attorneys say separated families have become increasingly fearful about filling out government paperwork and many don't know they can apply for asylum, a key benefit of the settlement that expires in December. The administration also hasn't said whether it will extend a current, trimmed-back legal services contract for families that ends in August. Another deadline is looming as well: thousands of separated families need to request for any pending removal orders to be cancelled by December, or lose their ability to stay in the U.S. legally.

"There was never enough funding to keep up with the need," said Anilú Chadwick, an attorney and senior director at the legal nonprofit Together & Free, which she said has supported 15 families that have been re-separated, including Baltazar's. "Now we have to see if the government awards a new contract, and I gotta say as someone who has been on the clock to find and locate services, that is not enough time even in the best of circumstances."

For separated families who are waiting for loved ones to be released from detention, or for paperwork to return to the U.S., however, time has been moving at a glacial pace.

Ever since Alva López was deported back to Guatemala nearly a year ago, she checked her phone each morning for word of when she and her children could return. Money started drying up. The children began forgetting their English slang. Briseidy, now 14, worried she would drift away from her American friends. Finally, two weeks ago, there was news: the government would bring her and her children back to Florida on an American Airlines flight, under a judge's order.

The puppies she had bought Ederson to lighten his mood had died, and there were few friends and relatives to say goodbye to. So she packed up the siblings and their few possessions, their clothes now loose on their frames after losing weight since returning to Todos Santos Cuchumatán.

And finally, in the last week of May, passports and travel documents in hand, the family flew to Miami. Ederson said it felt like a miracle. But soon after landing, immigration officials pulled Alva López in for questioning, taking her photo and fingerprints all over again and re-examining every document she held. Their stay in the U.S. may be short. An immigration official granted her just two weeks' humanitarian parole.

The government declined to comment specifically on Alva López's case.

"I still haven't told the children" about the two weeks' parole, Alva López said the first day she woke up back in the family's old neighborhood in West Palm Beach. "They're going to worry that the same thing will happen again," she said.

What to know about the New World screwworm fly and its reappearance in the US

By JOHN HANNA and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

The New World screwworm fly is threatening the \$113 billion U.S. cattle industry for the first time in more than a half century, with an infestation from its flesh-eating larvae confirmed in south Texas.

The infestation was discovered in a single 3-week-old calf in La Pryor, Texas, about 100 miles (161 kilometers) southwest of San Antonio and 50 miles (80 kilometers) from the U.S.-Mexico border. Federal and state officials had been working to keep the parasite from reaching Texas, home to \$17 billion worth of the nation's cattle, making it the industry's No. 1 state.

The deadly flies were detected in Mexico late in 2024, after years of being contained at the southern end of Panama.

The fly was an annual warm-weather scourge of cattle ranchers from at least the 1930s through the 1960s, until the U.S. eradicated the pest by breeding sterile male flies and dropping swarms of them from planes to mate with wild females. The USDA said the most recent case was the first in Texas since 1966.

Here is what to know about the fly, the threat it poses and the response:

Being unusual makes the flies a threat

The New World screwworm fly in the Western Hemisphere and its Old World cousin in Africa and Asia are unusual among flies because their larvae, or maggots, eat live flesh and fluids instead of dead material. Females lay their eggs in open wounds and mucous membranes after mating only once in their monthslong lives.

Any warm-blooded animal, including wildlife, pets and occasionally even humans, can be infested.

Livestock are vulnerable because of how they're handled, Lee Haines, an associate research professor of biological sciences at the University of Notre Dame, said in an email Thursday. Standard practices with cattle can break the skin, including shearing and de-horning, or even moving them in and out of corrals can cause scrapes and cuts. Birth would also make a mother and calf vulnerable, she said.

Stephen Diebel, a Texas rancher and president of the Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, added that even wounds "as small as a tick bite," can put cattle at risk.

Death can result if an infestation is not treated, though a dozen treatments have been approved for use in a variety of species. In decades past, ranchers had tens of millions of dollars in losses — potentially billions in today's dollars.

But agriculture officials were quick to note that the fly does not infest food, and U.S. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins said it's unlikely to damage beef production -- welcome news given that consumers are already facing record prices.

Officials sounded alarms for nearly 2 years

Federal and state officials and cattle industry leaders have been sounding public alarms about the fly's movement through Mexico and toward the U.S. since a case was confirmed in southern Mexico in November 2024.

Officials had considered the pest eradicated from Central and North America nearly two decades before an outbreak in Panama prompted a state of emergency there early in 2023, according to the joint U.S.-Panama program established in 1994 to stop the parasite. Cases jumped to Costa Rica and Nicaragua later that year.

Edward Burgess, a University of Florida entomologist who studies the fly, said it reproduces quickly and is carried across wide areas by its hosts, namely wild animals such as deer. Outside of Panama, he said, programs that produced and released sterile flies have largely shut down.

"It's hard to stay ahead of it because of how fast that fly is able to move and regenerate," Burgess said.

Outside the US, thousands of animals and hundreds of humans sickened

As of June 2, the parasite had sickened more than 171,700 animals and 2,000 people across Central America and Mexico, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. There have been 10 human deaths, the CDC says.

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Starting in May 2025, Rollins closed border entries to livestock and on Thursday she credited that move with delaying the fly's arrival in Texas by a year.

Rollins has argued that the Mexican government has not done enough to control animals moving within the country, a suggestion Mexican authorities have rejected.

But Haines said climate change is a key element in the spread of a tropical species that thrives in warm weather. Warmer temperatures are expanding the fly's habitat and cold snaps that killed them off each year in marginal habitats are becoming less frequent and less severe, she said.

Officials quarantine a swath of Texas

Texas State Veterinarian Bud Dinges imposed a 12-mile (20-kilometer) quarantine zone covering much of Zavala County, home to La Pryor, and a small part of neighboring Uvalde County. Animals cannot leave that zone without being inspected.

Local ranchers are concerned that the fly will spread among wildlife, particularly deer, as a small, short-lived outbreak did in the Florida Keys in 2016. That was the last time a U.S. case was confirmed among animals, though the CDC confirmed a case last year in a Maryland man who had traveled to El Salvador and recovered.

Zavalas County Sheriff Eusevio Salinas said Thursday that state officials were setting up several road checkpoints in the county to enforce the quarantine.

"They said they were going to do that for three to four days, and hopefully after that it's already under control," Salinas said.

In Texas, shots and fly drops

Diebel, whose family ranch is about 200 miles (322 kilometers) east of the quarantine zone, said ranchers are proactively giving injections that prevent screwworm infestation. They're also taking extra care to treat wounds from ear tagging and other practices and keeping a close eye for signs of illness.

The USDA has been dropping sterile flies in south Texas since February, when it opened a center for dispersing them in south Texas. It is now dropping them twice a week, for a total of 4 million flies, and it's also putting 4 million more a week in the ground as pupae, flies in the stage between larvae and adult, said Rear Admiral Michael Schmoyer, a member of the USDA's response team.

Releasing sterile flies is both time-tested and highly effective. While males are "promiscuous," in the scientific sense, females are not, and if their one mating hookup is with a sterile male, no eggs from that female will hatch.

Once sterile males are prevalent enough, the fly's population declines and then dies out.

But with sites outside Panama shut down for years, the USDA didn't think sterile flies were being bred fast enough. It invested \$21 million in a new fly-breeding facility in southern Mexico that is expected to start operations next month.

The USDA also is spending \$750 million to build a fly factory in southern Texas that can produce up to 300 million sterile flies a week. It is expected to begin operating next fall.

US sanctions Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel in latest move to pressure island's leadership

By FATIMA HUSSEIN, DÁNICA COTO and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States imposed sanctions Thursday on Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, his wife and three other individuals, in the latest move by the Trump administration to pressure the island's leadership that drew immediate condemnation from Havana.

Included in the sanctions are Alejandro Castro Espín, the sole son of former Cuban President Raúl Castro and Vilma Espín. He served as an adviser to Cuba's Defense and National Security Commission and was present when Raúl Castro greeted then-U.S. President Barack Obama in Havana during a historic March 2016 meeting. Castro Espín's son, Raúl Alejandro Castro Calis, also was listed.

The new penalties come as U.S. President Donald Trump has been threatening military action in Cuba

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since ousting Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro in January and then ordering an energy blockade that choked off fuel shipments to Cuba. That has led to severe blackouts, food shortages and an economic collapse across the island.

The threats took on additional weight after the U.S. announced criminal charges against Raúl Castro last month. Thursday's penalties, which follow Trump signing an executive order expanding sanctions against the island, freeze individuals' property and bank accounts in the U.S. But it's unclear how intertwined their finances are with the U.S. financial system.

It's "pretty unlikely" Cuba's president and others have assets in the U.S., said Richard Feinberg, former U.S. national security adviser on Latin America and professor emeritus of international political economy at the University of California, San Diego.

He said the sanctions "could be seen as preliminary to an intervention or increasing pressure on the regime to cut a deal," adding that the rhetoric of Trump and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio "could take you in either direction."

Díaz-Canel accused Trump of making "new threatening statements against Cuba" and said "these measures are aimed at reinforcing the blockade and escalating the conflict between Cuba and the United States."

"This political blindness adds to the coercive measures applied in recent weeks against our country, designed to harm the Cuban people," he wrote on X. "The aggression and perversion of the U.S. government will clash with our resolve to confront the worst-case scenarios and resist the imperial onslaught."

Trump says about Cuba, 'We're going to handle that'

Asked Thursday if his sanctions were meant to accelerate Cuba's collapse, Trump said, "We just want them to be a nicely run country."

"The country is starving and it's got no energy, it's got no oil, it's got no money, it's got nothing. It's got a beautiful piece of land. You could have beautiful resorts," Trump told reporters at an unrelated event in the Oval Office.

Asked whether Cuba is close to collapsing, he said, "It's sort of collapsed" and added that "we're going to handle that as soon as we've finished" military operations in Iran.

"I like to do one thing at a time," Trump said.

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

Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants who has long taken a hardline against Cuba's socialist leadership, has said Trump's preference is to reach a deal but has said he is doubtful the U.S. can find a diplomatic resolution with the current government.

Those "designated today direct or fund the regime and its efforts to mobilize its radical revolutionary movements in the United States and around the world," Rubio said in a statement.

Rubio has defended the Trump administration's decision to slap escalating sanctions on Havana, the largest of which is against Grupo de Administración Empresarial S.A., a business conglomerate operated by the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces.

Cuba's top diplomat condemns new sanctions as 'creating a scenario of conflict'

In addition to Díaz-Canel, Bruno Rodríguez, Cuba's minister of foreign affairs, said "the vile inclusion" of Díaz-Canel and others, including Cuban institutions and civil society organizations, "is the latest example of the U.S. interventionist plan to portray Cuba as a threat to U.S. national security."

"Every U.S. action aimed at creating a scenario of conflict between the two countries is destined to fail," he wrote on X. "Every threat against Cuba's independence and sovereignty will be met with even greater unity and determination from our people."

The new sanctions, which freeze any assets that those targeted may have in U.S. jurisdictions or any that come into U.S. jurisdictions, also apply to non-American entities that might do business with them.

In addition to the individuals, the sanctions also target Cuba's defense ministry; its Institute for the Friendship with the Peoples, which promotes people-to-people talks; Amistur Cuba, an arm of the institute that oversees specialized tourism on the island; and the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution.

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Cuba's president, Castro relatives and others are on the list. Díaz-Canel was handpicked in 2018 to succeed Raúl Castro and was the first person in decades to lead Cuba without bearing the name Castro.

Under him, the island plunged into the worst economic and energy crisis in recent history, a situation worsened by heightened sanctions imposed by the Trump administration.

Díaz-Canel's wife, Lis Cuesta Peraza, also appeared on the sanctions list. She does not hold the title of first lady, a title abolished during the revolution, but in practice she acts as such, receiving other spouses such as Queen Letizia of Spain and accompanying her husband on official trips.

Her son Miguel Anido Cuesta, who is Díaz-Canel's stepson, also faces sanctions.

Lis Cuesta Peraza wrote on X late Thursday that "it is almost an honor to be on this 'list.' They never tire of ridicule and political stupidity."

The new action boosts pressure on the Cuban government but is far from the first time the U.S. has imposed sanctions against heads of state or government and their relatives.

The U.S. hit former Sudanese President Omar Bashir and former Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe in the early 2000s and, more recently, targeted Maduro and his wife with sanctions.

Republicans debate limits on \$1.8B Trump settlement in late-night Senate session

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, JOEY CAPPELLETTI and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republicans beat back several amendments Thursday as they worked to pass legislation to fund President Donald Trump's immigration enforcement agencies, turning aside a Democratic effort to permanently block Trump from creating a \$1.776 billion settlement fund to allies who claim they were persecuted by the government.

But Republicans still faced a gauntlet of amendments before the bill could advance, a test of party unity that could go late into the night. The biggest threat to the bill could be another amendment to ban the settlement fund — this time from Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, who lost reelection last month after Trump endorsed his primary opponent.

"I feel optimistic that we'll get there in the end," Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said Thursday evening, while acknowledging he was not sure how the votes would turn out.

Thune has been pushing GOP senators for weeks to keep the bill focused on the funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol, which Democrats have blocked since early this year, and to avoid adding new provisions that could complicate its passage.

If an amendment limiting the settlement were to pass, Thune said, it would be "problematic" when they send the bill to the House. It could also mean a White House veto of the immigration spending bill, which has otherwise unified Trump and Republicans.

The last time the Senate abruptly changed a Homeland Security funding package, in March, the House simply refused to accept it and left town.

Settlement fund roils Senate GOP conference

Still, the judgment fund, which was part of a settlement that resolves Trump's lawsuit against the IRS over the leak of his tax returns, has angered many Republican senators.

Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said this week that the fund would not move forward. But Trump, who has been at odds with Senate Republicans in recent weeks, raised new doubts about the settlement's future Wednesday afternoon — just after the Senate had voted to start debate on the immigration bill — when he told reporters that the settlement is "very important" and said "I don't know" whether it is dead or on hold.

"I'd have to ask the lawyers," he said.

The Democratic effort to ban the fund, the first vote of the day, was held open for around three hours as Cassidy, Jon Husted of Ohio and Dan Sullivan of Alaska withheld their votes. In the end, Cassidy voted against the Democratic motion and the two other GOP senators — both of whom are up for reelection

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this year — voted for it.

Senators defeated a second amendment from Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina that would also ban the settlement fund but would move the money to a separate anti-fraud fund at the Department of Justice. Most Democrats voted against the amendment, guaranteeing its defeat, but more than 10 Republicans supported it.

Tillis said the settlement fund, some of which could potentially go to Trump supporters who beat police and attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, is a political liability for the party.

"If Blanche says this is largely inoperative, why not use this moment to codify that?" Tillis said. "Otherwise, you're exposing every one of our members who are in cycle to having to deal with this between today and Election Day, and that makes no sense for something that the DOJ says they're not moving forward with."

Amendments will be offered late into the night

It was unclear how Republicans would vote on additional amendments.

Cassidy, who had been in discussions all day with the Senate parliamentarian, said he still planned to offer an amendment to ban payouts from the settlement. He told reporters he may also offer an amendment to block a separate part of the settlement that would grant Trump and his family immunity from IRS audits.

Several Republican senators said they supported the idea but would have to see the final language before they decide. Sen. John Cornyn, who also lost reelection last month after Trump endorsed his opponent, said he agrees with the "thrust of it" but would wait to see the amendment. Republican Sen. John Curtis said the same.

Thune said it wasn't yet certain whether the final bill could pass without some sort of prohibition on the settlement.

"We're going to find out soon enough," he said Thursday evening.

Democrats planned other votes through the night, including on Trump's tariffs, his war with Iran and his immigration enforcement campaign.

"Amendment after amendment, vote after vote, Republicans are going to have to answer to the American people," Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said.

ICE and Border Patrol money has been long fight

Passage of the roughly \$70 billion bill to fund U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Border Patrol would end the blockade by Democrats who demanded policy changes after the fatal shootings of two protesters by federal agents in January. The bill would fund the agencies for three years, through the end of Trump's term.

Senate Republicans are using a complicated procedural maneuver to get around the filibuster and pass the budget legislation with no Democratic votes. But it has taken weeks to get the bill to the Senate floor as Republicans navigated various obstacles to passage created by Trump and the White House — including a \$1 billion proposal for White House security that they eventually scrapped and the fierce bipartisan backlash to the settlement fund.

Democrats say any funding bill for the Homeland Security Department should place restraints on federal immigration authorities, including better identification for federal officers and more use of judicial warrants, among other asks.

After federal agents shot Renee Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis, Trump agreed to a Democratic request that the Homeland Security bill be separated from a larger spending measure that became law. But bipartisan negotiations went nowhere, and the department funding lapsed in mid-February with no agreement on changes to the Trump administration's immigration enforcement tactics.

Congress eventually funded the rest of the Homeland Security Department at the end of April with Democratic support. But ICE and Border Patrol remained without regular funding, and Republicans launched a new effort to pass three years of funding for those agencies with no Democratic votes.

Murder charge dropped for Arkansas sheriff nominee who killed daughter's alleged abuser

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

A judge on Thursday dismissed a murder charge against an Arkansas man who won the GOP nomination for sheriff while awaiting trial for the shooting death of his teenage daughter's alleged abuser.

The ruling came weeks before Aaron Spencer, who will be on the November ballot, had been set to face a jury on a second-degree murder charge. He won a March primary over the local three-term sheriff whose office had arrested Spencer in Lonoke County, which has roughly 76,000 residents and is heavily Republican.

Spencer's attorneys do not deny that he shot and killed Michael Fosler in 2024, saying he did so to protect his child. Special Circuit Court Judge Ralph Wilson Jr. granted a motion by Spencer's attorney to dismiss the charge over a dash camera memory card that may have captured the shooting and was lost by law enforcement.

"The court finds that conduct by law enforcement was so egregious that dismissal of this case is warranted," Wilson wrote.

At the time of the shooting, Fosler, 67, was out on bond after being charged with dozens of sexual offenses against Spencer's then-13-year-old daughter.

Court documents show on the night of the shooting, Spencer had woken up to find his daughter missing, and later found the girl in the passenger seat of a vehicle Fosler was driving. Spencer forced Fosler's truck off the road and, after an altercation, called 911 to report he had shot the man.

Prosecutors said Spencer planned the killing and that he could have called police while pursuing Fosler. But Spencer pleaded not guilty and maintained he acted to protect his child from a predator.

Spencer's attorney, Erin Cassinelli, said she is thankful for the court's decision.

"No member of this family should ever again be forced to walk into a courtroom and relive this horror," she said in a statement. "This father should have never been charged for protecting his child."

Spencer said he is grateful this chapter is over and that his focus is now on his family and returning to normal life.

"There's still work to do in Lonoke County, and I'm more committed to it than ever," he said in a statement. "Together we can build a safer and stronger Lonoke County."

Lonoke County Prosecuting Attorney Chuck Graham did not return messages Thursday seeking comment on the decision.

The Associated Press typically does not identify sex abuse victims, but Spencer has made his daughter's experience with the criminal justice system a central part of his campaign for sheriff, pledging to establish a dedicated team to combat sex crimes against children.

Spencer's attorneys filed the motion seeking to have the case dismissed, contending that video and audio of the dash camera from Fosler's truck may have contained evidence that would have cleared Spencer of any wrongdoing. According to court records, a detective with the Lonoke County Sheriff's Office removed the dash camera from the truck when responding to the scene of the shooting.

But the camera's internal settings were not preserved and the battery of the camera was allowed to drain, and as a result the camera went back to its default settings. When the camera was sent to the attorney general's office for a forensic exam, the memory card that was in it when it was collected from the truck was missing. The detective who collected the camera later admitted that it was not logged into evidence right away, but was instead stored in his personal office rather than the evidence room, according to court records.

Wilson replaced the original judge handling the murder case in January after the Arkansas Supreme Court removed Judge Barbara Elmore from the case, finding she had issued an overly broad gag order that violated Spencer's First Amendment rights.

House passes bill to aid Ukraine and impose new sanctions on Russia

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House passed legislation Thursday that would aid Ukraine and sanction key segments of the Russian economy, overriding objections from Republican leaders who warned the bill would undermine negotiations designed to achieve a comparable but stronger result.

The legislation, sponsored by Rep. Gregory Meeks, D-N.Y., seeks to cement U.S. assistance for Ukraine by providing more than \$1 billion in security and reconstruction aid. It would make another \$8 billion available for Ukraine's defense through loans.

The 226-195 vote is a sign of impatience with President Donald Trump's approach to the war and represents the House's second major foreign policy break with Trump this week. The day before, the House, for the first time, approved a war powers resolution aimed at halting U.S. military action against Iran.

Supporters were able to force action on the Ukraine bill by gathering 218 signatures on a discharge petition, a legislative tool that allows a majority of the House to effectively bypass leadership.

Once rarely successful, House members have used the petition tool this Congress to pass bills on releasing the government's files on Jeffrey Epstein and to extend health care subsidies to many of those who get health coverage through the Affordable Care Act, though the latter measure faltered in the Senate.

Meeks said the question before the House was simple. Would it help Ukraine negotiate from a position of strength or help Russia outlast American resolve?

"We all want this war to end," Meeks said. "The question is how. Will we abandon Ukraine and force it into a terrible deal? That is what Vladimir Putin is counting on. Or will this body live up to the commitments we've made since the start of this war?"

The vast majority of Republicans opposed the measure. Rep. French Hill, the chairman of the House Financial Services Committee, said he is a steadfast supporter of Ukraine. However, the Arkansas Republican said the House was confronted with a flawed, outdated measure that actually calls for less funding for Ukraine security assistance compared to what Congress had agreed to as part of this year's defense policy. Another section could lead to a decrease in defense spending by some NATO members, he warned.

Rep. Brian Mast, the chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, said he believed the bill was "a cudgel to fight against President Trump."

"This bill, in my opinion, is an unserious bill that was crafted basically a year-and-a-half ago," Mast, R-Fla., said.

Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., broke with most of his Republican colleagues in voicing support for the measure. "Are we going to stand with good or are we going to stand with evil? That's what this is about tonight," he said.

In the end, 18 Republicans, 207 Democrats and one independent voted for the bill. Democratic Rep. Ilhan Omar joined with 194 Republicans in voting against it.

Lawmakers want to send a message

Supporters are hopeful that the House's passage of the Ukraine bill would put pressure on the Senate to do the same. But they also know the Senate likely won't go along unless Trump endorses the bill.

"It's probably not going to get 60 votes in the Senate, but it's going to hopefully force the Senate to address the issue," said Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., who signed the discharge petition and voted for the bill. "It's going to send a great message to the soldiers of Ukraine."

He said the vote would also send a message to Putin that "we do have a pulse here, that we do care about Ukraine and that we are going to utilize our authority to help them."

As the war has dragged on, it's gotten more difficult for supporters of Ukraine in Congress to provide additional financial support to help Ukraine defend itself.

The U.S. has approved some \$195 billion for the Ukraine response, according to the latest quarterly inspector general report for Operation Atlantic Resolve, with roughly a quarter of that going to replenish weapons stockpiles for the U.S. military. The last major legislation designed to bolster the Ukraine response

occurred in April 2024, though modest amounts have since been included in annual appropriations bills.

Republican leaders tried to stop the bill

Republican leaders urged their members to oppose the legislation. House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La., said there are good-faith negotiations between members of Congress and the White House to boost Ukraine. He described the negotiations as complicated.

"I think they are going to yield positive results, but you set that back if you pass legislation that doesn't go as far as the negotiations are going," Scalise said.

The war that followed Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbor is more than four years old, with no end in sight. In recent days, both sides have sought an edge by launching long-range missile strikes.

U.S.-led peace efforts have fizzled out as the sides made no progress on key differences and after the war in Iran grabbed Washington's attention. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accepted an unconditional ceasefire demanded by Trump, but Putin refused.

Action in the Senate on Ukraine has revolved around a bill that would impose sweeping tariffs and secondary sanctions on countries that purchase Russia's oil, gas, uranium and other exports, which are crucial to financing Russia's military. But the bill has languished.

Ex-national security adviser John Bolton will plead guilty in classified information case: AP source

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Trump administration national security adviser John Bolton has agreed to plead guilty to a single count of retaining classified information under a deal with the Justice Department that could allow him to avoid prison time, a person familiar with the matter said Thursday.

The deal would resolve a criminal case filed in October that charged Bolton with 18 counts of either retaining or disseminating classified information, including diary-like notes from his time in government that officials say he shared with family members as he was preparing a memoir about his career.

Under the agreement, Bolton would also face a \$2.25 million fine, said the person, who insisted on anonymity to discuss a deal that had not been made public. Any prison sentence would be capped at five years, but the agreement could also allow him to avoid time behind bars. The punishment will ultimately be up to a judge.

The case against Bolton, filed weeks after prosecutors secured indictments against former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James, unfolded against the backdrop of concerns that the Justice Department is using its law enforcement powers to pursue perceived adversaries of President Donald Trump. The investigation burst into public view last August when FBI agents served search warrants at his Maryland home and Washington office, but it had been well underway by the time Trump returned to the White House in January 2025.

Wrote book critical of Trump

Bolton, 77, is a longtime fixture in Republican foreign policy circles who became known for his hawkish views on American power. He served for more than a year in Trump's first administration before being pushed out in 2019 and publishing a critical book that portrayed the Republican president as deeply misinformed and painted an unflattering portrait of his leadership and decision-making.

Trump's administration fought unsuccessfully to block the publication of "The Room Where it Happened" on the grounds that the book contained classified information that could harm national security if exposed. Bolton's lawyers have said he moved forward with the book after a White House National Security Council official, with whom Bolton had worked for months, said the manuscript no longer had classified information.

The indictment he faced focused on notes shared with his wife and daughter rather than the substance of the book itself.

Bolton had initially pleaded not guilty and, in a statement released after his indictment, described the charges as part of an "intensive effort" by Trump "to intimidate his opponents, to ensure that he alone determines what is said about his conduct."

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A re-arraignment, which can signal a plea agreement, is scheduled for June 26 in federal court in Greenbelt, Maryland.

The Justice Department declined to comment.

The indictment's 18 counts carried a threat of a substantial prison sentence in the event of conviction, but the plea will avert that possibility.

Accused of sharing classified material with family members

Court documents alleged that he shared "diary-like" entries with information classified as high as top secret that he had learned from meetings with other U.S. government officials, from intelligence briefings or talks with foreign leaders. After sending one document, Bolton wrote in a message to his relatives, "None of which we talk about!!!" In response, one of his relatives wrote, "Shhhhhh," prosecutors said.

The indictment said that among the material shared was information about foreign adversaries that in some cases revealed details about sources and methods used by the U.S. government to collect intelligence. One document related to a foreign adversary's plans for a missile launch, while another detailed U.S. government plans for covert action and included intelligence blaming an adversary for an attack, court papers say.

Bolton's government service long predated the Trump administration. He had also served in the Justice Department during President Ronald Reagan's administration and was a State Department point person on arms control during George W. Bush's presidency.

Bolton was nominated by Bush to serve as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, but the strong supporter of the Iraq War was unable to win Senate confirmation. He resigned after serving 17 months through a recess appointment that allowed him to hold the job on a temporary basis without Senate approval.

Fired after foreign policy clashes with Trump

In 2018, Bolton was appointed to serve as Trump's third national security adviser. His brief tenure was characterized by disputes with the president over North Korea, Iran and Ukraine.

Those rifts ultimately led to Bolton's departure, with Trump announcing on social media in September 2019 that he had accepted Bolton's resignation.

Bolton subsequently criticized Trump's approach to foreign policy and government in his book, including by alleging that Trump directly tied providing military aid to Ukraine to that country's willingness to conduct investigations into Joe Biden, who was soon to be Trump's Democratic rival in the 2020 presidential election, and members of the Biden family.

Trump responded by slamming Bolton as a "washed-up guy" and a "crazy" warmonger who would have led the country into "World War Six."

The Dow leaps to a record as oil prices ease and US stocks outside of AI rally

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Wall Street rallied Thursday after falling oil prices and yields in the bond market eased the pressure on U.S. stocks. Banks, small companies and other stocks that had earlier been left behind by the euphoria around artificial-intelligence technology led the way.

The S&P 500 rose 0.4% for its 10th gain in the last 11 days, a day after dropping from its all-time high. The Dow Jones Industrial Average soared 874 points, or 1.7%, to a record, and the Nasdaq composite slipped 0.1%.

Stocks got a lift from a 2.8% drop for the price of Brent crude oil to \$95.03 per barrel. That gave back a chunk of its rise from this week caused by the latest flare-ups of fighting between Iran and the United States and its allies.

The expectation on Wall Street seems to be that the United States and Iran will ultimately agree to reopen the Strait of Hormuz to oil tankers. That would hopefully improve the flow of crude, lower oil's price and remove some of the upward pressure on inflation that's hurting the world. Such hopes, along with strong profit reports from U.S. companies, helped launch the S&P 500 on a nine-day winning streak that

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ended Wednesday, a day short of its longest run in three decades.

Stocks of smaller companies helped lead the way, and the Russell 2000 index of the smallest U.S. stocks jumped 1.4%. They can reap the biggest benefits of falling interest rates, and the yield on the 10-year Treasury dipped to 4.47% from 4.49% late Wednesday as oil prices sank.

Lower yields can make it less expensive for companies to borrow cash, which many smaller companies need to do to grow.

Banks also helped lead the market, including gains of 5% for Goldman Sachs, 4.7% for Fifth Third Bancorp and 4.4% for U.S. Bancorp.

They helped to more than make up for losses by some AI stocks, which took a sudden back seat after dominating the market.

Broadcom sank 12.6%, even though both profit and revenue for the chip company surpassed analysts' expectations. CEO Hock Tan said its AI semiconductor revenue more than doubled to \$10.8 billion during the quarter and that demand is only getting bigger. He is forecasting AI semiconductor growth to top 200% in the current quarter.

Investors, though, may have wanted even more after Broadcom's stock came into the day with a 38.5% surge for the year so far. That towered over the already strong 10.3% rise for the S&P 500 index, and Broadcom has grown to become one of Wall Street's largest and most influential stocks.

Analysts have been saying AI stocks may have run too high, becoming too expensive, and that the broad U.S. stock market may be set for a slowdown following an unrelenting streak of nine straight winning weeks for the S&P 500, its longest since 2023.

Other AI winners likewise gave back some of their big gains. Micron Technology, the latest company to see its total value top \$1 trillion because of AI euphoria, fell 7.7%.

CrowdStrike Holdings dropped 3.8% even though the cybersecurity company's profit and revenue for the latest quarter topped analysts' expectations. CEO George Kurtz said the latest quarter was when "the worlds of cybersecurity and frontier AI collided," and the company said it's splitting its stock to make its share price more affordable.

But its stock came into the day with a 59.5% surge for the year so far. And analysts said it beat forecasts for some financial measures by less than it usually does.

Outside of tech, PVH Corp., the company behind the Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger brands, tumbled 20.2% even though it also beat Wall Street's first-quarter sales and profit targets. CEO Stefan Larsson warned that it's feeling "the prolonged effects of the Middle East conflict, which is putting pressure on" customers in the region.

All told, the S&P 500 climbed 30.63 points to 7,584.31. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 874.86 to 51,561.93, and the Nasdaq composite slipped 23.02 to 26,830.96.

Reports on the U.S. economy, meanwhile, came in mixed. One said that slightly more U.S. workers applied for unemployment benefits last week, which could indicate a slowdown in the relatively solid U.S. job market.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose in Europe following a weaker finish in Asia.

South Korea's Kospi fell 1.8%, Hong Kong's Hang Seng dropped 1.5% and Japan's Nikkei 225 fell 1.4% for some of the larger losses.

Homicide convictions reversed for Colorado paramedics who injected ketamine into Elijah McClain

By MEAD GRUVER and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

FORT COLLINS, Colo. (AP) — A Colorado court reversed homicide convictions against two paramedics on Thursday in the 2019 death of Elijah McClain, a Black man who was pinned down by police and injected with a fatal dose of ketamine.

McClain's final words — "I can't breathe" — foreshadowed those of George Floyd a year later in Minneapolis, and the Colorado man's name became part of the rallying cries for social justice that swept the

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U.S. in 2020.

The appeals court ordered new trials for Aurora Fire Rescue paramedics Jeremy Cooper and Peter Cichuniec. McClain, 23, had been forcibly restrained and put in a neck hold by police, who stopped him in response to a suspicious person complaint as the massage therapist walked home from a convenience store in the Denver suburb in 2019.

Criminal charges against paramedics and emergency medical technicians involved in police custody cases are rare. As McClain's death and others raised questions about the use of ketamine to subdue struggling suspects, this prosecution sent shock waves through the ranks of first responders across the U.S.

New trials in the case will return the issue to the spotlight, and that could make first responders think twice when responding to calls involving people in police custody, said University of Miami criminologist Alex Piquero.

"At 11 o'clock tonight when they're on a call, and the circumstances are the same, is this going to influence their behavior?" Piquero asked. "It may not be the first thing that comes into their heads, but it's going to be there."

A jury in 2023 found Cooper and Cichuniec guilty of criminally negligent homicide following a weekslong trial in state district court. The jurors also found Cichuniec guilty of second-degree felony assault.

Cichuniec received five years in prison. Cooper avoided prison and was sentenced to 14 months in jail with work release and probation.

State attorney general says he will appeal

The appeals court upheld Cichuniec's assault conviction, but faulted the instructions given to jurors with respect to the criminally negligent homicide charges before they deliberated. Thursday's ruling sends their cases back to a lower court for a new trial on that charge.

Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser will appeal Thursday's decision, a spokesperson said.

"Bringing these cases to trial was the right thing to do for justice, for Elijah McClain, and for healing in the Aurora community," Weiser said in a statement. "The attorney general's office is committed to defending these convictions through the appeals process."

An Aurora police officer was convicted of homicide and third degree assault in McClain's death, while two other officers were acquitted.

Cichuniec was released early from prison in 2024 after a judge reduced his sentence to four years of probation. That judge, Mark Warner, cited "unusual and extenuating circumstances," a part of Colorado's mandatory sentencing law that allows a court to modify a sentence after a defendant has served least 119 days in prison. Warner said that Cichuniec had to make a quick decision the night of the arrest as the highest-ranking paramedic at the scene.

The International Association of Fire Fighters said in a statement it continued to support Cooper and Cichuniec, who are members of the labor union.

"Today's ruling recognizes the challenges paramedics face when making split-second medical decisions in rapidly evolving situations," said Edward Kelly, the association's general president.

Local prosecutors initially declined to bring charges in McClain's death

Local prosecutors initially decided not to bring charges in McClain's death largely because an initial autopsy was inconclusive on how he died.

Following the nationwide protests over Floyd's death, Democratic Gov. Jared Polis directed Weiser to re-investigate the McClain case. A grand jury indicted the two paramedics and three police officers when Dr. Stephen Cina, a forensic pathologist who performed McClain's autopsy, changed his findings to pin the blame on the sedative ketamine after reviewing body camera footage from the scene.

The city of Aurora in 2021 agreed to pay \$15 million to settle a federal civil rights lawsuit brought by McClain's parents.

The Associated Press left a voicemail seeking comment with the attorney for McClain's mother, Sheneen McClain. Other requests for comment were left with the paramedics' lawyers.

The paramedics' defense attorneys argued they followed their training in giving ketamine to McClain

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after deciding he had "excited delirium," a disputed condition invoked to justify excessive force that some say is unscientific. They also said prosecutors did not prove the sedative is what killed him.

Paramedics in Aurora had been trained to use the drug for the condition in 2018. State officials have since told paramedics to stop using excited delirium as a basis for administering ketamine.

An activist who befriended Sheneen McClain after they met at a protest said the appellate ruling was disappointing and "one of the most divisive judicial decisions our state has experienced in recent memory."

"It strikes at the heart of a question that Colorado continues to struggle to answer: When a Black life is taken under circumstances that shock the conscience of the public, what does accountability truly mean?" said MiDian Shofner, CEO of the Epitome of Black Excellence and Partnership.

Kennedy Center moves to erase Trump references after judge said they were illegally added

By STEVEN SLOAN and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Kennedy Center is beginning the process of removing references to President Donald Trump a week after a federal judge ruled that his name had been illegally added to the performing arts center.

Roma Daravi, the Kennedy Center's vice president of public relations, said in a statement to The Associated Press that "we are complying with the court's order while evaluating all legal options to preserve this revitalization and recognize President Trump's leadership."

In a Thursday memo to staff from the Kennedy Center's Office of General Counsel, the institution's lawyers said email signatures, letterhead and other documents must reflect the name as "The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts" or "Kennedy Center."

The changes, the memo said, must be completed by June 12.

In a May 29 decision, U.S. District Judge Christopher Cooper also blocked the administration from closing the cultural and arts venue for major renovations that had been planned to start in July.

Hours after the ruling, Trump said he was backing away from the revamp and making arrangements to relinquish control to Congress of what, until the Republican president's second term, had been known as the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

The next day, Trump on social media branded Cooper as "an anti Trump Hater" and predicted that the performing arts center that he wanted to shutter for a two-year overhaul will "soon be closed, probably never to open again."

Clearly angered by his latest legal setback, he said it was "impossible for me to be treated fairly," tying Cooper's ruling to earlier losses, including the Supreme Court's rejection in February of his sweeping tariffs.

The removal marked a setback in the president's second-term plans to remake many of Washington's landmarks — and add new ones.

On Thursday, his administration said renovations had been completed on the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, painting the bottom what Trump has called "American flag blue." The White House East Wing was demolished to build a large ballroom, and Trump plans to build an arch between the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery.

Hezbollah rejects latest ceasefire agreement as Israeli strikes kill 4 in Lebanon

By BASSEM MROUE, JON GAMBRELL and SAM METZ Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Hezbollah on Thursday rejected the latest ceasefire agreement between Israel and the Lebanese government, and the militant group demanded a complete Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon as more fighting there hampered efforts to end the Iran war.

The Hezbollah announcement came as Israeli strikes killed at least four people, according to local authorities, and a U.N. peacekeeper was killed in the crossfire. An Israeli soldier was also killed in combat

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in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah leader Naim Kassem, in a written statement read on TV, called the negotiations "absurd, humiliating and insulting." He said the agreement's demand that Hezbollah fighters leave southern Lebanon under fire would mean "surrender, defeat and achieving the enemy's goals."

"What we are concerned about is an end to the aggression, ceasefire and Israel's withdrawal," he said, underscoring that Hezbollah has not made any commitment to stop fighting. "So long as our villages are not safe and are being bombed and destroyed and our people are killed," he said, northern Israel "will not be safe."

Sirens sound after Netanyahu visit

Following Kassem's statement, drone alert sirens sounded in several border communities in northern Israel, including Shlomi, a town where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and several ministers had been meeting with local officials, his office said. Israeli media reported that Netanyahu left a short time before the alerts sounded.

The Israeli military later said the sirens were triggered by attempts to intercept several drones that hit near soldiers in southern Lebanon. No injuries were reported.

Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir, the Israeli military's chief of staff, acknowledged Thursday that the ongoing war was straining northern Israeli towns living under the threat of Hezbollah fire. He said Israel's operations in Iran and Lebanon had "created a new security reality," by weakening Iran and Hezbollah "to an unprecedented degree."

Lebanese troops began moving Thursday afternoon into the southern village of Dibbine, in coordination with U.N. peacekeepers, after Israeli forces left the area, which saw intense clashes in recent days, state-run media reported. It was the first time Israeli troops withdrew from an area in southern Lebanon since the latest Israel-Hezbollah war began about three months ago.

The fighting in Lebanon, where Israeli forces have seized large swaths of the south, threatens efforts to end the Iran war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, a key transit point for oil and gas. Its closure has jolted the world economy.

Iran has demanded that any lasting truce extend to Lebanon. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who faces elections later this year, wants to press ahead with Israel's offensive until Hezbollah no longer poses a threat.

U.S. President Donald Trump, who faced a rare rebuke from Congress on Wednesday, has sought to downplay the diplomatic deadlock and the failure of declared ceasefires to end the fighting. He told reporters that in the Middle East, "a ceasefire is when you're shooting in a more moderate manner."

Serbian peacekeeper and Israeli soldier killed

A Serbian peacekeeper was killed and two others were wounded when a mortar struck their location near Marjayoun, a Christian-majority town that has seen intense fighting, according to the U.N. mission in southern Lebanon, known as UNIFIL, and the Serbian Defense Ministry.

Israel blamed Hezbollah for the firing that killed the U.N. peacekeeper, without offering evidence. Hezbollah and the U.N. did not immediately comment on who launched the shells.

Also Thursday, the Israeli military announced that a 21-year-old captain in the armored corps was killed in southern Lebanon.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said a drone strike killed a motorcyclist and wounded four people in the village of Maaroub. The Israeli military said soldiers killed an armed militant and later found a Hezbollah cache of guns, grenades, surface-to-air missiles and other combat gear in the area.

The military also said it conducted strikes near the coastal city of Tyre and around Shaqra, another community in southern Lebanon.

The Lebanese news agency reported airstrikes in the south and said a strike on the village of Sohmar in the Bekaa Valley, in eastern Lebanon, killed three people and wounded others.

Israel has warned people not to go into parts of southern Lebanon where it says it is striking Hezbollah facilities.

Fighting has raged despite declared ceasefires

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Hezbollah resumed rocket fire days after Israel and the United States launched their surprise Feb. 28 attack on Iran, which backs Hezbollah. Before then, Israel had regularly carried out strikes in Lebanon against what it said were militant targets, often killing civilians, despite an earlier truce reached in 2024.

After Hezbollah's rocket and drone attacks resumed, Israeli troops seized around a fifth of Lebanon, pushing further into the country's south than at any time since the end of Israel's 1982-2000 occupation.

In the southern city of Sidon, residents reacted to Wednesday's ceasefire announcement with skepticism, saying previous agreements had failed to stop the violence.

"Every few days a ceasefire is announced, but people keep getting killed," said Mayada Hijazi.

"It's all talk and no action," said Salah Nassab. "We keep going back to our homes, and then we get displaced again, back and forth. We're very tired."

More than 3,500 people have been killed in Lebanon, and over 1.2 million have been displaced. The fighting has killed at least 28 Israeli soldiers and three civilians.

Latest ceasefire came from ongoing Israeli-Lebanese talks

The latest declared ceasefire came about through U.S.-brokered talks between Israel and Lebanon's government, which accuses Hezbollah of dragging the country into war and had made efforts to disarm it before the latest hostilities.

The ceasefire agreement calls for Lebanon's armed forces to take control of security zones in Lebanon from which the militants would be banned.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun on Thursday called the new agreement "the last chance to enter a final and comprehensive ceasefire." He said Lebanon was ready to implement the deal once he receives responses from relevant factions in Lebanon, including Hezbollah. The United States — and Trump himself — would determine how and when the deal is implemented, Aoun told journalists.

The agreement terms Hezbollah "an enemy" of Israel, the U.S. and Lebanon and calls for dismantling it. The government has promised to do so in the past but does not have the capabilities to disarm Hezbollah by force.

The latest agreement did not say when Israel would withdraw from southern Lebanon but said the U.S. would support the Lebanese army as it works to assert control in areas where Hezbollah has long wielded power.

With Trump in a holding pattern on Iran war, allies and critics worry he risks getting boxed in

By AAMER MADHANI and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is facing warnings from foes and allies alike that he's getting boxed in on the Iran war, a conflict he sold as a brief military incursion but that has since settled into a holding pattern.

It's been a week since U.S. and Iranian negotiators reached a tentative agreement to extend the ceasefire in the conflict by 60 days and start a new round of talks on Iran's nuclear program that required Trump's signoff.

But Trump has called for unspecified changes to the agreement and Iranian officials — perhaps calculating that the Republican president is reluctant to restart the bombardment after burning through key weapons systems — are showing no signs they'll give in to new demands.

A series of strikes by the U.S. and Iran this week has raised fresh concerns that the ceasefire could collapse. But Trump on Thursday reiterated that he's certain his administration is on track to successfully wrap up the conflict.

"We're going to win one way or another," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office.

The shaky moment follows repeated claims by Trump since a 14-day ceasefire was agreed to on April 7 — following 38 days of U.S. and Israel bombing of Iran — that a deal is just days away and the Iranian side is begging to come to a settlement.

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Without an interim settlement in place to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, global energy prices remain elevated and are adding to anxieties around the world about the impact of rising costs spurred by the 3-month-old conflict on the cost of food, fuel and other goods.

After a string of reports this week that Iran was shutting down talks, Trump told CNBC he "couldn't care less" if the negotiations had bogged down and even mused they had become "boring."

There's anxiety Trump is getting boxed in

There's growing concern inside the administration and among key advisers and allies that Trump now finds himself in a bind, according to a U.S. official and another person familiar with the administration's internal deliberations, both of whom spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

He's buffeted by Democrats seizing on oil prices and warnings from hawkish members of his base that an early exit from the conflict would amount to capitulation.

Trump is privately hearing from other Republican lawmakers as well as Pentagon officials and Gulf allies that a return to the bombing campaign is a bad idea.

Those advising against returning to military action note that the U.S. has burned through munitions at too fast a rate. It could take three years to replenish some key weapons systems.

Meanwhile, Gulf allies are worried Iran will retaliate against them and their critical infrastructure and energy interests and further set back their economies.

At the same time, Trump has bristled at the idea of accepting a deal that resembles the 2015 nuclear agreement brokered by Democrat Barack Obama's administration, which restricted Iran's nuclear program in exchange for lifting international economic sanctions.

Trump, during his first term, abandoned the pact, which he said had failed to permanently stop Iran's nuclear program, ignored Iran's ballistic-missile development and did not penalize Iran for supporting militant proxy groups across the Middle East.

Now, Trump, according to those familiar with internal deliberations, has made clear he feels strongly he can't make "a bad deal" and is acutely aware he's at risk of tarnishing his legacy if he missteps.

White House spokeswoman Anna Kelly dismissed the notion that Trump has been boxed in, or that there's any concern within the administration about the pace of talks.

Trump resisted Israel's push for Lebanon bombings

Israeli and hawkish allies in Washington have made the case to Trump that a deal at this point would amount to unconditional surrender, urging him to ratchet up economic pressure on Iran and back Israel's assault on the Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon.

But Trump, earlier this week, in a heated call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, demanded Israel stand down. And on Wednesday, Israel and Lebanon said they agreed to renew a ceasefire. Hezbollah was not part of the Israel-Lebanon talks, which have been held at the ambassadorial level in Washington since the beginning of last month, and the militant group has denounced the agreement.

Remaining in the current status quo with Tehran — neither a full resumption of hostilities nor sealing an interim agreement to restart nuclear talks — is a situation Iran appears better poised to exploit, argued Behnam Ben Taleblu, a senior fellow at the hawkish Washington think tank Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Despite being the weaker party, Iran appears to be calculating that the longer the holding pattern lasts, the better the chances are that it can "box in" Trump, he added.

"Either way, Tehran appears more resolute than ever to not provide Trump with a victory image, hence why it isn't budging on the battlefield or negotiating table," Taleblu said.

Holding pattern isn't helpful for Republicans on the ballot

At the same time, Democrats are trying to capitalize on Trump's handling of the unpopular war ahead of November's midterm elections. The House of Representatives on Wednesday for the first time passed a symbolic resolution calling for a halt in military action against Iran, with four Republican lawmakers joining Democrats in the rebuke of Trump's war.

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The president has dismissed the House vote as "meaningless."

"The Democrats are fueled by Trump Derangement Syndrome," Trump fumed in a social media post. "The four Republicans, that's a whole other story - They're GRANDSTANDERS! They should be ashamed of themselves."

During hours of hearings on Capitol Hill on Tuesday and Wednesday with Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Democrats laced into Trump for discounting the economic impact of the conflict on Americans and for failing to anticipate Iran would shutter the Strait.

In one tense exchange, New Jersey Democratic Sen. Cory Booker pointed to the unsteady ceasefire as a sign Iran has the upper hand.

"We are the strongest nation on the planet Earth, and we're in a stalemate with Iran," Booker said. "And now we're begging to get back into a deal that you all trashed in the first place."

Rubio dismissed the criticism, underscoring that Iran has been placed on its heels with the strikes, which have taken out multiple layers of senior leadership and left Iran's economy in shambles.

"There's no one begging," Rubio responded. "I don't know where you're getting this perception that Iran is stronger."

Another Democrat, Sen. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, homed in on Trump's comments last month that voter anxiety about the cost of living was "not even a little bit" of a motivating factor for him to reach a deal to end the war.

The president continues to downplay the rising costs for Americans at the pump and predicts that gas prices would fall sharply after the conflict ends.

Christopher Borick, the director of the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion in Pennsylvania, said that Democrats running in swing districts around the country are already zeroing in on Trump's rhetoric on the war's impact on Americans' pocketbooks.

"There's significant risk in having this thing drag on for Republicans," Borick said. "But for Republicans in some of these tough swing districts, there's a case to be made to rip the bandage off now, get some easing in the oil markets and hope there's enough time for voters to turn the page."

Sipping tea fuels Polish qualifier Chwalinska's run to French Open final against teenager Andreeva

By JEROME PUGMIRE AP Sports Writer

PARIS (AP) — Sipping tea every night is working wonders for Maja Chwalinska.

The Polish player became just the second qualifier to reach a Grand Slam singles final in the Open Era when she beat Diana Shnaider of Russia 7-6 (4), 6-4 on Thursday.

The 24-year-old Chwalinska can match Emma Raducanu's title run at the 2021 U.S. Open when she plays Russian teenager Mirra Andreeva in Saturday's final at Roland Garros.

Nothing will change Chwalinska's routine for the biggest match of her life.

"I'm going to drink my tea," she said.

Chwalinska and Raducanu, according to stats provider Opta, stand alone among men and women in having reached a major singles final from the qualifying rounds since the Open Era began in 1968.

"I feel like I am in a bubble, I don't know what's going on," Chwalinska said. "After the tournament it will be time to process it: breathe in, breathe out."

Besides the tea, she might watch some tennis "because I'm a tennis freak."

She said her favorite player growing up was Swiss great Roger Federer, then Spanish clay-court ace Rafael Nadal. Now it's 24-time major winner Novak Djokovic.

"I'm just very grateful that I was growing up during this era," she said. "Sometimes I come back to these old matches and I watch them play, and it feels like poetry."

Chwalinska sealed victory on her first match point with a powerful forehand winner down the line, then fell back with both hands on her face. She then sat on her chair and panted heavily, her face buried into a towel.

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"I honestly don't know what was going on in my head," she said. "I was just in such a shock."

Chwalinska's run saw her advance through three qualifying rounds to enter the main draw and play in just her third Grand Slam. Her best result at a major before this was the second round at Wimbledon in 2022. Polish countrywoman Iga Swiatek has won the French Open four times.

The 19-year-old Andreeva reached her first Grand Slam final by beating Marta Kostyuk 6-1, 6-3 earlier Thursday on Court Philippe-Chatrier.

Andreeva had reached the semifinals here two years ago, but this is Chwalinska's first semifinal anywhere at WTA tour-level.

Remarkable run

Chwalinska has dropped only one set in her nine matches, including qualifying, and has bulldozed her way past four top-50 players in the main draw.

Her ranking will rocket from No. 114 to No. 14 if she wins the tournament, according to the WTA.

Her bank balance will also get a significant boost. Chwalinska's total prize money heading into Roland Garros was \$864,030 and by reaching the final she gets 1.4 million euros about (\$1.6 million); and 2.8 million euros (\$3.25 million) if she wins on Saturday.

A neat drop shot and lob gave her set point in the tiebreaker, and she clinched the first set when Shnaider's backhand went wide.

Shnaider had a medical timeout after the seventh game of the second set. She flexed her left leg as she lay on her back, and dropped her serve in the ninth game, giving Chwalinska a chance to serve for the match.

"All the kudos to Maja. She played amazing," Shnaider said. "She moves incredible on the court, she covers a lot. Even if you think that you won the point, she's there."

Fully focused

Andreeva could see even the smallest details on the ball.

"I was seeing the little hairs on the ball when I was tossing or playing (shots)," Andreeva said. "I was really, really focused today."

Andreeva, who is seeded No. 8, also converted her first match point when serving for the victory.

She clearly feels comfortable at the French Open, which she describes as a "cozy" tournament because she sees familiar faces every year, and enjoys her time in Paris.

"I really like to walk around the city, to go into those little restaurants on the street," she said. "I also speak a little bit of French, so I try to sometimes talk to people in French."

Tensions on the court

There was no post-match handshake between Andreeva and Kostyuk — and the Ukrainian walked off quickly, turning only to wave and blow kisses to the crowd.

They had separate photos taken before the match as they each stood next to two children on their respective side of the net. Usually the players pose for the same photo, standing right next to each other by the net.

Kostyuk and countrywoman Oleksandra Oliynykova have spoken out during the tournament about the impact Russia's invasion of Ukraine is having on their country.

The No. 15-seeded Kostyuk said defeat won't linger given how much support she felt from fans.

"This is something I will carry with me forever," she said. "I feel like this is the highlight of my tournament."

Roof open and then closed

The semifinal began at shortly after 3 p.m. with an open roof, like on Wednesday when beaten quarterfinalists Aryna Sabalenka and Anna Kalinskaya complained of swirling wind on Chatrier and said the roof should have been closed.

It was closed toward the end of the second set of Thursday's semifinal, offering Kostyuk better conditions for her clay-court game. But her 16-match winning streak on clay ended.

In public letter, Ukraine's Zelenskyy calls on Putin for direct negotiations in a neutral country

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Thursday called for face-to-face negotiations in a public letter addressed directly to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The letter, the first public message Zelenskyy has written directly to Putin since Russia launched its full-scale invasion in 2022, was a sweeping critique of the Russian leader's 26 years in power.

Zelenskyy acknowledged shifting U.S. priorities, saying it would be wrong to simply wait for the Trump administration to return its attention to ending the Ukraine war while it remains heavily focused on the Iran war.

"I am proposing a meeting," Zelenskyy wrote.

U.S. President Donald Trump said it "would be great" if Putin and Zelenskyy met. "They should get it done," Trump said.

Asked what concessions he had urged Putin to make to end the war, Trump declined to provide details but said both sides would need to compromise.

"They're going to both make compromises," he said. "I suggested those compromises."

Zelenskyy appeared to be trying to seize a pivotal moment in the war, as Ukraine has begun to regain some battlefield leverage largely through improved long-range strike capabilities that have complicated Russia's advances. At the same time, Moscow has intensified its deadly aerial campaign across Ukraine, seeking to exploit Kyiv's shortages and continued vulnerability to ballistic missile attacks.

He said the talks could be hosted by a neutral third country, ruling out both Moscow and Kyiv as venues and suggested Switzerland, Turkey or Arab states as possible hosts for negotiations.

"It is leaders who resolve the key issues. That has always been the case, and it always will be," he wrote. "I propose to set a clear date for such a meeting."

He said Ukrainian intelligence indicated Russia was considering plans to prolong the war into 2027 and 2028, while increasingly relying on ballistic missile strikes to achieve what its ground campaign had failed to accomplish.

Zelenskyy also accused Moscow of seeking to draw Belarus deeper into the conflict and of attempting to destabilize the situation around Transnistria, the breakaway Moldovan region backed by Russia.

The Ukrainian leader argued that Russia was increasingly feeling the costs of the war, pointing to drone attacks deep inside Russian territory, economic strain, fuel shortages, rising prices, and the necessity of more military mobilization.

Zelenskyy claimed Russia suffered more than 30,000 soldiers killed or seriously wounded in May alone, saying Ukraine had "video confirmation" of the battlefield losses and that such casualty levels had been sustained month after month.

He added that Ukraine also continues to suffer painful losses despite what he described as a favorable casualty ratio.

He said Ukraine was prepared to implement a full ceasefire for the duration of negotiations and proposed an all-for-all prisoner exchange as a first step toward ending the conflict.

Zelenskyy also called for the return of civilians and children taken from Ukraine during the war.

"The world has not grown tired of Ukraine, as you long hoped it would. But there is growing fatigue with Russia," Zelenskyy said.

Trump officials went after dozens of colleges. Now they're rewriting the rules for all of academia

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A year ago, the White House was unleashing a blitz on higher education. At one campus after another, Trump officials opened investigations and cut federal funding unless schools fell in line with the Republican president's political agenda.

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Now, after a campaign that put dozens of universities under investigation, President Donald Trump's administration is taking a wider approach, moving to rewrite the federal rules that govern all of higher education. Demands that were being pressed on individual schools are being written into the fine print for thousands of U.S. universities.

"We're coming over the higher education system and course correcting," Nicholas Kent, undersecretary for the Education Department, said in an Associated Press interview. Unlike investigations that target individual campuses, he said the new tactic has power "to affect 6,000 institutions."

The shift comes after federal judges blocked Trump's administration from making crippling cuts at Harvard and the University of California, Los Angeles. It also follows a mass exodus in civil rights lawyers who traditionally guide investigations against universities. Still, Trump hasn't backed down from his campaign to end what he calls "wokeness" run amok in academia.

Through regulation, the administration is going after many of the targets it hammered with investigations — diversity, equity and inclusion policies, transgender athletes, antisemitism and a variety of practices perceived as anti-white discrimination.

Several US agencies propose new rules

One new rule being proposed by the Education Department would overhaul the system that decides which colleges can receive federal money, known as the accreditation process. Among other changes, the proposal would require accreditors to make sure colleges have "intellectual diversity," a veiled call for more conservative voices.

Many people in higher education are alarmed by a proposal from the Office of Management and Budget that would order agencies to ensure federal grants "advance the President's policy priorities." Trump officials would verify that grants aren't used to promote DEI, "anti-American values" or anything denying "the sex binary in humans," according to the proposal issued last week. An OMB spokesperson said the rule aims to promote transparency.

Another proposal from the General Services Administration would require federal grant recipients, including universities and their contractors, to certify they don't have DEI policies deemed unlawful by the administration.

At least 11 new rules have been proposed at the Education Department, including one aimed at "streamlining the process" to cut money for schools that violate the Trump administration's interpretation of civil rights law.

Making federal rules can take months of debate in humdrum bureaucratic processes. But unlike earlier strategies that tested the limits of White House power, the rulemaking process is a widely accepted route to establish federal policy into law — without needing to go through Congress.

Some in higher education welcome the change. Unlike last year's attacks, the new approach opens the door for a conversation, said Ted Mitchell, president of the American Council on Education, which represents college and university presidents.

"We're playing a game that has rules and referees, and that's good," said Mitchell, a former Education Department official under President Barack Obama, a Democrat. "It gives us an opportunity to talk about where we might agree with the administration. That was impossible to do when these were just straight-on attacks."

The administration launches fewer new investigations

Meantime, the Education and Justice departments have announced fewer higher-education investigations, issuing news releases on roughly a dozen at U.S. universities so far this year. In the same span last year, they announced more than 70, according to an AP analysis. The exact number of new investigations is unclear — a public database has not been updated since January 2025.

Kent said the Education Department will continue to open investigations as needed, describing it as using a "scalpel to cut out the bad." But he said colleges have started to come to heel on the administration's priorities.

"Folks realize that it's a new day and that we're paying attention," Kent said.

The vast majority of the investigations opened last year are still open. The White House struck deals

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with Columbia, Brown and a handful of other campuses, but most cases are unresolved with no public update in months.

Catherine Lhamon, who led the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights under President Joe Biden, a Democrat, said the barrage of investigations amounted to "performance art" that grabbed attention but had little impact. After pushback from schools, she said, the Trump administration is backing off.

"It stopped putting itself in a position to lose," said Lhamon, who now leads the Edley Center on Law and Democracy at the University of California, Berkeley.

Still, some fights have intensified. The White House has doubled down on battles with Harvard and UCLA after federal judges blocked the administration from cutting off research funding from the campuses.

The Justice Department has sued Harvard and UCLA four times since February, alleging that both campuses tolerated antisemitism and that Harvard refused to release admissions data sought by the administration. Leaders of both universities say they have worked to fight antisemitism.

Admissions cases become a top priority

A White House official said the investigative slowdown is also the result of a mounting focus on college admissions. The administration has been building cases against colleges accused of considering race in admissions decisions even after the Supreme Court struck down affirmative action. Those investigations can take more time because they require large data collections, said the official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal strategy.

Some of those cases are now coming to bear.

The Justice Department recently concluded that medical schools at Yale and UCLA discriminated against white and Asian American students by allegedly favoring Black and Latino applicants. The universities have defended their admissions processes, saying they were rigorous and based on merit.

On Thursday, the Justice Department said it was opening 15 similar investigations at other medical schools, alleging "potential race discrimination" in their admissions processes.

Trump officials are taking a hard-line approach against any use of race in admissions, clashing with colleges that invite students to discuss their race in application essays. In its 2023 decision, the Supreme Court said nothing stops schools from considering how applicants' race speaks to broader qualities.

"We are making sure," Kent said, "that we are elevating our best and our brightest and that we're not putting the thumb on the scale because of somebody's skin color."

Higher education has already been changed

Facing last year's blitz, many campuses quietly made changes to avoid scrutiny. Some closed DEI offices. The NCAA moved to limit transgender athletes. Universities from UCLA to Columbia tightened campus protest rules after pro-Palestinian demonstrations were the subject of federal investigations.

Research has been scaled back as top schools face continued funding cuts.

In the classroom, there's been a chilling effect as professors fear that what they say or teach could attract federal attention, said Todd Wolfson, president of the American Association of University Professors.

Still, he's optimistic the balance of power is shifting in universities' favor. Students and faculty members on several campuses built pressure to reject a White House invitation last fall to sign on to aspects of Trump's agenda in exchange for favorable access to research funding, he said. The AAUP has brought several lawsuits against the administration, including one that stopped funding cuts at UCLA.

"The sector is getting its feet under it, and it's only getting stronger," Wolfson said. "I can promise you that we will fight them tooth and nail."

Average US long-term mortgage rate falls to 6.48%, retreating from its highest level in 9 months

By ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writer

The average long-term U.S. mortgage rate eased this week from its highest level in nine months, welcome relief for prospective homebuyers.

The benchmark 30-year fixed rate mortgage rate fell to 6.48% from 6.53% last week, mortgage buyer

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Freddie Mac said Thursday. The average rate remains below 6.85%, where it was a year ago.

When mortgage rates decline they give homebuyers more purchasing power.

Rates have been mostly trending higher since the war with Iran began, disrupting the passage of tankers ferrying crude oil from the Persian Gulf to customers worldwide. That's sent oil prices sharply higher — a key driver of inflation.

"This conflict is currently the main driver of still-high mortgage rates, as the oil shock ripples inflation fears throughout the global economy," said Joel Berner, a senior economist at Realtor.com.

Mortgage rates are influenced by several factors, from the Federal Reserve's interest rate policy decisions to bond market investors' expectations for the economy and inflation. They generally follow the trajectory of the 10-year Treasury yield, which lenders use as a guide to pricing home loans.

Expectations of higher oil prices as the war drags on have kept long-term bond yields elevated, causing mortgage rates to mostly trend higher.

The yield on the U.S. 10-year Treasury note was at 4.47% in midday trading Thursday on the bond market, up from 4.45% a week ago. It was just 3.97% in late February, before the war broke out.

As recently as late February, the average rate on a 30-year mortgage had slipped just under 6% for the first time since late 2022. It's hasn't fallen below that threshold since. Last week, it surged to its highest level since August 28, when it was 6.56%.

While average long-term mortgage rates remain lower than they were at this time last year, their mostly upward trajectory and uncertainty over how much higher they may go as bond markets react to the economic fallout from the conflict in the Middle East have been a drag on the housing market.

Sales of previously occupied U.S. homes were essentially flat in April after declining from a year earlier in the first three months of the year, extending a nationwide housing slump that dates back to 2022 when mortgage rates began to climb from pandemic-era lows. The May existing home sales snapshot is due out next week.

Recent mortgage applications data are another sign that the upward trend in mortgage rates has many would-be homebuyers on hold.

Mortgage applications, which include loans to buy a home or refinance an existing mortgage, fell 2.5% last week for the third week in a row, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association. Applications for loans to buy a home remain modestly higher than last year's levels, but posted their slowest weekly pace since April.

Meanwhile, home loan refinancing applications softened as many homeowners eager to refinance hold out for lower rates.

Still, those homeowners also got some relief this week. Borrowing costs on 15-year fixed-rate mortgages, often sought by borrowers refinancing a home loan, also eased. That average rate fell to 5.79% from 5.87% last week. A year ago, it was at 5.99%, Freddie Mac said.

Home shoppers who are undeterred by elevated mortgage rates are benefiting from buyer-friendly trends in many markets, including more properties for sale than a year ago and data showing that home listing prices have started falling.

The median price of U.S. homes listed for sale fell 2.4% last month from a year earlier, the steepest decline on data going back to 2017, according to Realtor.com.

With Oval Office replica and skyline views of Chicago, Obama's new museum is political and personal

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Former President Barack Obama's influence in his presidential museum runs deep, from the location on Chicago's South Side to textured stone adorning its dramatic tower to striped reading chairs that resemble ones in his own home.

The Obama Presidential Center opens to the general public on Juneteenth after a celebratory dedication in Chicago with dignitaries. But tens of thousands of people — friends and family of museum staff, students

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and journalists — have already been offered a sneak peek of the nearly 20-acre campus as crews finish final art installations and landscaping.

The roughly \$850 million project covers the political and personal realms of the nation's first Black president. Campaign memorabilia and presidential artifacts are displayed in the admission-based museum tower while public spaces of the sprawling campus feature other things important to Obama: a new library, basketball court and picnic area with grills.

"This is a safe space for people to come and, yes, reflect on the historic moments of this presidency and the campaigns, but also to come together as a community to think about what change you can bring to your own neighborhood," Josh Harris, the Obama Foundation's vice president of public engagement, said during a recent tour with The Associated Press.

Here's a closer look at the top attractions of the campus that is expected to draw as many as 1 million visitors annually.

President for a day

Obama's presidential museum will be the first fully digital museum of its kind. There will be no official papers on display. Instead, visitors will experience high-tech and hands-on exhibits spanning the campaigns, key moments of Obama's presidency and life at the White House.

One of the largest attractions is a life-sized replica of the Oval Office.

On a recent day, a stream of visitors, including schoolchildren, walked through the circular room, stopping to sit behind the desk and pose for pictures. The top drawer holds a copy of a handwritten letter from his predecessor, President George W. Bush, and Obama's beloved BlackBerry phone.

"We want to make sure that people from all walks of life have the opportunity to sit behind the Resolute Desk," said Harris. "You think about the possibilities that if a young organizer from the South Side of Chicago can be president, you can be president too."

Other sections of the museum detail the Affordable Care Act, immigration policies, and smaller moments such as when Obama unexpectedly sang during a 2015 eulogy for those killed in a South Carolina church shooting. A large television screen plays a clip of Obama singing "Amazing Grace."

Peppered throughout are areas for personal reflection, which museum organizers say is key.

"We're passing that baton and inviting people to bring change home, however change may be defined, both small or large," said Louise Bernard, the museum's director.

Touching iconic ballgowns

When Obama touted the museum's contents at its groundbreaking in 2021, he predicted one of the top draws.

"We want this center to be more than a static museum or a source of archival research," Obama joked at the site. "It won't just be a collection of campaign memorabilia or Michelle's ballgowns, although I know everybody will come see those."

Roughly a dozen outfits on mannequins are behind glass, including a black and red dress designed by Narciso Rodriguez that the former first lady wore on Election Night in 2008 in Chicago.

Visitors will also get a chance to touch swatches of the fabrics, including the rose gold chain mail Atelier Versace evening gown she wore at her final state dinner in 2016.

Obama's personal touches

The museum's location is near where Barack Obama started his political career, taught law at the University of Chicago and where the family lived. Michelle Obama also grew up on the South Side.

A lifelong basketball lover, Obama requested a glass-paneled, professional grade basketball court to be used for community programs.

The former first lady designed a garden, where lettuce and strawberry plants are sprouting. There are also charcoal grills available for public use — an element that Obama envisioned when he pitched the plan in community meetings nearly a decade ago.

"President Obama always talked about his feelings of being in Chicago and one of his memorable moments was grilling in the park," Harris said.

The Obamas' design tastes and love of history are also evident.

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The museum campus features dozens of commissioned works of art while different parts of the campus are named after prominent figures. The central "John Lewis Plaza," named for the late congressman and Civil Rights leader, is designed as a public gathering spot.

Inside a new Chicago Public Library branch, a 70-foot (21-meter) mural depicts literary figures, including Walt Whitman and James Baldwin. At the center, Toni Morrison reads to a boy wearing an orange shirt, representing a young Obama.

The presidential reading room features thousands of books chosen by the Obamas, ranging from presidential biographies to best-selling fiction. One of Obama's favorite parts are two high-backed chairs with blue, yellow and black stripes. They were selected by the former president as top-notch reading chairs similar to ones he has at home.

Pricey admission with free options

Tickets are \$30, the highest of any U.S. presidential museum or library. Next on the list is the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum in California, where tickets are \$29.

Obama Foundation leaders say the prices are justified for the state-of-the-art facility.

Tickets at the adjacent Griffin Museum of Science and Industry are \$25.95. In downstate Illinois, tickets to the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield cost \$15.

Along with free days and discounts for Illinois residents, Obama Foundation officials also argue that most of the campus is free, with only four floors of the museum tower requiring tickets.

Anyone can walk the campus, use the playground, library, sledding hill or grilling area. The tower's top floor, which feature panoramic views of the nation's third-largest city, is also free.

"The idea behind this institution, this campus, was to make it accessible to as many people as possible," Harris said.

A fire at a nursing home in Sri Lanka kills 12 people

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — A fire at an unregistered nursing home in western Sri Lanka killed 12 residents and injured eight others, police said Thursday.

The fire started late Wednesday at the home in Anguruwatota town. Fifty-one residents were rescued, police spokesman Fredrick Wootler said. He said people with mental illnesses were also housed there.

The director of the home was arrested on suspicion of causing deaths through negligence. He appeared before a court and was ordered to be detained for a week while an investigation is underway.

Associated Press footage showed the building gutted with its charred furniture and equipment. Bodies lay nearby.

Local television channel Hiru showed image of firefighters, police and residents trying to contain the raging fire. Those rescued were assisted by police and soldiers in boarding buses to a safe location.

Chathura Mihudum, director of the National Secretariat for Elders, said the facility was not registered as a nursing home and had been warned to follow laws and guidelines.

He said it was overcrowded with beds for just about 15 people in a space where 71 people were living.

Government officials had previously visited the institution and had instructed the management to follow laws, he said, without elaborating.

In Iowa, water pollution is a health threat that also disrupts summer fun

By MICHAEL PHILLIS and BRITTANY PETERSON Associated Press

MANCHESTER, Iowa (AP) — Hannah Ray J Childs propelled her kayak into a rapid on Iowa's Maquoketa River on a recent afternoon and dipped her paddle in the water to swing the front of her boat into the air.

She loves to spend her days performing whitewater kayaking acrobatics that dunk her body in the water and give her the "feeling of flying," she said. The water is where she found community — she even first spotted her husband when he was flipping his kayak in violent water. He in turn taught her how.

But she has also gotten sick from the water and now wears nose and ear plugs to minimize risk. Many

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others question why she spends so much time on the water.

"People's first response when I tell them that I like to kayak and be upside down in the river," Childs said, "is, 'Ew, that's disgusting. Why would you do that?'"

Iowa is a particularly stark example of the Midwest's broader struggle with water pollution. The state is among the top producers of corn, soybeans and hogs, and it boasts a dense network of streams and rivers. Fertilizer and manure on those farms contain nitrates and phosphorus that drain into those waters, making Iowa among the leading contributors to an aquatic dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico. Last summer its biggest city imposed water restrictions as it struggled to remove the harmful nitrates from tap water.

Water pollution has been a stubborn problem here for decades, affecting not only public health but also people's ability to enjoy the water in the summer.

Algal blooms can create dangerous conditions at beaches, and soil runoff can make the water just feel gross. Bacteria, sometimes from human sewage, keeps teenagers out of streams. More than half the sections of rivers, streams and lakes the state tracked in 2024 did not meet state standards for swimming, drinking or aquatic life.

The state has relied on voluntary actions and incentives — not mandates — to reduce nitrate and phosphorus runoff, but it remains far short of its goal. Recently environmental groups sued the Trump administration, alleging that it improperly reversed a Biden-era requirement for Iowa to address nitrate pollution in sections of several rivers.

There has been investment and some improvement. In May, Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds promoted a \$320 million package for water infrastructure and other projects, adding to the nearly \$100 million annually that the state allocates to the problem. Phosphorus has diminished some. Better practices such as cover crops, reduced or no tillage to protect the soil and on-farm installations to reduce runoff have substantially increased in recent years.

Though landlocked, Iowa's identity is shaped by waterways including the Missouri and Mississippi rivers that form some of its borders. There are beautiful lake-side beaches and excellent trout fishing. Waters are among its few natural spaces.

Childs learned to love the Maquoketa River growing up on a nearby corn and hog farm. She remembers paddling to find fishing holes with her brothers and exploring streams with friends.

She now volunteers to test the river for chemicals and championed a whitewater park in Manchester, her northeast Iowa hometown, to help others enjoy the water.

"If we don't get people invested in their local river, their local community, how are we ever going to ask them to take care of it?" she said.

Feelings of loss

Mary Swander, a 75-year-old theater director and former state poet laureate, fondly remembers learning to canoe and swim outdoors while growing up near the water. Summer was for splashing around. Winter, ice skating.

"I had a little group of friends and we played hooky once, and we all got our swimsuits and drove over to Lake MacBride and spent the whole day in the lake, in the water, swimming, and we had a whole picnic," she said.

Swander now avoids the water after bad experiences. One time the water at a state park felt wrong — sticky. Another time a ranger warned her canoeing group not to get their hands — or anything else — in the water.

"I was like, 'Well, what the hell are we doing out here, then?'" she said.

Swander was able to replace swimming with other activities and keep some friendships, but others faded. The loss of places outside the home and office where people can connect may make sustaining social interactions harder, especially for older adults, said Philippa Clarke, a University of Michigan professor who has researched social spaces.

Bacteria plays the biggest role in making streams inaccessible. It comes from cows, deer and other animals, although in some places human sewage is the biggest problem. Experts say heavy rains are a major risk when they wash away manure — something that climate change will intensify — and improving

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sewage treatment and leaky septic systems is vital.

Nitrates and phosphorus from manure and fertilizer on farms are also at the heart of the problem. Millions of acres of farmland use plastic pipes under fields — a system called tile drainage — to quickly direct water into streams. The nutrients feed algae, leading to lake advisories and threatening drinking water.

Struggles at Lake Darling

The challenge of keeping water bodies clean is exemplified by Lake Darling, a roughly 300-acre (120-hectare) human-made lake that offers camping, trails and a beach for swimmers in Iowa's southeast. But last year the lake had the worst overall health of any state beach with 10 weeks of E. Coli advisories and six with algal warnings, According to the Iowa Environmental Council, which tracks such advisories.

Years ago the lake was closed, drained and renovated — its earlier brown water became inviting and clearer. Nearby landowners altered their properties to catch runoff, and critical land was purchased for conservation, according to Bob Shepherd who is part of a proud park volunteer group.

Recently, however, it has struggled, said Claire Hruby, an environmental science professor at Drake University who studied pollution at the lake. Hruby said there are several new hog operations in the lake's watershed, and nutrient runoff from manure triggers algae issues.

When the water is particularly bad, "It's like swimming in green paint," she said.

Concerns about water quality keep people away even on days that are not that bad, according to Lawrence Eyre, a tennis camp director and teacher at a nearby school. As recently as several years ago, kids would finish playing tennis on courts baking in the summer sun and, minutes later, be rewarded with a swim in another nearby lake.

But parents noticed that some kids were getting itchy skin, and algae appeared at the water's edge. Word spread, and many wanted their children not to take the risk. Now they tend not to bother, Eyre said.

"It does put a dent in the enjoyment of the summer," he said.

Iowa is symbolic of Midwest struggles with water pollution

Environmentalists see a state that can't say no to agriculture.

In 2015, Des Moines' water utility sued three counties over the money it had to spend filtering out nitrates. A judge eventually dismissed the complaint, saying any push to permit and reduce runoff from nearby agriculture was an issue for the Iowa legislature.

While Minnesota has mandated vegetation near streams to reduce runoff, Iowa has taken a different approach. It relies on its agriculture and natural resources departments, along with Iowa State University, to develop voluntary strategies that include less fertilizer use, improved crop management and adding wetlands to reduce runoff.

The EPA helps states implement their strategies to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus. The agency said it's important to see agriculture as part of the solution and to understand that improvement takes time.

Many farmers are also under pressure. Supply costs have risen sharply in recent years as have fertilizer prices following the war in Iran, according to Aaron Lehman, president of the Iowa Farmers Union, which represents family farms and pushes for sustainable practices.

"There's a lot less control that farmers have," Lehman said.

Plus it can take years for farmers to see a return on their investment — if they ever do — when they improve their practices. Demand for federal and state help to do so outstrips supply, according to Rachel Curry, an agriculture educator at the University of Illinois Extension. Changing farming practice is like turning a cruise ship — it takes time, but with the right help, they can get there.

Cooperation between the state and farmers is essential, and mandates would destroy that trust, Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig said in an interview with the Iowa Farm Bureau.

Others see hope in local successes.

David Thoreson has sailed above the arctic circle and around continents — a life of adventure made possible because his mother taught him to sail on the Iowa Great Lakes in the state's northwest. He said local efforts to restore wetlands, purchase land for conservation and improve sewage treatment have kept the lakes healthy for tourists and locals.

"They understand the importance of it, and that's what drives our economy and property values and

multi-generational interest in this place that just keeps bringing people back," Thoreson said.

AP exclusive: Iran players describe how the war affects their World Cup preparations

By KHALIL HAMRA Associated Press

ANTALYA, Turkey (AP) — Iran is heading to the World Cup while the country is at war with the primary host nation, a situation that is unique in the tournament's history.

In exclusive interviews with The Associated Press during a team camp in Turkey, two members of Iran's squad described how the conflict is affecting its World Cup preparations.

"Well, to be honest, it's not easy," said Saeid Ezatolahi, a 29-year-old midfielder who also played for Iran in the 2018 and 2022 World Cups.

"That's going to be my third World Cup. So for me and some of the other players, it might be easier to manage these kind of things," he said in English on the sidelines of a training session on Wednesday. "But at the end ... it is going to be difficult for us because at the same time, we are following the news in our country and the political things, of course, can affect the mind of the players and the people."

The Iran team has spent more than two weeks in Turkey, mostly practicing at the coastal resort Antalya, and some went to the capital Ankara to submit visa applications at the U.S. embassy. Media access to their World Cup preparations has been limited, and the players rarely speak to international journalists.

Iran will be based in Mexico during the World Cup

The team is set to travel to Mexico this weekend after receiving visas from the Mexican embassy in Ankara. The team said Thursday that the process of obtaining entry permits had been finalized for all members of the squad. Problems with visa processing meant Iran's World Cup training base was moved from Tucson, Arizona, to Tijuana, on Mexico's border with California.

Iran will play its first two games near Los Angeles, which has a large Iranian community, many of whom oppose the current government.

"So for sure, we are expecting to have a lot fans during our games at the stadium," Ezatolahi said. "And this is going to be a lot pressure for us because the expectation is going be high. I just wish we can make them proud and show them that Iranians, they are prepared for every hard job in the world," he said.

Mohammad Ghorbani, 24, is going to his first World Cup for Iran.

"It's true that we are facing special circumstances right now but we are football players and we have to play, practice, and prepare ourselves for the competitions we have ahead," the Abu Dhabi-based player told the AP in Farsi.

"On the other hand, we know that our people have been going through a lot of difficulties throughout the war, and we are going there for them, to get the best results for their joy and the joy of the people of our country."

The U.S. and Israel launched its war against Iran on Feb. 28, killing its supreme leader and other top officials. Iran responded with strikes targeting Israel, U.S. forces and the Gulf Arab states. It also has maintained a chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf, imperiling global energy supplies.

Despite a nominal ceasefire being in place, Iran and the U.S. have yet to negotiate a permanent end to the war and attacks continue in the region.

Iran is in Group G with New Zealand, Belgium and Egypt

Iran's team is not required to enter the United States until June 14, one day before its first match against New Zealand at the Los Angeles Rams' stadium in Inglewood.

Iran returns to Inglewood to face Belgium on June 21 and completes Group G in Seattle, against Egypt on June 26.

"I'm really proud to be part of my national team," said Ezatolahi, whose career has taken him to play for clubs in Spain, Russia, England, Belgium, Denmark, Qatar and now Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

"We need to clear up our minds and be fresh because our target and our duty is to fight for our people,

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to represent our country and to show how good we are," he said.

Ghorbani agreed, saying the team wants to bring joy to Iranians.

"The best message I can give right now is that the Iranian team is showing what it means to be a team," he said. "We are showing that we are one team under one flag that can bring joy to our whole country, and to show the power of Iranian players and Iranian people to the world."

Today in History: June 5, Robert F. Kennedy assassinated

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, June 5, the 156th day of 2026. There are 209 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On June 5, 1968, U.S. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy was shot and mortally wounded after claiming victory in California's Democratic presidential primary at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles; assassin Sirhan Bishara Sirhan was arrested at the scene.

Also on this date:

In 1794, Congress passed the Neutrality Act, which prohibited Americans from taking part in any military action against a country that was at peace with the United States.

In 1950, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Henderson v. United States*, struck down racially segregated railroad dining cars traveling across state lines.

In 1967, the Six-Day War began as Israel, anticipating a possible attack by its Arab neighbors, launched a series of airfield strikes that destroyed nearly the entire Egyptian air force.

In 1975, Egypt reopened the Suez Canal to international shipping, eight years after it was closed as a result of the 1967 Six-Day War with Israel.

In 1976, 11 people were killed when the Teton Dam in Idaho failed, releasing 80 billion gallons of water.

In 1981, the Centers for Disease Control reported that five men in Los Angeles had come down with a rare kind of pneumonia; they were the first recognized cases of what later became known as AIDS.

In 2002, 14-year-old Elizabeth Smart was abducted from her Salt Lake City home. (Smart was found and rescued by police in a Salt Lake City suburb in March 2003.)

In 2004, Ronald Wilson Reagan, the 40th president of the United States, died in Los Angeles at age 93 after a long struggle with Alzheimer's disease.

In 2016, Novak Djokovic became the first man in nearly a half-century to win four consecutive major championships, finally earning an elusive French Open title with a win over Andy Murray to complete a career Grand Slam.

In 2024, Boeing launched astronauts into space for the first time aboard its Starliner capsule, joining SpaceX as a second taxi service for NASA. Two NASA test pilots blasted off from Cape Canaveral, Florida, bound for the International Space Station.

Today's Birthdays: USA Track & Field Hall of Famer John Carlos is 81. Musician-artist Laurie Anderson is 79. Author Ken Follett is 77. Finance author Suze Orman is 75. Musician Kenny G is 70. Actor-comedian Jeff Garlin is 64. Author Rick Riordan is 62. Actor Ron Livingston is 59. Singer Brian McKnight is 57. Actor Mark Wahlberg is 55. Actor Liza Weil is 49. Actor-comedian Nick Kroll is 48. Rock musician Pete Wentz (Fall Out Boy) is 47. Singer-actor Troye Sivan is 31. NFL quarterback Sam Darnold is 29. Dancer Rylee Arnold is 21.