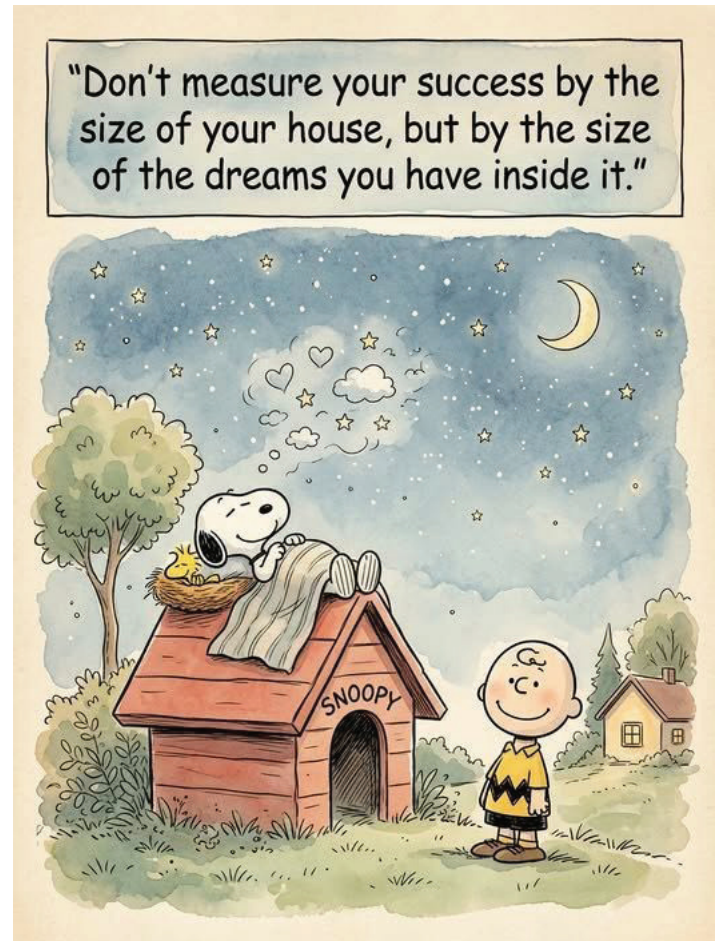


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Wednesday, June 10

Senior Menu: French dip sandwich, vegetable pasta salad, fruit.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Groton VB GMS Camp, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., Arena/Gym

JVT Practice, 6-9 p.m., Arena

U8 Baseball at Britton, DH, 5:30 p.m. (Red and Blue)

U12 Softball hosts Britton, DH, 6:30 p.m., (G&W)

U10 Softball hosts Britton, DH, 5:30 p.m., (G&W)

U8 Softball hosts Britton, 5:30 p.m., (G&W)

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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

Thursday, June 11

Senior Menu: Oven fried chicken, sweet potatoes, green beans, glorified rice, whole wheat bread.

Groton VB GMS Camp, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., Arena/Gym

2026 Tiger Skills Workouts, 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Arena

JVT Practice, 6-7:30 p.m., Arena

Story Time at Wage Memorial Library, 10 a.m.

Transit Fundraiser, 5 p.m., Groton Community Center

Groton Lions Club Meeting, 6 p.m., 104 N Main

U12 Baseball at Warner, 7:15 p.m., City Field

U10 Baseball at Warner, 5:30 p.m. (B&W), City Field

U8 Baseball at Warner, 5:30 p.m. (Blue), School Field

U18 Softball at Redfield, 5:30 p.m.

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1440

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

Historic Drone Rescue

The US military completed its first known drone rescue by sea after Iran allegedly downed a US Apache helicopter near the Strait of Hormuz early yesterday morning. The two pilots on board are reportedly uninjured.

The Navy deployed a 24-foot autonomous maritime drone, called a Corsair, to locate the pilots. Capable of carrying up to 1,000 pounds over 1,000 nautical miles at speeds exceeding roughly 40 miles per hour, the uncrewed vessel transported the pilots to safer waters, where they were hoisted into a crewed helicopter. The US launched strikes on Iran yesterday in retaliation for the alleged attack, which came one day after President Donald Trump urged Iran and Israel to halt their renewed exchanges of strikes.

The US has been using low-flying Boeing AH-64 Apaches to enforce a blockade on oil shipments, part of a broader effort to pressure Iran into a deal to end the war.

The Tower Rises

Pope Leo XIV will celebrate Mass today at Barcelona's Sagrada Família and bless its newly completed Tower of Jesus Christ, marking 100 years since architect Antoni Gaudí's death.

Construction on the basilica began 144 years ago, with the first cornerstone laid in 1882 during the pontificate of Pope Leo XIII, the namesake of the current pope—Leo XIV is the 11th pontiff to serve during the project's construction. Gaudí led work on the church for 43 years until his death in 1926, envisioning a structure with light and color to create spiritual drama and organic forms with almost no straight lines, reflecting his belief that curved lines belong to God. His unfinished design—largely destroyed during the Spanish Civil War—has been carried forward by at least nine architects.

Now the world's tallest church at 566 feet, the basilica attracts roughly 2 million visitors annually but remains controversial over costs, tourism pressures, and a stairway that could displace 1,000 families and businesses.

Age-Reversing Injection

In a world first, a human has received a cellular reprogramming injection, biotechnology company Life Biosciences announced yesterday. The experimental treatment will be tested in close to 20 patients with glaucoma or nonarteritic anterior ischemic optic neuropathy.

The gene therapy involves returning cells to their younger states so they can become resilient to disease, but not all the way to their newborn stem cell state. The company has successfully reversed tissue aging in monkeys and mice using this method, including healing age-related blindness. However, researchers are concerned about the possibility of side effects in humans, as two of the four proteins involved in the process have the potential to divide uncontrollably (in animal trials, some mice developed tumors).

For the first-ever human trial, researchers are injecting the therapy into a glaucoma patient's eye and will monitor the intervention for six months. Ultimately, researchers hope to expand interventions into liver and muscle cells, with Jeff Bezos and Sam Altman backing some of Life Biosciences' competitors.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Serena Williams, 44, wins first competitive tennis match in nearly four years with her doubles partner Victoria Mboko, 19.

Somali soccer referee denied entry into the US over "vetting concerns," cut from World Cup.

FIFA reportedly revokes Iran fans' tickets for three US matches; Iran blames the US.

Ex-European soccer president sues FIFA over 2015 corruption allegations.

Rob Reiner's son seeks money from family trust—reportedly worth over \$1.5M—to help fund his defense after being charged with killing his parents last year.

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Science & Technology

NASA introduces Artemis III crew members, who will test novel technologies in low Earth orbit next year; the mission is critical to Artemis IV, a crewed mission to the moon slated for 2028.

Anthropic releases Mythos-class AI model to the public with restrictions on queries about topics such as bioweapons and software bugs; model was previously deemed too dangerous for public use.

Asexual reproduction limited evolution for millions of years, according to fossil analysis; competition and stress 635 million to 539 million years ago spurred sex and increased diversity.

Humanlike sex can be traced back to fish.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.3%, Dow +0.2%, Nasdaq -1.0%) ahead of today's latest inflation reading.

US existing home sales rose 3.2% year over year in May, the strongest pace since December; median home price of \$429,300 is up 1.3% from a year ago, the highest price for any May on record. Rich buyers are fueling the rise.

Rivian begins customer deliveries of lower-priced second-generation R2 electric vehicle, following strategy used by Tesla as it seeks to transition into a mass-market automaker.

Politics & World Affairs

Graham Platner (D) advances to face off against Sen. Susan Collins (R) in Maine's Senate race, amid a series of controversies.

Interactive map shows the path to control of the Senate in November.

US House passes \$70B bill to fund immigration enforcement for three years, sending measure to President Donald Trump's desk.

Anti-immigration protests erupt in Northern Ireland amid unrest over knife attack this week.

Social Security is projected to run out of funds by 2032, barring action from Congress, trustees say; if that happens, the program will be able to pay only 78% of retirement benefits.

★ 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!



Groton City Council tables senior meal request, airport discussion; additional four-way stop approved

By Elizabeth Varin

The Groton City Council tackled a variety of community issues during its meeting Monday evening, including senior meal services, city mapping updates and traffic safety.

Council members tabled a request from Area IV Senior Nutrition to use the Community Center kitchen and a portion of the facility for senior meal services.

The executive director of Area IV Senior Nutrition toured the Community Center and said it would work well to prepare senior meals, according to information provided to the City Council. They would utilize the kitchen and a portion of the Southwest room, with the room on the east side of the building remaining fully available.

However, council members and senior citizens had questions about the proposal, including what specific space would be needed, the timing it would be utilized and whether a commercial kitchen would be necessary to provide food for the senior nutrition program. (It should be noted that the senior meals used to be prepared at the community center by Rose Locke)

The council tabled discussion pending as they seek more information about the proposed plan.

The council approved an agreement to update the city's maps, though council members indicated additional discussion will be needed to determine how the city will handle mapping services and future updates moving forward.

The council approved an agreement with IMEG Consulting Corp. for an estimated \$3,500 to update the city's base property map, which was last updated in 2018. Paper copies will be provided to the city.

Discussion about digital files and future map updates consumed an hour of the meeting as council members and staff reviewed the pros and cons of city staff mapping data points. That would eliminate having to pay to get the maps updated each year or as changes are made to plats in town.

However, that discussion was continued to a future meeting as equipment needed for mapping isn't in the budget discussion until next year.

Discussion regarding airport leases and related airport matters was also tabled until the first meeting in July.

In other business, the council approved installing an eastbound stop sign on the west side of town, converting an existing three-way stop into a four-way stop.

Currently, the intersection of West Third Avenue and North State Street only has three stop signs, one on the west, one on the north and one on the south side of the intersection.

The council approved adding a stop sign to the east side of the intersection, citing safety and the large number of kids in the area near the baseball and softball fields.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Candidate condemns 'whoever' approved a runoff law, and it turns out to be a legend from his city

Republican governor hopeful Toby Doeden says 'I don't know who did it,' and person should be 'discredited'; spokesman later says comments were 'in jest'

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

Republican candidate for governor Toby Doeden has some criticism for whichever South Dakota legislator got a law passed requiring runoff elections.

"We should just cancel the 35% rule and just award me the winner, like that's it," Doeden said while laughing in a video published Monday on YouTube. He added, without a laugh, "such a silly rule anyway. They put this in back in the '80s. I don't know who did it, but whoever did it should be discredited. Like, it's ridiculous. You ask the people to vote. Whoever gets the most votes wins."

Doeden doesn't have to look far to learn who's responsible. The law is credited to a legendary former lawmaker from Doeden's own city and party: the late Joe Barnett, an Aberdeen Republican. Northern State University's Joseph H. Barnett Center, which is Aberdeen's major indoor athletic venue, was named in Barnett's honor.

The former state House speaker and majority leader served 19 years in the House before he died in 1985, the same year his runoff law passed. The law requires a runoff if nobody reaches 35% in a primary with three or more candidates for governor, U.S. Senate or U.S. House. Previously, if nobody reached 35% in such a race, the party's nomination was decided by delegates at state party conventions.

Doeden, a businessman running his first campaign for elected office, finished first in a four-way Republican primary on June 2. But with 31% support instead of the required 35% to win, he was thrown into a July 28 runoff with Gov. Larry Rhoden, who finished second with 25%.

A Doeden campaign spokesperson sent a written statement Tuesday in response to South Dakota Searchlight questions about Doeden's comments on the runoff law and its origins.

"Mr. Doeden's comments were obviously made in jest and did not insinuate anything specifically regarding Former Speaker Barnett or his legislative record," the statement said. "Joseph Barnett was a great and highly respected leader that Aberdeen was lucky to have."

Former colleagues of Barnett shared bipartisan praise for the deceased lawmaker in interviews with Searchlight.

Democratic former state lawmaker Lars Herseth represented Brown County alongside Barnett.

"I don't know of anyone, in my time, who did more to serve Brown County than Joe Barnett," Herseth said.

Don Frankenfeld, of Rapid City, served as a Republican in the state Senate while Barnett was in the House. He said Barnett "was a genius, both intellectually and politically."

"He had tremendous weight in determining legislative decisions," Frankenfeld said. "He was also a very thoughtful person."

Kent Frerichs is a Democratic former lawmaker from Wilmot who served with Barnett.

"He went out of his way to try to make sure that everybody would have equal opportunity to be heard," Frerichs said.

The context for Barnett's 1985 legislation was the 1986 governor race. Former House Speaker George S. Mickelson was preparing to run in a crowded Republican primary that also included former U.S. Rep.

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Clint Roberts.

Frankenfeld said Mickelson was concerned that if no candidate reached 35%, the decision would move to a convention that was "unpredictable, not representative of the party as a whole" and more likely to be driven by "activists."

"There is a pretty easy chance of it being manipulated," Frankenfeld said.

Barnett did not live to see the law in action. He died of a heart attack on May 1, 1985. In 1986, Mickelson won the Republican nomination for governor with 35.3% of the votes and went on to beat Herseth in the general election. This year's July 28 runoff will be the first to be carried out under Barnett's law.

Frerichs said his concern about Doeden is encapsulated by the candidate's criticism of the runoff law.

"He's confident, but doesn't seem to know a lot of these things," Frerichs said of Doeden.

Frankenfeld said that's attractive to some voters.

"Part of his appeal, and part of his baggage, is his lack of experience in government," Frankenfeld said.

"He almost wears political ignorance as a badge of honor."

The statement from Doeden's spokesperson said Doeden "knew that the previous nomination process for statewide office was totally bogus and that it should always be the people who choose their leaders, not a powerful few."

"Mr. Doeden won the June 2nd Primary in tremendous fashion and is beyond grateful for his widespread support," the statement said. "He looks forward to obtaining the final nomination after the July 28th run off."

Rhoden campaign spokesman Ian Fury said in a written statement to Searchlight, "Winners win, and losers complain about the rules."

Rhoden's running mate, Republican Lt. Gov. Tony Venhuizen, maintains a website called SoDak Governors devoted to South Dakota political history. On that website, Venhuizen wrote in 2017 of Barnett, "it was said he was held in such high regard that legislators of both parties would pass legislation solely on his word."

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

State will pay extra for county jail space amid crackdown on alleged parole violations

Short-term contract in Sioux Falls part of broader conversation, county commissioners say

BY: JOHN HULT

SIOUX FALLS — The South Dakota Department of Corrections will pay the state's most populous county a premium to house people accused of violating parole, under the terms of a short-term contract approved Tuesday.

The price bump for room and board at the Minnehaha County Jail is one ripple effect from a state-level crackdown on parolee behavior. It's pushed more parolees into local jails and spurred the sheriff to open and staff the facility's dormant fourth floor to make room.

In late April, Gov. Larry Rhoden signaled the state's intention to jail parolees more quickly for things like failed drug tests and new drunken driving charges, and to hire five more parole agents. Rhoden's announcement came days after a parolee allegedly shot and injured a Sioux Falls police officer. A year earlier, another man on parole is alleged to have fired on and injured an officer in the city.

The state pays counties to hold parolees while parole officers consider sending them back to prison for violations, which could include behavioral or employment issues, failure to maintain contact with their parole officer or a conviction on a new criminal charge.

The state parole board must sign off after a parole officer decides that a parolee needs to go back to prison, and there can be a waiting period before the person is then transferred to prison custody.

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The state's prison population and the number of parolees held at both the Minnehaha and Pennington county jails have swollen since Rhoden's announcement.

The number of parolees held in county jails for parole violations alone, with no new charges, grew by dozens in both Pennington and Minnehaha counties within days of the policy shift. The state's prison population, meanwhile, grew by nearly 200 in May, corrections spokesman Michael Winder said. The number of people on parole dropped by 181 in that same time frame, as parolees returned to active inmate status.

There are currently 65 parolees across the state being held at county jails on parole holds, Winder said Tuesday.

Commission approves contract

The state's room-and-board rate for local jails is \$95 per day, per inmate, less than the price paid by neighboring counties or federal agencies. That figure is set by law.

Under the terms of the new contract, the state will pay Minnehaha County \$125 per day, per inmate for the first 20 parolees held on suspected violations, \$95 for parolees 20 to 60, and \$200 for every inmate past 60.

The high figure affixed to the third tier is a deterrent, Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Jeff Gromer told county commissioners.

"Quite honestly, our jail's already pretty full, and we don't want to hold more than 60 of them," said Gromer.

The commission approved the contract on a unanimous vote. It will stay in effect through July 24. At that point, Gromer said, the state expects to have opened its new women's prison in Rapid City, and "they're confident they won't need as many beds out in the community."

Winder, the corrections spokesman, said earlier this week that the opening date has not been set, but is expected to come this summer.

Back at the commission meeting, Gromer said he expects the issue of per-day payments to county jails to become a topic of conversation for the next state legislative session.

Factoring in food and staffing, it costs more than \$95 per day to house an inmate, Gromer said.

Minnehaha County Commissioner Gerald Beninga said he hopes the "unfunded mandate" issue can be resolved. It's been a problem for all 16 years he's served as a commissioner, he said.

Commissioner Joe Kippley, however, said he'd take "the glass half full perspective" on the contract.

"The state obviously was able to come to a short-term solution here with us," Kippley said. "That's kind of a baby step."

Price of accountability

Pennington County Sheriff Brian Mueller and his counterpart in Minnehaha County, Mike Milstead, have spent the better part of two years pushing the state to take a harder line on parolees. Most of the people on parole in both jails are there awaiting trial on new criminal charges, rather than for suspected parole violations.

Former prison inmates on state supervision have been getting "too many bites at the apple," Mueller said, and have been "committing new crimes in our communities."

But Rhoden's announcement and the Department of Corrections policy shift "immediately backed up our county jails across the state," Mueller said.

Rhoden's announcement also promised speedier processing of parole violations — something that members of the state Board of Pardons and Paroles said last month could increase their workload — but speedier processing alone doesn't always ease Mueller's immediate burden.

While parole violations are processed, the person on parole remains in county jail. The state also needs to have space in its facilities, which also lengthens the waiting period in jails like Mueller's.

Winder said he did not have an "updated number" on state prison facility waiting lists, saying "the number of pending parole intakes fluctuates daily."

Mueller brought up his space concerns with state officials last month. The state responded by moving to place more "parole hold" inmates in Sioux Falls through the now-approved Minnehaha County contract, and to lean more heavily on Hughes County, where the state has a contract for the use of up to 72 jail beds.

Mueller said he looks forward to a legislative conversation on cost sharing, but also hopes the conversation broadens beyond per-day compensation. Ideally, Mueller said, the state would use its own facilities to house allegedly noncompliant parolees awaiting their fate.

"We're going to create more public safety accountability," which Mueller called "a good thing," but "jail bed space and prison bed space has to continue to be part of that conversation."

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.

Three new cases of screwworm confirmed in Texas; A&M leader tasked as federal adviser

BY: JAYME LOZANO CARVER AND STEPHEN SIMPSON

This article first appeared on The Texas Tribune.[cropped-cropped-texas-tribune-favicon.png](#)
KERRVILLE, Texas — Three more cases of New World screwworm were confirmed in Texas by the U.S. Department of Agriculture on Monday, bringing the total number of cases to five.

One new case is in Andrews County, nearly 400 miles north of Zavala County, where the first case was reported last week.

The new cases are in different animals. In La Salle County, about 80 miles southeast of Zavala, a calf has been infected. In Andrews County, a veterinarian submitted the samples from an infested dog. According to the Andrews Veterinary Clinic, the case was seen on Saturday, and neither the dog nor its owner is local to Andrews. The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, a USDA service, said the dog is from a household in Lea County, New Mexico, making it the state's first screwworm case.

The APHIS said the dog's travel history and exposure history is unknown. The USDA is inspecting additional animals in the household and increases outreach.

The third case is in a goat out of Gillespie County, about 170 miles north of Zavala County.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, along with Gov. Greg Abbott, held a joint press conference at the Knipling-Bushland U.S. Livestock Insects Research Laboratory in Kerrville where they revealed their "War on Screwworm" campaign with a slogan declaring "Inspect, Report, and Protect," warning Texans the situation is expected to get worse.

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins said the U.S. Department of War is making the New World screwworm infestation one of its top priorities by putting a military commander in charge of helping accelerate resource gathering, construction and research.

"South Texas ranchers are the front line of this battle against screwworm," Rollins said, emphasizing the importance of reporting any screwworm incidents.

Abbott also said the state's emergency command center will be open 24/7 with specialists from Texas A&M and state personnel to ensure all incidents are reported and tracked.

"We have beaten this before and we will do it again," Abbott told a room filled with reporters and ranchers.

Rollins said there is currently no timeline in defeating New World screwworm, but with the partnerships between federal, state and local officials, it shouldn't take multiple years like it has in the past.

"Some would say it's impossible, but this is Texas," Rollins said.

The screwworm is a parasitic fly that infests living mammals, especially cattle. State and federal officials are racing to contain the insect that has been on a northern migration track since at least 2023. Agriculture leaders fear if the fly is not contained, it could cost the state's cattle economy at least \$1.8 billion.

Dudley Hoskins, Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs with the USDA, urged animal owners to stay vigilant, check their animals closely and report anything that looks suspicious.

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"We need the partnership of animal owners across the region," Hoskins said in a statement. "Together, we can protect our livestock, our communities, and the health of animals nationwide."

Rollins called out recent comments made by Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller alleging producers and ranchers won't report screwworm findings out of fear of being quarantined harmful to their efforts.

"Unserious comments from an unserious AG commissioner who only has a few months left," she said.

The USDA is also exploring alternative options to combat screwworm including putting ivermectin in animal feed.

Rollins announced Monday that President Donald Trump appointed John Bellinger, a member of the Texas A&M University Board of Regents, to be the new senior adviser for New World screwworm preparedness. Bellinger is expected to help explore all available technologies to combat the screwworm. Bellinger was appointed to the A&M board in 2023, where he serves as chair of the committee on research.

Jayme Lozano Carver is the Texas Tribune's first Lubbock-based reporter, covering the South Plains and Panhandle through a partnership with Report for America. Jayme previously worked for Texas Tech Public Media, Lubbock's NPR station, where she spearheaded "Rural Healthcare: The Other Texas Drought," a series for PBS' "Frontline" on rural hospital closures in Texas. She also covered a broad range of topics for the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal, including climate change, agriculture, entertainment and health care. Born in Levelland, Jayme is a native of the South Plains area and studied at South Plains College and Texas Tech University. She loves to talk about her cats, horror movies and pro wrestling.

Stephen Simpson is the Texas Tribune's mental health reporter, based in Austin, where he covers behavioral health in schools, treatment in the judicial system, substance abuse and the state mental health system, among other topics. He previously worked in his home state of Arkansas as a politics reporter, where he covered the state's Supreme Court, House of Representatives and correctional system for the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette. Stephen's earliest career experiences include reporting and copy editing at The Jonesboro Sun and The Pine Bluff Commercial. He earned a degree in online and print journalism with a minor in filmmaking from the University of Central Arkansas.

Homeland Security retreats on plan to get data on mail-in voters

BY: JONATHAN SHORMAN

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security is walking back, for now, a plan to sweep up data on millions of Americans who vote by mail under President Donald Trump's executive order restricting mail ballots.

In a federal court filing Monday night, the Justice Department significantly hedged the data-sharing plan, pulling back from a position the Trump administration advanced last week. DOJ lawyers now cast the idea as in the early stages and dependent on approval of a new U.S. Postal Service rule for mail ballots, citing a memo that Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin signed earlier Monday.

"The Secretary authorized DHS to continue preliminary conversations with USPS concerning potential data-sharing arrangements, and should USPS finalize its rulemaking process, consider working to advance potential coordination to the extent feasible and consistent with applicable law and privacy protections," the notice says.

Mullin's memo, the Monday court filing says, "more accurately reflects the current policy of the Administration with respect to the implementation" of the executive order, reversing a Friday notice that said Homeland Security "contemplates" working to "integrate" the Postal Service's voter data in an effort to monitor the flow of mail ballots and identify possible fraud. Friday's filing said Homeland Security would use the information to generate investigative leads.

Trump's March 31 executive order requires states to submit lists of potential mail voters to the Postal Service if they want ballots delivered and directs Homeland Security to compile lists of voting-age citizens in each state. The order faces several lawsuits ahead of the November midterm elections but so far hasn't been paused by a federal judge.

Trump signed the executive order amid an ongoing campaign to influence how states administer federal elections. Under the U.S. Constitution, states run elections. While Congress can pass regulations, the president has no unilateral authority over voting.

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Trump has long attacked mail voting and has also promoted the idea that noncitizen voting is rampant. In reality, it's extremely rare.

Democrats and voting rights groups say the order represents an unconstitutional attempt by Trump to assert authority over elections. They also argue the order endangers the independence of the Postal Service, which is overseen by a Board of Governors, not the president.

Running out the clock

Michael McNulty, the policy director at Issue One, a group focused on protecting American democracy, said the Justice Department's second notice almost appears to anticipate that a court will block the Postal Service's new rule, which would require states sending ballots through the mail to provide lists of voters.

"It looks like they definitely walked back the USPS data-sharing language," McNulty said in an interview. Downplaying the current effect of the rule could be part of a legal strategy to shield the administration from court challenges.

Despite a series of legal challenges, the Trump administration has urged judges not to block the March order because federal officials haven't taken major action to implement it — making the lawsuits premature. That argument will become more difficult to maintain as the Postal Service moves forward on the new rule for mail ballots and Homeland Security begins to take action.

David Becker, a former Justice Department Voting Rights Section attorney who leads the nonpartisan Center for Election Innovation & Research, said that since the beginning of the second Trump administration, the Justice Department has sought to "run the clock out" in legal challenges until it's too late for courts to act or judicial action would cause chaos.

While Trump and his aides speak publicly about the alleged threat of noncitizen voting, in court the Justice Department seeks to minimize the extent of the actions the federal government has taken to carry out the executive order, Becker indicated.

"So I think this is a case of the government trying to have it both ways," Becker said. "The government is trying to satisfy an audience of one, the president, while at the same time trying to play this rope-a-dope game with the court so that the court might not rule against them, they might say that a case isn't ripe yet."

In response to questions from States Newsroom, Homeland Security said in an unattributed statement that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, an agency within DHS, is "lawfully implementing" the executive order.

"President Trump has been clear: Nothing is more fundamental than the integrity and security of our elections," the statement said.

Quest for voter rolls

The Trump administration has spent the past year attempting to obtain unredacted state voter rolls to feed into a powerful Homeland Security computer program that can identify potential noncitizen voters. The Justice Department has filed more than 30 lawsuits seeking to force states and the District of Columbia to turn over the information, but so far none have been successful.

Eight states — including heavily Democratic California, Oregon and Washington — have all-mail elections, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. For those states, complying with the executive order would effectively mean turning over the names of all or nearly all their voters to the Postal Service.

It's unclear if those lists would include voters' sensitive personal data, like driver's license and partial Social Security numbers, that the Justice Department has sued to obtain.

In its Monday notice, the Justice Department appeared to suggest Homeland Security had been planning to go beyond the scope of the executive order.

The executive order does not explicitly direct the Postal Service to share voter and mail ballot data with Homeland Security. Instead, it tells the Postal Service to coordinate with the Justice Department on investigations into suspected election crimes.

Data-sharing arrangements between DHS and the Postal Service "are not directed" by the order, the

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Monday notice says. Any future sharing would be contingent upon both the Postal Service's mail ballot rule and "any policy and legal determinations as to the desirability and feasibility of any such data-sharing" — in other words, a decision the Trump administration will make later.

Computer system participation

The Justice Department had also reported Friday that Homeland Security planned to launch a "State Voter Roll Verification" powered by the Systematic Alien Verification for Eligibility, or SAVE, system — the computer program that can flag possible noncitizen voters.

The Friday notice said states would be able to upload their voter rolls to SAVE, but Homeland Security already allows states to voluntarily run this information through the program. Some Republican-led states have previously used SAVE to scan their voter rolls and it's unclear how the new verification process would have been different.

On Monday, the Justice Department reversed itself on that issue as well. DOJ lawyers wrote in the second notice that the executive order "does not direct that approach, and the new memorandum no longer includes that discussion."

The Justice Department's Monday notice makes clear that Homeland Security still plans to create lists of citizens in each state, as mandated under the executive order. The agency plans to have a way for states to obtain citizenship information from federal agencies by June 30, the notice says.

The executive order also requires Homeland Security to allow individuals to access their citizenship-related records and update or correct them ahead of elections. The Justice Department said Monday that Mullin approved a phased plan for a portal accessible to the public.

Monday's notice, citing Mullin's memo, says only that those capabilities will be developed and launched later this year after the completion of legal, privacy and technical groundwork. That leaves open the possibility that states will have access to federal citizenship information weeks or months before individual voters will be able to view the same data and call attention to any errors.

Questions linger

What prompted Mullin to sign the memo on Monday is unclear. Homeland Security didn't respond to a request for a copy of the memo.

Early on Monday evening, lawyers for the League of Women Voters filed a court document in a separate lawsuit challenging Homeland Security's use of the SAVE system that alerted the judge to the Justice Department's Friday notice.

"It remains unclear—from the Implementation Notice or otherwise—what specific legal authority either the USPS or DHS have to share, consolidate, and use data in this way," the lawyers wrote, referring to the initial data sharing plan between Homeland Security and Postal Service.

The Justice Department responded on Tuesday, saying in a court filing that information was "no longer accurate, as of yesterday evening."

Also unclear is what role, if any, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick has played in Mullin's decision to change course. Trump's executive order charges Lutnick with coordinating implementation efforts.

The Commerce Department didn't respond to States Newsroom's questions.

Sixteen Democratic senators last week demanded Lutnick halt implementation of the executive order. The letter, led by Sens. Maria Cantwell of Washington, Ben Ray Lujan of New Mexico and Alex Padilla of California, urged Lutnick to preserve records related to the development of the order ahead of congressional oversight.

"Vote-by-mail is safe, secure, and convenient, and it has been used successfully across the political spectrum over many election cycles," the senators wrote.

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

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in Congress clear final hurdle for \$70B boost in immigration enforcement

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republicans on Tuesday approved three years of funding for immigration enforcement without any new guardrails on how federal agents operate.

The 214-212 vote sent the nearly \$70 billion package to President Donald Trump, who is expected to sign the measure. Republican senators approved the bill earlier this month, with Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski the only member of the GOP in opposition.

California independent Rep. Kevin Kiley, who conferences with Republicans, voted no, along with Democrats.

Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La., argued Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Border Patrol need the additional funding so they can deport anyone in the country without proper authorization.

"They want you to think that it's just everybody coming in to seek the American dream," he said. "We have a legal method for that to happen."

Scalise then read a list of Americans killed by people who were present in the United States without legal status.

"It's not some hypothetical, it's happened over and over and over again," he said.

Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., said he opposed Republicans' plans to "give a blank check to ICE without any guardrails, any oversight, or any accountability."

"Donald Trump promised America that he would target violent felons who are here illegally, but instead taxpayer dollars are being used by ICE and his violent mass deportation machine to target and brutalize American citizens, in some cases killing them," he said.

Jeffries contended that "immigration enforcement should be fair, just and humane" and that ICE "needs to conduct itself" according to the same standards other law enforcement agencies follow.

Funds will stretch over 3 years

The legislation will provide \$38.53 billion for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, \$26.02 billion for Customs and Border Protection and \$5 billion for the secretary of Homeland Security.

The funding, which lasts through September 2029, is in addition to the \$170 billion Republicans provided in their "big, beautiful" law. About \$100 billion of that remains unspent, according to Democrats.

Republicans opted not to place any new constraints on how federal immigration agents operate or provide additional funding for oversight, despite officers killing two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis in January.

Those shootings led Democrats in Congress to demand new restrictions on officers, which led to weeks of bipartisan negotiations amid a 76-day shutdown for the Department of Homeland Security.

That stalemate ended in April after lawmakers approved DHS' annual appropriations bill without funding for ICE or the Border Patrol. Republicans had to remove those provisions in order to move the legislation through procedural votes in the Senate that require the support of at least 60 lawmakers.

A new path

Republican leaders then turned to the complex budget reconciliation process to provide three years of funding for ICE, CBP and the secretary of DHS without requiring any changes to how they operate.

The special legislative pathway allows bills to move through the Senate with simple majority votes as long as they adhere to certain rules.

Senate Republicans originally included, but later removed, \$1.46 billion for several Department of Justice Programs and \$1 billion for the Secret Service to make security upgrades linked to the new White House ballroom, also called the East Wing Modernization Project.

The funding for ICE, CBP and the DHS secretary clears the way for the Trump administration to continue its immigration crackdown until just a few months before his second term is scheduled to end.

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.

Trump launches new strikes on Iran after US Army helicopter downed

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — U.S. forces launched renewed strikes on Iran late Tuesday, in response to the downing of a U.S. Apache helicopter a day earlier, according to U.S. Central Command.

President Donald Trump ordered the operation, which began at 5 p.m. Eastern and was “a proportional response to unjustified Iranian aggression,” a social media account for U.S. Central Command posted Tuesday evening.

Trump said earlier Tuesday the United States would retaliate after Iran shot down the helicopter late Monday over the Strait of Hormuz, and that the two American pilots aboard were unharmed.

Trump announced the cause of the helicopter’s downing in a Truth Social post just before 1 p.m. Eastern. As of early Tuesday morning, the incident had still been under investigation, according to U.S. Central Command.

“I have just been informed by our Great Military that last night the Iranians shot down one of our highly sophisticated Apache Helicopters while patrolling over the Strait of Hormuz. There were two pilots involved, both are safe and uninjured. Nevertheless, the United States must, of necessity, respond to this attack. Thank you for your attention to this matter! President DONALD J. TRUMP,” the president wrote.

Despite recent exchanges of fire, the administration maintains the war, named by the Pentagon as Operation Epic Fury, is over and that an April 7 ceasefire agreement between the U.S. and Iran remains in place.

On Sunday’s “Meet the Press” with moderator Kristen Welker of NBC News, Trump said, before abruptly walking out of the interview a short time later, “I call it a military exercise because people would rather have it called that. It’s not a big war for us.”

The two military pilots were rescued at 7:33 p.m. Eastern time after the AH-64 Apache went down off the coast of Oman while the military was patrolling regional waters, according to U.S. Central Command.

“The Soldiers were safely rescued within approximately two hours and are in stable condition. The cause of the incident is under investigation.

“Rescue efforts were led by U.S. Naval Forces Central Command and the 82nd Airborne Division, with support from U.S. Air Force and Navy units including U.S. 5th Fleet’s Task Force 59,” according to the command’s statement posted on social media just after 6 a.m. Eastern.

The U.S. continues to block traffic to and from Iranian ports, and as recently as Monday fired on an empty oil tanker in the Gulf of Oman the military said was breaking the blockade just southeast of the Strait of Hormuz.

According to U.S. Central Command, American forces have disabled seven non-compliant vessels, redirected 134 ships that complied, and allowed 42 vessels supporting humanitarian aid to pass since initiating the blockade on April 13.

Iran has all but choked off international shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, where one-fifth of the world’s petroleum supply traveled before the war.

War status

Thirteen U.S. service members have died in the conflict, which began on Feb. 28.

The Pentagon’s tally for service members injured stands at 411 as of Tuesday. Despite the administration’s stance that the war is over, the Defense Casualty Analysis System lists one U.S. sailor as “wounded in action” in June as part of Operation Epic Fury.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio testified last week before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs that the U.S. war in Iran was “over.”

In response to a question from Rep. Sara Jacobs, D-Calif., about who won the war, Rubio answered, “Epic Fury is over, which is what you would consider the war.”

The U.S. launched the conflict in conjunction with Israel, and the Israeli government’s continued bombardment of southern Lebanon has stymied further peace talks — though Trump has repeatedly claimed

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Iran wants to make a deal.

Iran and Israel exchanged rocket fire Sunday into Monday for the first time since April.

Despite a U.S.-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon in mid-April, Israel's bombing campaign has continued in southern Lebanon, as Iran-backed Hezbollah fighters refuse to recognize the agreement.

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

Projected Social Security benefits cliff creeps up to 2032

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — Congress must act to shore up Social Security during the next six years to avoid an automatic drop-off in benefits in 2032, according to a report released Tuesday.

The annual update on the Old Age and Survivors Insurance trust fund shows that it will "become depleted" in the fourth quarter of that year, a few months earlier than projected in last year's report.

That would lead to recipients receiving 78% of their benefits — the projected yearly income to the trust fund — unless Congress acts before then. By 2100, benefits would be only 62%, according to the report.

That decrease would have a significant impact on the tens of millions of Americans who rely on the program to stay out of poverty, especially retirees.

Social Security Commissioner Frank J. Bisignano wrote in a statement that in order to "protect the promise of Social Security, it is important for lawmakers and the Social Security Administration to work together to ensure the trust funds continue to provide financial stability now and for future generations."

Bisignano is scheduled to testify before the House Ways and Means Committee on Wednesday, where he will likely face several questions about the new report and whether the administration has policy suggestions for Congress.

More than 68 million Americans received Social Security payments in April, according to data from the administration. More than 56 million of the beneficiaries were 65 or older.

Michael A. Peterson, CEO of the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, wrote in a statement November's mid-term elections will have an impact on who is in the Senate, where lawmakers have six-year terms, in the lead-up to the deadline.

"It's important to recognize that the Senators we elect this year will be in office when Social Security becomes unable to pay out full benefits, so this must be a central campaign issue," he wrote.

Peterson added that "there are many well-known solutions available" and that it's "time for responsible, bipartisan leadership to strengthen Social Security and Medicare, ensuring the stability of these programs for generations of Americans to come."

Maya MacGuineas, president of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, wrote in a statement that "Washington is sleepwalking into a retirement crisis, allowing our nation's most important trust funds to go insolvent at the expense of over 70 million beneficiaries who count on these programs."

MacGuineas added that there is "no shortage of options out there to avoid this."

"It's time for our leaders to start telling the truth on Social Security and Medicare, and working on real plans to save these programs," she wrote. "Time is running out."

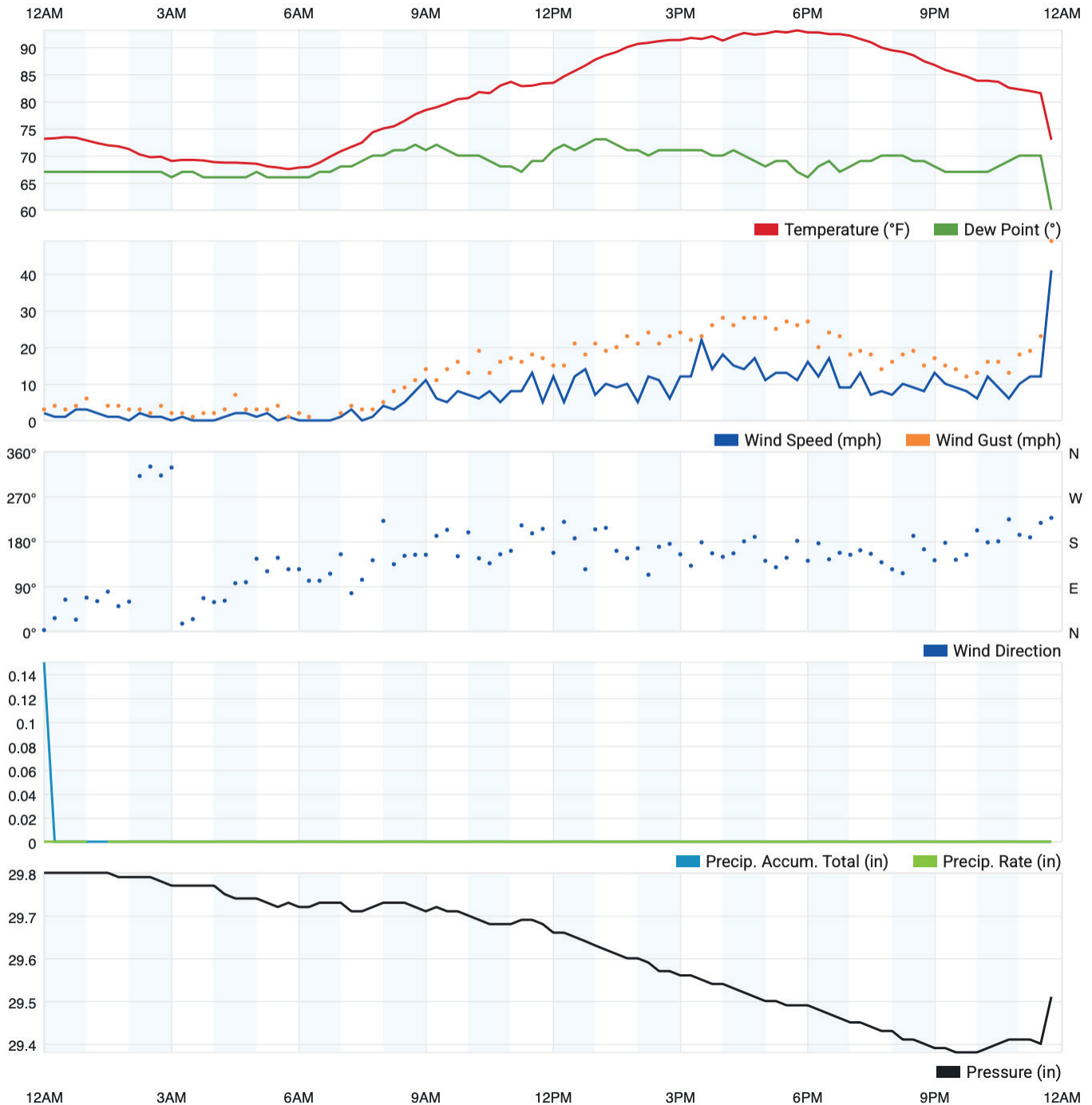
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

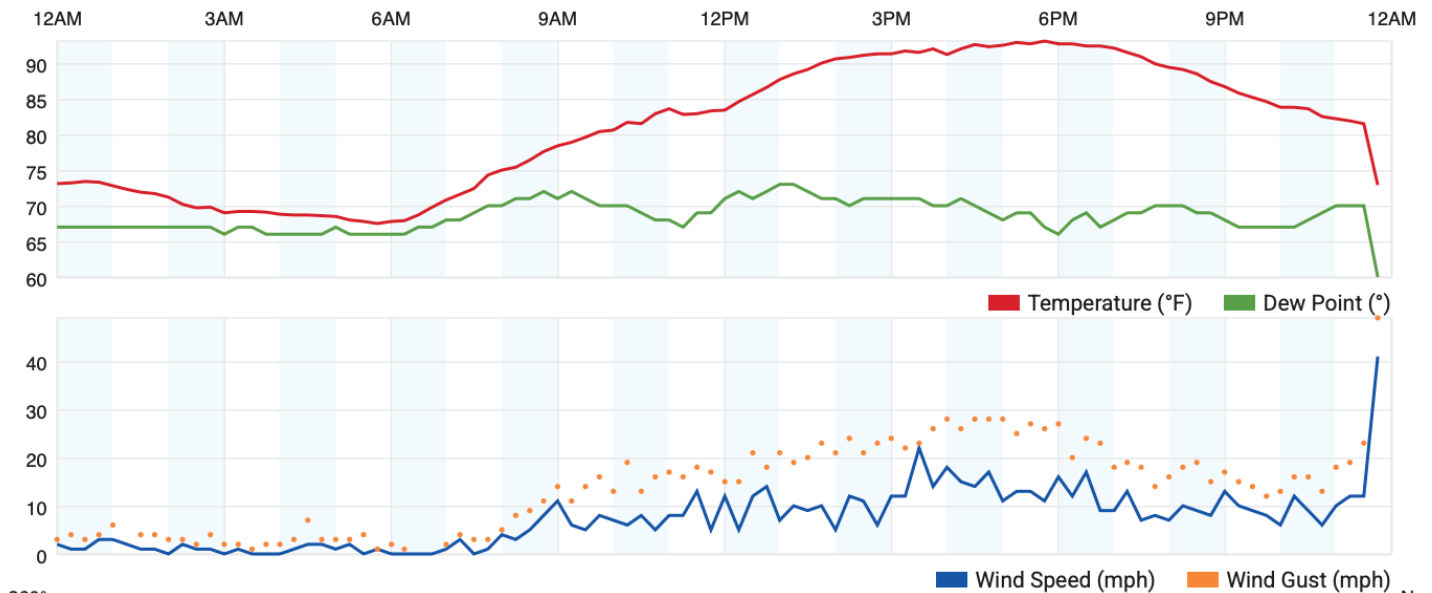
June 9, 2026



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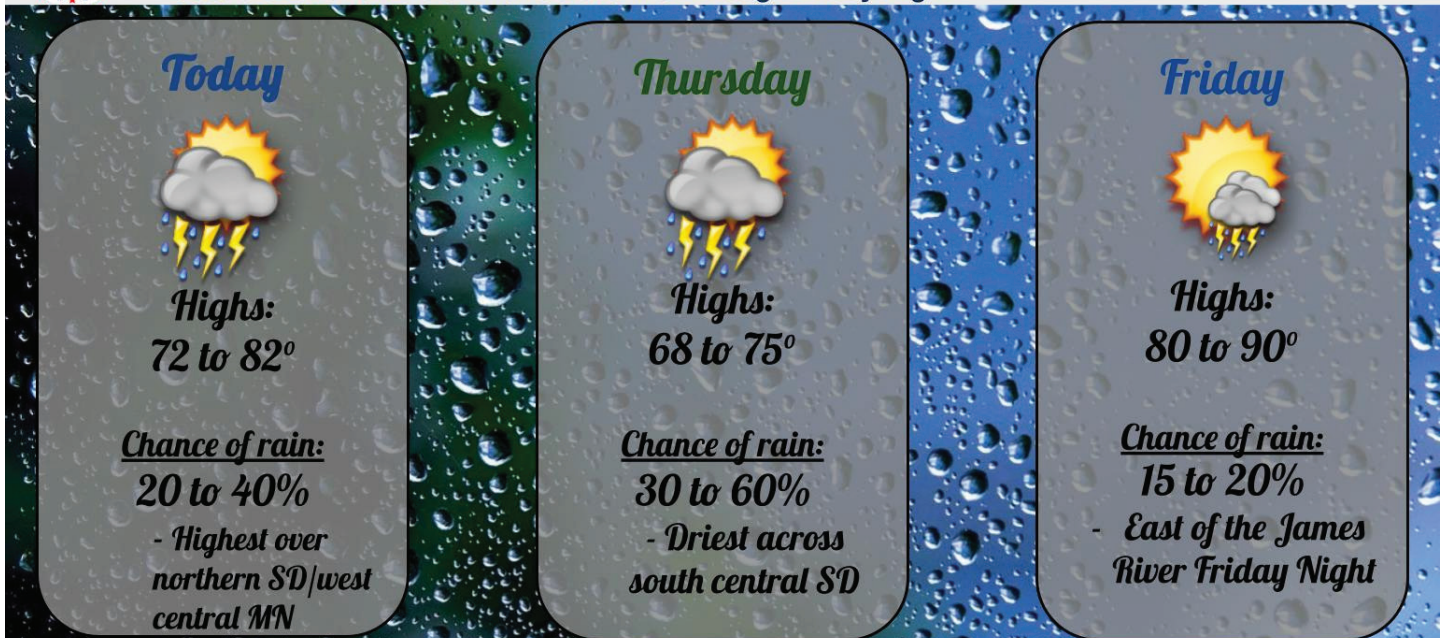
June 9, 2026



The Rest of the Week

June 10, 2026
3:53 AM

Occasional Showers & Thunderstorms Through Friday Night



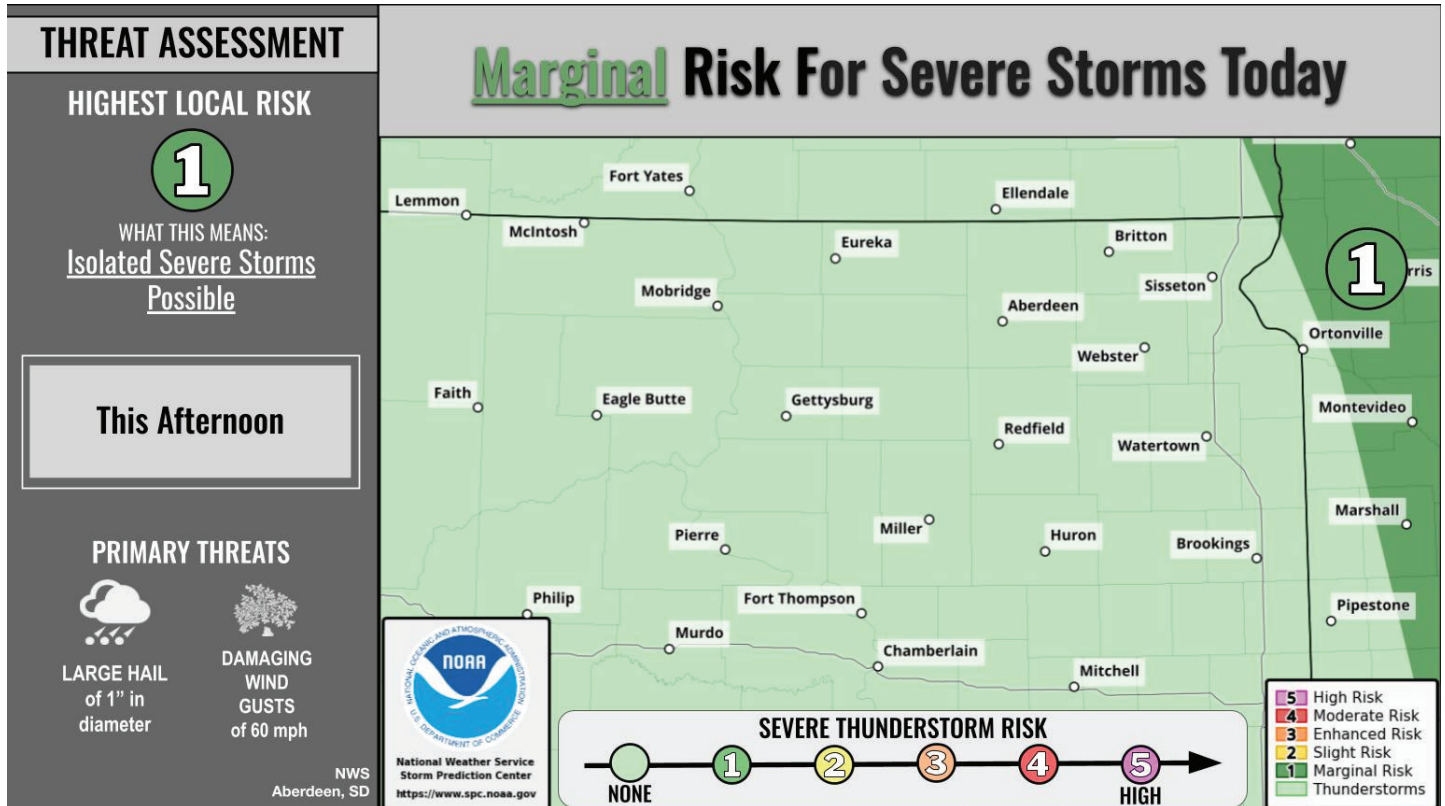
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

The rest of the week is shaping up to be cooler and less humid with occasional chances for showers and afternoon thunderstorms. No organized severe weather is expected. After a couple of cooler days today and Thursday, we get a bump in temps on Friday before cooler temperatures return this weekend. Breezy to windy conditions out of the west to northwest are expected each of the 3 days.

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Far eastern portions of our forecast area could see some afternoon thunderstorm development today, mainly across west central MN and points east. A couple of the stronger storms that do develop would be capable of quarter size hail and wind gusts to 60 mph.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 93 °F at 5:47 PM

Low Temp: 68 °F at 5:42 AM

Wind: 28 mph at 4:05 PM

Precip: 0.03

Today's Info

Record High: 101 in 2021

Record Low: 37 in 1964

Average High: 79

Average Low: 54

Average Precip in June.: 1.15

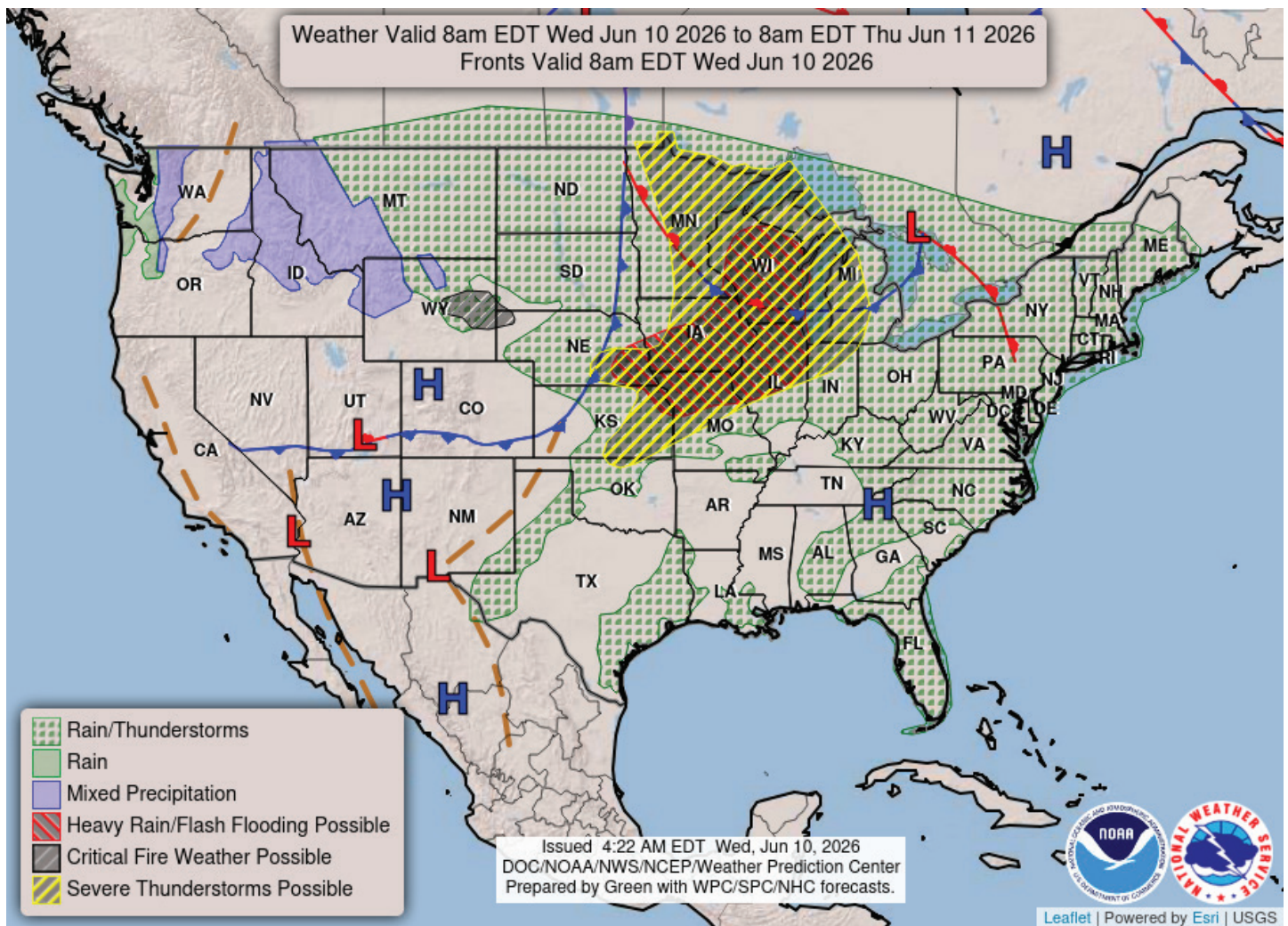
Precip to date in June.: 0.74

Average Precip to date: 8.40

Precip Year to Date: 7.10

Sunset Tonight: 9:19 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:43 am



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Today in Weather History

June 10th, 1998: Torrential rains of two to three inches in a short period caused flash flooding on Crow Creek near Gann Valley. The flash flooding washed out roads and some dams.

June 10th, 2004: An F1 tornado damaged 3 barns and numerous other buildings on a farm 22 miles west of Fort Pierre. The tornado also downed power lines and broke windows in a home. No injuries were reported.

1752 — It is believed that this was the day Benjamin Franklin narrowly missed electrocution while flying a kite during a thunderstorm to determine if lightning is related to electricity. (David Ludlum)

1957 — A dust devil at North Yarmouth, ME, lifted a 600 to 1000 pound chicken shelter into the air and carried it 25 feet. It landed upright with only slight damage. It is unknown whether any eggs were scrambled. (The Weather Channel)

1958 — A woman was sucked through the window of her home in El Dorado, KS, by a powerful tornado, and was carried sixty feet away. Beside her was found a broken phonograph record entitled Stormy Weather. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — Thunderstorms produced 2 to 4 inch rains in southern Texas. Two and a half inches of rain at Juno TX caused flooding and closed a nearby highway. Flooding on the northwest side of San Antonio claimed one life as a boy was swept into a culvert. Thunderstorms in the north central U.S. produced an inch and a half of small hail at Monida Pass MT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Three dozen cities, mostly in the eastern U.S., reported record low temperatures for the date, including Elkins, WV, with a reading of 33 degrees. Unseasonably hot weather continued in the Northern High Plains Region. The record high of 105 degrees at Williston, ND, was their seventh in eight days. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather through the day and night across much of the southern half of the Great Plains Region. Thunderstorms spawned 14 tornadoes, and there were 142 reports of large hail and damaging winds. Hail three inches in diameter caused three millions dollars damage at Carlsbad, NM. Hail four inches in diameter was reported at Estelline TX and Stinnett, TX. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 80 mph at Odessa TX. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)



The Danger of a Hardening Heart

The moment you sense your heart growing hard, run to God and ask for help.

Hebrews 3:7-11: 7 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, ``TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,
8 DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS,
9 WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED Me BY TESTING Me, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS.
10 ``THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, `THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS';
11 AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, `THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'"

The Hebrew people who left Egypt witnessed God's power firsthand—the plagues, the parted sea, the pillar of fire. Yet when the time came to claim their promised land, they refused to believe God would give them victory over Canaan's inhabitants. Despite Joshua and Caleb's passionate pleas, the people rebelled, inventing justifications for their unbelief.

The Lord's response was sobering: 40 years of wandering in the desert (Numbers 14:33-36). That generation wouldn't enter the land He had prepared for them. Because this lesson about unbelief and its consequences was so vital, God referenced it again in the New Testament (Hebrews 3:7-11). He didn't want anyone to repeat such a costly mistake.

How does a heart become hardened? It's a gradual process that begins with selective belief—hearing God's Word but not fully accepting it as true. This leads to trying to manage one's affairs without the Lord's guidance. Over time, the person ignores the conscience or justifies unscriptural choices. Eventually, the heart becomes so resistant that the Spirit's voice can't be heard.

If you sense your heart growing hard, there's hope. Confess your unbelief to the Lord, and ask Him to restore receptivity to His will.

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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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.09.26

23 25 33 35 50 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 36 Mins 45 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.09.26

9 30 36 38 40 3

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$413,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 21 Mins 45 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.08.26

4 23 25 30 47 4

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$29,190,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 36 Mins 45 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.06.26

5 9 13 14 23

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$124,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 51 Mins 45 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.08.26

1 16 20 21 49 10

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 20 Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.08.26

3 24 34 43 49 20

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$238,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 20 Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

After long waits at the Social Security Administration, its chief says things are getting better

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After complaints about staffing cuts and long waits to get help at the Social Security Administration, its commissioner says he's ready to make the case to Congress this week that things are getting a lot better at the embattled agency.

Frank Bisignano is expected to face pointed questions from lawmakers at a hearing on his agency's customer service performance, its ability to pay Americans their benefits, protect their privacy, and other questions about the inner workings of the SSA.

He plans to tout shorter wait times and other customer service metrics to a House Ways and Means Committee hearing slated for Wednesday, and slam his predecessor, Martin O'Malley, for requiring appointments for field office visits, in a letter to lawmakers viewed by The Associated Press.

In the letter, Bisignano states that the SSA has cut phone wait times by 75% under his leadership, fixed frustrating website issues, and served 50% more people.

"I've been very clear. We will meet clients where they want to be met. You want to call us on a phone, we'll have technology on the phone, or you can talk to somebody on the phone. You want to come to a field office, you can come with an appointment, or without," Bisignano told The Associated Press in an interview.

Critics argue that recent gains are being achieved through temporary staffing shifts, increased reliance on online services, and workforce reductions that have created longer-term service risks, shifting bottlenecks around rather than solving staffing problems.

Bisignano dismisses the criticism. "People boo at Yankee Stadium, even when they're winning," he said.

Bisignano in his letter also said the Biden-era Social Security Administration, run by O'Malley, "turned people away who travelled to field offices" in a "failure to have consumer-centric service."

O'Malley told the AP that the SSA under his tenure never turned away walk-in customers. "We encouraged appointments, but we were not turning away walk-ins."

"He lies a lot," O'Malley said about Bisignano. "He's in the habit of lying."

Bisignano took over the agency after a series of chaotic customer service changes, leadership exits, and false allegations made by President Donald Trump and Elon Musk — who ran the Department of Government Efficiency cost-cutting program — that millions of dead people were receiving benefits.

The SSA cut 7,000 workers at the start of the Trump administration. Roughly 2,000 employees were reassigned last year into direct-service positions, including staff whose jobs don't normally involve answering calls.

The SSA's Inspector General — its internal watchdog — has identified ongoing errors in benefit administration and claims processing. But its latest semiannual report to Congress also shows the agency has made measurable progress in improving telephone service and deploying technology to speed disability claims processing.

The union representing SSA employees and field office workers says some offices are severely understaffed. That includes Ironwood, Michigan; Decorah, Iowa; Havre, Montana; Big Spring, Texas; Sheridan, Wyoming; Glasgow, Montana; Pierre, South Dakota; Cedar City, Utah; and Cody, Wyoming, according to the American Federation of Government Employees Council 220.

But Bisignano said no field offices have been closed and noted that the agency is committed to meeting clients where they prefer.

"What I'm trying to achieve is to have a better way for the American public to interact with the Social Security Administration," Bisignano said.

Bisignano also serves as chief executive of the IRS, in a role that was created by the Trump administra-

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tion. Asked about a new tax audit immunity deal for Trump and his family that was part of the controversial settlement crafted to resolve Trump's \$10 billion lawsuit against the IRS, Bisignano referred The Associated Press to Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent's recent comments to a congressional committee, where he refused comment on ongoing litigation.

US strikes Iran after blaming Tehran for helicopter crash. Iran fires on countries in the region

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The United States launched airstrikes early Wednesday against Iran after blaming Tehran for the crash of an American attack helicopter, and Iran fired back at countries in the region — another escalation that threatened to derail efforts to end the war.

Bahrain, Kuwait and Jordan — all of which host U.S. troops — came under Iranian fire. It was the second time this week that back-and-forth strikes have tested the ceasefire after Iran and Israel targeted each other on Monday, and it again raised the question of how much pressure the deal can take before it cracks.

While U.S. President Donald Trump has insisted that negotiations with Iran to end the war are making progress, he has repeatedly vacillated between expressing such optimism and warning that he was ready to return to all-out war. Iran, meanwhile, has proved resilient despite having faced weeks of heavy bombing, betting that its ability to effectively close the Strait of Hormuz — a crucial passageway for the world's oil and natural gas — gives it a strong bargaining chip.

Both countries seem to be looking for a way to end the conflict — if they can manage to sell it as a win at home. But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appears intent on pursuing much more difficult goals: the collapse of Iran's theocratic government, the elimination of its nuclear program, and the destruction of the Iranian-allied Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon. That will make compromise much harder.

Strikes by the US and Iran shake the Mideast

Since the U.S. and Israel started the war with attacks on Iran on Feb. 28, the conflict has shaken the global economy, driven up energy prices around the world, and made many basics, including food, more expensive. Brent crude oil, the international standard, was at more than \$91 a barrel on Wednesday, up more than 25% since the start of the war.

In the latest strikes, U.S. fighter jets targeted "air defense, ground control stations, and surveillance radar sites," the military's Central Command said. Iran acknowledged strikes around Bandar Abbas and Qeshm Island, but gave no details on the damage.

"The operation was a proportional response to recent attacks on U.S. forces and international commercial ships transiting regional waters," Central Command said.

Iran's top diplomat vowed that there would be a response, and Tehran later claimed attacks in Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan.

Jordan said it shot down five incoming missiles, which Iran said targeted the Muwaffaq Salti Air Base. The base has hosted American F-35 fighter jets and other aircraft.

Jordan's state-run Petra news agency carried a military statement saying there were no injuries and that explosives experts examined the debris from the interceptions.

Bahrain and Kuwait said they intercepted incoming fire, without elaborating.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi condemned the American attacks as a violation of Iranian sovereignty in calls with his counterparts from Turkey and Saudi Arabia "and emphasized the inherent right of self-defense, including reciprocal action," according to a post on his office's Telegram channel.

The exchanges of fire came a day after a U.S. Army attack helicopter crashed near the Strait of Hormuz after colliding with an Iranian drone, according to a U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation. It wasn't clear whether the collision was intentional.

A drone boat rescued both of the helicopter's aviators, and Trump said they were uninjured.

A cargo ship is attacked by a small boat in the Gulf of Aden

Guards aboard a cargo ship off the coast of Yemen in the Gulf of Aden exchanged fire with gunmen in

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a small boat and repelled their attack, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility. Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels have said they will resume their attacks against Israel-affiliated ships in the Red Sea. Somali pirates have also become more active in the region.

Trump has said a deal to end the war is coming

Before he accused Iran of downing the U.S. helicopter, Trump expressed renewed optimism over negotiations with Iran, but didn't say why there was reason for hope.

Mediators, led predominantly by Pakistan, have been trying for weeks to get a deal across the line. While Trump, wary of high gas prices and upcoming congressional elections in November, seems to be looking for a quick win, he is also making demands that will be tough for Iran to swallow.

The U.S. wants to see Iran give up its stockpile of highly enriched uranium. While Iran insists its nuclear program is peaceful, that uranium is a short, technical step from weapons-grade levels.

Iran is refusing to give up the uranium and demanding relief from sanctions. It also wants the release of frozen assets even before a final agreement is in place, something rejected by Trump.

It's not clear how those differences can be bridged — and Trump has repeatedly threatened to walk away from the talks. On his Truth Social platform overnight he seemed to be warning again that he was ready to return to all-out war, posting a clip from the American TV series "The West Wing" with actor Martin Sheen as president bellowing: "We don't come back with a proportional response, we come back with total disaster!"

Meanwhile, Iran has continued to insist that any deal to end the war must also end fighting between its ally Hezbollah and Israel. Instead, Israel has intensified its military campaign against the militant group.

Israel's military said on Wednesday it launched multiple strikes in southern Lebanon over the past day, targeting Hezbollah infrastructure.

Pakistani airstrikes in Afghanistan kill at least 13 people, Taliban official says

By ABDUL QAHAR AFGHAN and MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Pakistan launched new airstrikes on Afghanistan early Wednesday, in a further escalation of months of fighting between the two neighbors that has killed hundreds.

The strikes, which Afghanistan said hit the eastern provinces of Khost, Kunar and Paktika, shattered more than a month of calm between the two sides.

Afghan government spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said 13 people had been killed — 11 children, one woman and an elderly man — and that 14 other civilians were wounded. Pakistan confirmed it had carried out strikes, saying it targeted militant hideouts and infrastructure linked to recent attacks inside Pakistan, and that 26 militants were killed.

The two sides often give widely differing casualty figures.

Pakistan and Afghanistan have engaged in deadly fighting since late February, when Afghanistan launched a cross-border attack on Pakistan in retaliation for Pakistani airstrikes inside Afghanistan. Several rounds of internationally mediated peace talks have failed to produce a lasting truce.

Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of harboring militants that carry out deadly attacks inside Pakistan, especially the Pakistani Taliban, known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan or TTP. The group is separate from, but allied with, the Afghan Taliban, which has ruled Afghanistan since it seized power in the country in 2021 amid the chaotic withdrawal of U.S.-led troops. Kabul denies the charge.

Pakistan says it targeted militant hideouts

In a post on X, Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said that "precise and calibrated strikes were carried out along Pakistan-Afghanistan border areas on hideouts and safe havens of masterminds and planners" of attacks carried out by the Pakistani Taliban and insurgents in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region bordering Afghanistan.

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Tarar said four targets were destroyed in the operation: a training center, a hideout, an ammunition cache and a facility belonging to militant commanders.

He added that Pakistan has always strived to maintain peace and stability in the region, but the safety and security of its citizens remain the top priority.

The country's counter-terrorism campaign will continue "at full pace to wipe out the menace of foreign-sponsored and supported terrorism," he said.

Pakistan's Information Ministry dismissed Afghanistan's reports of civilian casualties. In a post on X, it said that "Afghan Taliban accounts are peddling propaganda claiming Pakistan bombed civilian homes and caused civilian casualties."

Wednesday's strikes came a day after suspected Pakistani Taliban militants attacked a security post in Pakistan's Hasan Khel area of northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan, triggering an intense gunfight in which six members of the Federal Constabulary were killed and several others wounded, according to Pakistan's Interior Ministry.

Local authorities in Pakistan said Tuesday that security forces killed eight of the attackers and thwarted an attempt to overrun the checkpoint. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi later attended funeral prayers for the dead personnel in Peshawar, the ministry said.

Though the situation along the border was calm hours after the strikes, Kabul has previously responded to Pakistani strikes by targeting Pakistani posts along the frontier.

Afghanistan and Pakistan have been fighting for months

Pakistan in February declared it was in open war with Afghanistan, following a surge in militant attacks on civilians and security forces inside Pakistan. Afghanistan has said a Pakistani airstrike in March hit a drug treatment center in Kabul, killing more than 400 people.

Pakistan has disputed the death toll and denied targeting civilians, saying it struck an ammunition depot.

Wednesday's strikes come months after China hosted peace talks between Pakistan and Afghanistan in Urumqi, in northern China. Beijing later said the two sides had agreed not to escalate their conflict and to explore a solution.

Authorities in Pakistan have said that Beijing and some other friendly countries were still encouraging both sides to reach an agreement for durable peace.

Masood Khan, an Islamabad-based security analyst, said Pakistan's priority is ending attacks by the Pakistani Taliban, which Islamabad says operate from Afghan soil.

Khan said the solution to the tension lies in enforcing a decree by Afghanistan's Taliban leader Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada ordering the TTP to stop attacks on Pakistan. "That decree must be implemented sincerely and faithfully," he said.

Tension and cross-border fighting has left the border between the two countries closed since October, hampering trade and transportation and stranding thousands of people.

Hong Kong charges 7 people and 2 firms over massive fire that killed 168

By KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong authorities on Wednesday charged seven people and two companies with offenses including manslaughter and conspiracy to defraud over the city's deadliest fire in decades.

The massive blaze engulfed seven apartment buildings and killed 168 people on Nov. 26, 2025. Former residents and relatives of the dead have been waiting for answers for months after the fire shattered the close-knit community of Wang Fuk Court, which housed thousands of people in the suburban district of Tai Po.

In a statement on Wednesday, authorities said police and the Independent Commission Against Corruption charged the suspects with 25 counts. Money laundering, attempting to pervert the course of public justice and tax evasion were also among the allegations.

The seven people played different roles in the major renovation project of Wang Fuk Court. The two

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companies charged are the project consultancy firm, Will Power Architects Company, and Prestige Construction & Engineering Co., the main contractor involved in the project.

The seven defendants, Wong Hap-yin, Hau Wa-kin, Ho Kin-yip, Ng Yeuk, Hung Kwok-wai, Chung So-fan and Lin Min, were brought to court Wednesday afternoon. Authorities said they included directors of the two companies and a registered inspector of Will Power.

The defendants told the court that they understood the charges, and most appeared calm.

In March, police said they arrested 38 people on accusations related to the fire, including manslaughter and fraud. Nine have been charged, police said. The anti-graft agency said in the same month that they also arrested 23 people on suspicion of offenses such as bribery and conspiracy to defraud.

Victor Dawes, a lawyer representing an independent committee conducting an ongoing inquiry into the fire's cause, previously said almost all fire safety systems failed on the day of the blaze because of human error.

Defying Trump ended some Republicans' careers. It could help Susan Collins win reelection in Maine

By PATRICK WHITTLE and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — This election year is déjà vu for Sen. Susan Collins — the Maine Republican is running for reelection as Democrats pin their hopes on a new candidate to defeat her. Last time, it was state lawmaker Sara Gideon. This time, it's combat veteran and oyster farmer Graham Platner.

But Collins has proven to be a hard target for Democrats over the years — even for candidates without the baggage of Platner, who has faced criticism for his relationships with women, inflammatory online posts and a previous tattoo recognized as a Nazi symbol. Collins is seeking her sixth term with sky-high name recognition, a record-breaking run of consecutive Senate votes and a history of bringing back federal funding for her state for years.

She is also the rare Republican who sometimes can boost her own popularity back home by keeping her distance from President Donald Trump, and she has perfected that delicate dance even as his tightening grip on the party has cost two of her Senate Republican colleagues their reelection.

Sens. John Cornyn of Texas and Bill Cassidy of Louisiana lost their primaries when facing Trump-endorsed opponents. But despite the president's complaints about Collins, he did not campaign against her. Years of practice have made her adept at staying close — but not too close — to the president when it is politically advantageous, and moving away when showing an independent streak is helpful.

"She's shown time and time again where her state's electorate is. She understands what's too far, she understands where she needs to be," said political consultant Matt Mackowiak, who worked for Cornyn's failed reelection campaign. Trump endorsed Cornyn's opponent, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton.

The road to Senate control goes through Maine

The Democrats need to flip four seats to take control of the Senate in November and hope that Trump's falling approval ratings and the war in Iran — as well as its subsequent effect on oil prices and the economy — could buoy their chances. Maine is among the top targets, along with Alaska, Ohio and North Carolina.

Platner wants to make the case that Collins isn't as independent of Trump as her reputation suggests — repeatedly noting that she allowed his Supreme Court nominations to go through, which in 2022 led to the overturning of Roe v. Wade, a landmark 1973 decision that legalized abortion, among other major issues.

"Susan Collins may have started her career decades ago in Washington with good intentions, but she has become just as spineless and corrupt as the establishment she now serves," Platner said at a victory party on Tuesday.

Platner supporters are ready for change, said John Keenan, of Sullivan, Maine.

"I think Maine has grown tired of the same old system," he said. "And putting youth into the campaign, with new instead of a rubber stamp, is very refreshing."

Trump has often criticized Collins — but not lately

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Even as she faces Platner in November, Collins may have to stay wary of Trump. The president has spent years singling her out for daring to occasionally defy him on some issues.

However, he's refrained from doing so more recently — especially as Collins failed to draw a credible challenger and cruised to a Republican primary victory.

The White House declined to comment. Political advisers close to Trump, however, said the president understands how critical it is that Republicans maintain control of Congress after November, which requires accommodating Collins. Trump understands the need to avoid a Republican wipeout like 2018's "blue wave" midterms that saw Democrats flip the House and derail much of the last two years of his first-term plans.

"Senator Susan Collins represents the people of Maine first and foremost and has proven herself to be a dedicated public servant," said Republican National Committee spokesperson Kristen Cianci in a statement.

Collins spokesperson Blake Kernan said the senator "has worked with five different Presidents throughout her Senate tenure, and has never agreed with any of them on every issue."

"When she agrees with an effort, she will support it; when she disagrees, she does not hesitate to speak up for what she believes is the right outcome for Maine and for America," Kernan said in a statement.

Other Republicans ran into trouble with Trump

That didn't work out for some Republican senators.

Cornyn was among his party's top voices, rising through the ranks after joining the Senate in 2002. Paxton trounced him in a runoff race days after Trump endorsed the attorney general.

In office since 2015, Cassidy voted to convict Trump during his impeachment trial after the U.S. Capitol siege on Jan. 6, 2021. He lost his primary to Trump-endorsed state Rep. Julia Letlow.

Maine figures to be a more competitive race in November — as evidenced by Trump recently refraining from singling out Collins. That's despite her voting last week with Democrats to block the nearly \$1.8 billion fund the president wanted to create to benefit allies that he claims were unfairly targeted by law enforcement.

"She's always down in the polls and she survives," Trump conceded when asked about Collins in an interview with the New York Post last week.

Collins defeated Gideon, the Maine House speaker, by almost 9 points in 2020, the same year that Biden beat Trump by a similar margin in the state.

Mackowiak said "there's just no pathway to a MAGA senator from Maine."

"It does appear that the Trump political operation is soberly analyzing the electoral environment in Maine and really kind of follows her lead as it relates to that state and that race, particularly this cycle," he said.

Maine Republicans are 'a bit more pragmatic'

Chuck Ellis, a Republican from Westbrook who runs a digital marketing company, said Collins' reluctance to move in lockstep with Trump can be a plus.

Although there are some "hard-line" voters who may disapprove, Ellis said, "ultimately a lot of your conservatives, your Republicans, are people who are a bit more pragmatic."

After Collins opposed the White House's signature tax cut and spending package last year, and voted against a proposal to claw back \$9 billion in foreign aid and public media funding, the president complained about her on social media.

"Republicans, when in doubt, vote the exact opposite of Senator Susan Collins," he wrote.

Then, in January, Trump lashed out at the "stupidity" of Collins and four other Senate Republicans who joined Democrats to start a debate over restricting the president's use of force in Venezuela.

She later received a profanity-laced call from Trump.

White House may keep a further distance from Collins' race

As chair of the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee, Collins last week cast her 10,000th Senate vote in a row, setting a record.

"She has been able to do and show that 'I am bringing money and resources from the federal government to Maine to help Maine,'" Ellis said.

The president is unlikely to travel to Maine ahead of November despite visiting other states with key Senate races, like Iowa and Michigan. He could even campaign personally for Paxton.

Vice President JD Vance has been to Maine, where he promoted his anti-fraud task force. Collins didn't attend Vance's speech in Bangor last month where he acknowledged the senator's distance from the Trump administration.

"If she was as partisan as I sometimes wish that she was," Vance said, "she would not be a good fit for the people of Maine."

Israel is tightening its grip on east Jerusalem with evictions and demolitions

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Fakhri Abu Diab fought for decades to save his home. But when Israeli authorities arrived with bulldozers two years ago, he was powerless to stop them.

He and his wife now live among shards of memory: a bicycle where his bedroom stood; the garden where he planted tomatoes as a boy; a portrait of his late mother painted on a wall, based on a photograph lost in the demolition. Their mobile home, set up amid the rubble, is also marked for removal.

They are "trying to erase my memories, my childhood, my history," he said, wiping away tears.

For decades, Israel has worked to expand the Jewish presence in annexed east Jerusalem — the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and home to major Jewish, Christian and Muslim sites. Settlers have exploited discriminatory policies and archaeological claims to evict Palestinians far from the region's war zones.

Activists say those efforts have gone into overdrive in recent years, as Israel is no longer constrained by U.S. pressure and attention has shifted to Gaza, Lebanon and Iran.

Over 260 homes and other structures were demolished in 2025, a 70% increase from three years earlier, with some neighborhoods seeing the most evictions in decades, according to Ir Amim, an Israeli anti-settlement group that closely tracks such policies. There have been at least 116 demolitions so far this year, it said.

It's "an intensity and scope that we have never seen," said Aviv Tatarsky, a researcher at Ir Amim. "Israel can decide, yes, this neighborhood, we want to erase it ... No one is going to stop us."

Israeli government supports settlement growth

Israel captured east Jerusalem, along with the West Bank and Gaza, in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three territories for their future state, and the U.N. and much of the international community consider them to be illegally occupied.

Israel considers all of Jerusalem to be its unified capital and says residents are treated equally by law.

Palestinians in annexed east Jerusalem are eligible for Israeli citizenship, but unlike Jews, they must apply for it — a long, uncertain process. Most choose not to because it would recognize Israel's claims to the city. That leaves them with few ways to challenge housing policy, largely set by Israel's Parliament.

Rights activists say that in addition to supporting the development of major Jewish settlements — which many Israelis view as ordinary neighborhoods — authorities have severely limited the growth of Palestinian neighborhoods, making it virtually impossible to obtain housing permits.

Last year, nearly 9,000 permits were approved for Jerusalem's Jewish residents and fewer than 700 for Palestinians, according to Bimkom, an Israeli rights group. Palestinians make up some 40% of Jerusalem's population and are concentrated in the east.

Israeli officials say the discrepancy exists because Palestinians rarely apply for permits. Many Palestinians say it's futile.

When Palestinians build without permits, they face the threat of demolition. Settler groups meanwhile exploit an array of laws to purchase or take over Palestinian properties.

Previous U.S. administrations have pressed Israel to slow or suspend settlement projects, viewing them as an obstacle to resolving the conflict. U.S. President Donald Trump broke with that tradition in his first term, recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

The U.S. State Department said in a statement that it's up to Israeli authorities to set policy in Jerusalem, and that it expects them to respect due process and the rule of law.

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The neighborhood is near major religious sites

Abu Diab's neighborhood, al-Bustan, extends through a valley just outside the Old City, with the dome of the Al-Aqsa Mosque visible above the towering walls. Named for the orchards that once grew there, the neighborhood is now a crowded jumble of low concrete blocks and demolition sites.

It's part of the larger district of Silwan, home to some 20,000 Palestinians and coveted by settlers because it is near major religious and archaeological sites. The mosque is the third holiest in Islam, and the hilltop where it stands is the holiest site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount because it was where the two Jewish temples stood in antiquity.

The Jerusalem municipality said the homes in al-Bustan are being demolished because they were built without permits in areas not zoned for housing. A park and public parking lot will be established there for the benefit of all residents, it said in a statement.

The municipality said it put forward plans for alternative housing in the neighborhood but that residents did not show "serious intentions" to reach an agreement.

Abu Diab has been battling demolition orders in court since 2004. Part of his home was built before 1967, but his growing family expanded it without permits because it was impossible to get them, he said.

In February 2024, police gave him and his wife minutes to pack before demolishing their home. Since then, they have lived in the mobile home, their suitcases packed.

They are among some 1,500 Palestinians in al-Bustan whose homes could be demolished at any time.

Settlers move in as Palestinians are evicted

A short distance away, in the congested Batan al-Hawah neighborhood, settlers are moving in as Palestinians are evicted.

Zuhair al-Rajabi and dozens of his extended family were ordered out in January, when Israel's Supreme Court ruled against them after more than a decade of legal action.

Thumbing through papers in his living room, he pulled out a document from 1966 saying the property is his. He says he has to leave by July but has nowhere to go, as rents are high in Jerusalem. "The problem, in short, is that they don't want us here," he said.

March marked the highest rate of state-led evictions in the neighborhood in decades, with 15 families forced out and hundreds more people at risk, according to B'Tselem, an Israeli rights group.

Israeli laws allow settlers to reclaim properties that were owned by other Jews before the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation. Palestinians who fled or were driven from their homes in what is now Israel during that conflict are barred from returning. Authorities have also transferred state-held land to settler groups.

The Batan al-Hawah evictions show "the cooperation between settler organizations and state institutions, based on discriminatory laws, toward a shared goal — the Judaization of east Jerusalem and the replacement of Palestinian residents with Israeli settlers," said Yair Dvir, a spokesperson for B'Tselem.

The Israeli judiciary, in a statement, said courts rule on the merits of each case based on the circumstances, applicable law and established precedent, and denied colluding with private organizations.

Daniel Luria, the executive director of Ateret Cohanim, one of the main settler organizations in east Jerusalem, said it was working to correct a "monumental historical injustice" by helping Jews to return to what had been a Yemenite and Sephardic Jewish neighborhood up until the early 20th century, when he says they were expelled by Arabs and then again by the British.

Since 2004, around 50 Jewish families have moved into the neighborhood and more are eager to join them, he said. "There's never going to be a Palestinian state," he added.

An Israeli flag waves above the home where Khalil Basbous was evicted in January. The 68-year-old moved into a relative's house around the corner but walks past his former home every day.

"It's mine," he said, wiping tears from his face and softly touching an olive tree he had planted by the door. "I have no doubt that I will return."

Alleged spy's mysterious disappearance spotlights Israel's intelligence networks in Lebanon

By ABBY SEWELL and SALLY ABOU ALJOUD Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — As Israeli warplanes pounded Beirut's southern suburbs last March and residents fled in panic, one man found his opportunity. Amid the chaos, he slipped out of his imprisonment in a Hezbollah cell and made his way to the green hills overlooking the Lebanese capital.

There, in the posh diplomatic quarter of Baabda, he disappeared inside the gates of the Ukrainian Embassy. Where he is now is a mystery, tangled up in an ongoing spy game as Hezbollah attempts to root out Israeli intelligence operatives that have infiltrated the militant group.

The man identified by Lebanese officials as Khaled al-Aydi is said to be a Palestinian refugee from Syria who also holds Ukrainian citizenship. He had been detained by Hezbollah in the Beirut suburbs and accused by Lebanese officials of being part of a thwarted Israeli intelligence plot to carry out bombings and assassinations.

Details of al-Aydi's escape and a Lebanese military court's case against him were provided by three judicial officials and two senior security officials in Lebanon who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly. A senior political official in Hezbollah also provided details.

Al-Aydi's disappearance could have political implications for the Lebanese government, which has largely remained silent about the case.

If evidence were to emerge that al-Aydi escaped Lebanon with help from the government, it could inflame tensions with Hezbollah's largely Shiite Muslim base. The government already faces scrutiny for directly negotiating with Israel, which has been engaged in fierce fighting with Hezbollah since the early days of the Iran war.

The Ukrainian embassy asked Lebanese authorities in March to facilitate al-Aydi's departure from the country after he escaped Hezbollah detention, according to a Lebanese government document obtained by The Associated Press. But Lebanon's General Security agency refused, saying a judicial warrant for his arrest had been issued in September 2025, according to the document.

Israel's Mossad intelligence agency declined to comment. Ukraine's Foreign Ministry also declined comment.

A Ukrainian official with knowledge of the case said al-Aydi is not in the Ukrainian Embassy or its compound in Lebanon. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the situation, would not say where al-Aydi is — and out of concern for the security of Ukraine's embassy and its personnel, would not say whether al-Aydi was ever in the embassy, or whether Ukraine helped him escape.

Israel's intelligence networks

Using human and high-tech surveillance, Israel has cultivated far-reaching intelligence networks in Lebanon. That has helped it carry out dramatic operations against Hezbollah.

In the most elaborate example, Israel infiltrated Hezbollah's supply chain and sent the Iran-backed militant group thousands of booby-trapped pagers and walkie-talkies. Israel remotely detonated the devices in September 2024, killing at least 37 people. Days later, Israeli airstrikes killed Hezbollah's longtime leader, Hassan Nasrallah, while he was hiding in a heavily fortified bunker.

Even before that, Israel's intelligence within Hezbollah allowed it to hit the group's senior leaders and field commanders "with relative ease," said Nicholas Blanford, an expert on the militant group at the Atlantic Council.

Since the 2024 Israel-Hezbollah war, Hezbollah and Lebanese authorities have cracked down on alleged spy networks. About 50 people have been convicted and are serving sentences, while others remain under investigation, the judicial officials said.

"We were successful in detecting many spy networks, and the state was also successful in this matter," Hezbollah political official Wafiq Safa, said. But "the Israelis are always working to recruit young Lebanese people from all communities."

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Al-Aydi doesn't fit the profile of other alleged spies

Many alleged spy networks have involved current or former Hezbollah members or individuals with family ties to the group.

Al-Aydi, in contrast, was an outsider. He had Ukrainian citizenship through his mother, according to the Lebanese government document AP obtained. It is not known how he was allegedly recruited by Israel.

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians came to Lebanon for refuge during Syria's 14-year civil war. But Al-Aydi entered the country in August 2025 on a flight from Ethiopia, one of the Lebanese security officials said.

While Hezbollah began in the 1980s as a small guerrilla operation fighting Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon, it greatly expanded after its 2006 war with Israel, making it "easier for the Israelis to penetrate," Blanford said. The group's entry into the Syrian civil war further exposed it, as recruitment standards were lowered, he said.

Lebanon's economic crisis also aided Israel's recruitment efforts, Blanford said.

Cases filed in Lebanon's military court describe operatives being paid between \$2,500 and \$20,000 to provide intelligence on Hezbollah weapons depots and political offices. Many of the alleged agents were recruited by Israeli handlers through social media, judicial officials said.

One high-profile case was Mohammad Hadi Saleh, a singer and prominent religious performer within circles connected to Hezbollah. He was arrested in May 2025 and charged with providing the Mossad with maps and coordinates of key Hezbollah sites later struck in Israeli operations. He is in jail awaiting trial.

"It's ironic that they (Hezbollah) were spending a lot of time accusing their opponents of being Israeli spies, and it turns out that the spies were actually from within the organization and its support base," said Mohamad Hage Ali, a senior fellow at the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut.

Recruitment efforts continue. During the latest war, Israel has dropped leaflets over Lebanon with QR codes that, according to the Lebanese army, direct people to an Israeli military unit tasked with recruiting agents.

Al-Aydi is thought to have fled the country

Lebanon's General Security said in October it had broken up a network planning bombings and assassinations in Lebanon, including an operation meant to target events for the one-year commemoration of Nasrallah's death. Authorities discovered a motorcycle rigged with explosives and a car modified to hold explosives, security and judicial officials said.

Al-Aydi and six others, all Lebanese, were charged. One of the six also escaped, and the others are in a Lebanese jail awaiting trial, the judicial officials said. Only al-Aydi was being held by Hezbollah, likely because he was seen as a high-value catch.

The military court alleges the operation was orchestrated by a Mossad handler living in Germany who communicated with others through encrypted applications. The court sent a summons to the Ukrainian embassy that went unanswered.

Safa said there was an unsuccessful attempt to smuggle al-Aydi out of Lebanon to Syria. He did not elaborate.

The two senior Lebanese security officials said al-Aydi is believed to have left the country. It was not clear whether he crossed into Syria, where officials said they had no information about him.

Alleged spy's disappearance raises political tensions

Relations between the Lebanese government and Hezbollah are at a low point. The government was angered by the militant group's unilateral decision to enter another war with Israel, while Hezbollah is furious the government has chosen to negotiate a ceasefire and potentially wider security and political agreement directly with Israel.

Al-Aydi's escape could exacerbate tensions and put the Lebanese state in a difficult situation.

If Lebanese authorities refused to let al-Aydi leave the country, the U.S. and Ukraine were "well-positioned to exert significant pressure" to secure his release, Hage Ali said. On the other hand, if the state is seen to have let al-Aydi escape, it would face "public anger, predominantly among Lebanese Shia" sympathetic to Hezbollah, which could use that emotion to inflame internal tensions, he said.

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Police are investigating a large burning cross at a Chicago park

By HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

A large, burning cross was discovered at a Chicago park on Tuesday afternoon, and police said they are investigating how it ended up there and the motive behind it.

Video taken by a motorist shows the wooden cross engulfed in bright orange flames as it leans against a tree in Grant Park, a popular area near Lake Michigan. The Chicago Fire Department confirmed the flaming object was a cross, and said officials put out the fire.

Chicago Police said there were no reports of injuries and that they are investigating the motive and circumstances around the "object on fire."

Keinika Carlton, 43, was driving home from running errands with her daughter and mother-in-law when they saw the cross on fire. She said she felt a combination of shock, sadness, disgust, as well as curiosity.

"Is this a racial thing? Is this a religious thing?" she said. "As Black women, of course, our first thought is racial, because burning crosses are known to be used as a tactic, an act of violence toward Black Americans in the South."

Carlton estimated the cross was at least 6 feet (1.83 meters) tall. The experience was new to all of them, including Carlton's mother-in-law, who grew up in Kentucky.

Carlton said as they slowed down to shoot a video of the flames, she saw around her other cars slowing down and people walking nearby, staring at the cross burning.

While the motive behind the burning cross was not immediately clear, cross burnings in the U.S. have historically been seen as "symbols of hate" that are "inextricably intertwined with the history of the Ku Klux Klan," according to a 2003 U.S. Supreme Court decision written by the late Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. The justices ruled that the First Amendment allows bans on cross burnings only when they are intended to intimidate because the action "is a particularly virulent form of intimidation."

Alyna Carlton, 22, said she never thought she would see something like that in her lifetime.

"It kind of really opened my eyes, had me realize that I'm not that far removed from the past."

Tuesday's takeaways: Platner's big night, Clyburn carries on and Trump's support gets mixed results

By STEVE PEOPLES and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nevada, South Carolina and North Dakota hosted primary elections Tuesday, but much of the political world was focused on Maine's high-stakes U.S. Senate contest.

The results were never in question. Neither Republican incumbent Sen. Susan Collins nor Democratic challenger Graham Platner faced serious opposition for their party's nomination. And yet Tuesday marked an especially significant moment for Platner, the embattled veteran and oyster farmer, who is fighting to rebuild his credibility in a campaign rocked by controversy.

Elsewhere, President Donald Trump's clout within his party was tested anew in states like South Carolina and Nevada, where he endorsed his favored candidates. Democrats hoped to build momentum in Nevada as part of a broader push to reclaim key governor's seats.

Here's some of the biggest takeaways from Tuesday's primaries.

Platner tries to shift the conversation

There is no question that Platner has repair work to do.

The Maine Democrat openly acknowledged as much Tuesday night, telling a room packed with cheering supporters that "people can change."

"Any of those who feel let down or disappointed or disillusioned, it is my job to earn your trust, faith and support," Platner said. He later added, "I've made mistakes in my life, mistakes that I regret, that I live with, that I continue to learn from."

It was hardly a defiant message for a man who sits at the very center of the Democratic Party's fight to reclaim the Senate majority. Although he spent the closing minutes of his election-night speech attacking

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Collins, much of the night was choreographed to address other controversies.

It was barely a week ago when revelations surfaced that Platner had engaged in sexually explicit messages with multiple women while married. Allies wondered if more baggage would emerge, and then The New York Times reported new allegations about his behavior during previous relationships.

Platner's mother took the stage before he spoke. She declared: "I am very, very proud of my son. I'm proud of who he is." And then Platner's wife appeared at his side before and after his speech. They held hands, touched foreheads and kissed.

Platner's rival for the Democratic nomination, Maine Gov. Janet Mills, suspended her campaign in April after it became clear Platner was in a commanding position.

A much more difficult challenge lies ahead: earning his own party's trust as he tries to defeat Collins, who is running for her sixth term.

Maine race tests Democrats' standards

As the controversies surrounding Platner have mounted, his support among Democrats has remained intact.

His victory — and his party's response — underscores how much the party has changed in the Trump era. Democrats who once embraced a near-zero-tolerance approach to serious allegations of personal misconduct are increasingly prioritizing electability in their quest to return to power in Washington.

Jim Messina, who led former President Barack Obama's reelection campaign, said "a star is born" after Platner's speech Tuesday night.

Few lawmakers illustrated the Democratic Party's evolution more clearly than Minnesota Sen. Tina Smith. On Monday night, Smith offered an unequivocal endorsement of Platner, saying that if she lived in Maine, "he'd have my support, no question."

Smith arrived in the Senate in 2018 after replacing Sen. Al Franken, who resigned amid allegations of inappropriate touching and kissing during the height of the #MeToo movement.

She is joined by other Democrats who once derided Republicans' acceptance of Trump and other controversial nominees, but now back Platner. Sens. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren have been — and continue to be — key supporters of Platner.

But not all Democrats appear comfortable. Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania had pushed Maine voters to support Mills, even though she dropped out. Mills issued a statement Tuesday night that did not mention Platner's name. Rep. Josh Gottheimer of New Jersey pushed Platner to "get off" the ballot in a CNN interview.

Expect Democratic leaders to face a new round of difficult questions about their own standards in the days and weeks ahead.

Trump's endorsement doesn't deliver clean win in South Carolina

The president was looking to rebound Tuesday from an embarrassing loss in Iowa last week, where his preferred candidate for governor was defeated in a rare rebuke from Republican primary voters.

But South Carolina's Republican gubernatorial primary offered only an incomplete victory.

Trump-backed Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette was unable to secure a majority of the vote in the five-candidate field needed to avoid a runoff. She will face state Attorney General Alan Wilson on June 23.

As the results came in, Trump called Evette and pledged to help her over the next two weeks, according to a person familiar with the private conversation who was not authorized to discuss it publicly.

The night produced a more decisive result for one of Trump's closest allies in Congress. Sen. Lindsey Graham avoided a runoff and secured the Republican Senate nomination over businessman Mark Lynch. Trump had warned that it would be a "DISASTER for the Republican Party" if Lynch won.

Meanwhile in Nevada's 2nd congressional district, Trump-backed retired Lt. Col. David Flippo faced former state Sen. James Settelmeyer in a GOP primary that was too early to call Tuesday night. Republican Rep. Mark Amodei, who announced his retirement from the seat, has endorsed Settelmeyer, as has the state's governor, Republican Joe Lombardo.

Clyburn cruises to primary win after South Carolina redistricting scare

Longtime South Carolina Rep. James Clyburn, who holds significant national political clout as the state's

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lone Democratic House member, easily fended off a little-known primary challenger Tuesday.

Just weeks ago, it was unclear if Clyburn would make it to a 18th term in office. Republican lawmakers, backed by Trump, considered a congressional map that would have significantly altered Clyburn's majority-Black district and made it harder for him to hold onto the seat. But the Republican-led state Senate rejected the effort, leaving his district largely intact.

Two Republicans are still competing for the chance to face Clyburn in November, but he is expected to be the overwhelming favorite in the general election. A win would likely ensure he plays a significant role in the lead-up to the 2028 presidential race.

The US election system can be slow

It took a full week for California's general election matchup for governor to become clear. The final results for Maine could take even longer. And key primary contests in South Carolina are headed to a June 23 runoff.

Despite what you may be reading on the internet, this is how U.S. democracy works. These differences in how votes are counted — and how long it takes — exist because the Constitution sets out broad principles for electing a national government, but leaves the details to the states.

Tallying votes collected by local officials in individual precincts can take a long time — especially in states like Maine that offer ranked-choice voting, or South Carolina, which requires a runoff if none of the candidates earn more than 50% of the vote.

In California, which held its primary elections last week, Republican Steve Hilton joined Democrat Xavier Becerra in qualifying for the November ballot for governor on Tuesday. Elections often take a long time to sort in the state, the nation's most populous, largely because officials designed their system to prioritize accessibility over speed.

In Maine's crowded primary for governor, five Democrats were in the running and the state will move to its ranked-choice system to determine the winner. Historically, the process has taken more than a week to resolve. And in South Carolina, the Trump-backed Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette and state Attorney General Alan Wilson emerged from the crowded primary on Tuesday and will compete in a runoff election in two weeks.

UK leaders call for calm as protests break out after Belfast street stabbing

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — U.K. leaders called for calm Tuesday after the arrest of a Sudanese man accused of trying to kill a man in a vicious stabbing on a Belfast street sparked fiery anti-immigration protests because the suspect is an asylum seeker.

The victim, a man in his 40s, was taken to the hospital with serious injuries to his eyes, face and back after he was attacked late Monday in north Belfast in Northern Ireland, police said.

The suspect, 30, who was not named, was held in custody and charged with attempted murder, possession of a knife in a public place and making threats to kill. A kitchen knife was found at the scene.

Police were trying to determine the motive, but there was no information to suggest the attack caught on video was terrorism-related, said Ryan Henderson, assistant chief constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. He added that police were not seeking other suspects.

"This brutal attack will have sent shock waves through the community, causing real concern," he said.

Northern Ireland's leaders and chief constable urged people not to incite hate and fear or target particular communities after reports that protests were planned.

Protesters in black hoodies, some wearing masks, torched a bus in east Belfast, and cars and trash bins were set ablaze as groups gathered in other parts of the city.

At the other end of the U.K., demonstrators marched in Southampton, England, where the recent sentencing of a man who killed a university student with a knife led to violent clashes with police last week.

Although the victim and convicted killer were both British, protesters stood outside a Southampton hotel

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that had housed asylum seekers, holding signs that said "Illegal Migration Is Destroying Our Civilisation."

The Belfast attack sparked immediate questions about the suspect's immigration status, including from some politicians. Gavin Robinson, the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, urged authorities to curb "uncontrolled immigration."

Northern Ireland's chief constable Jon Boutcher told reporters that the suspect was living in the U.K. under a five-year visa granted in September 2023. Boutcher said he was believed to have traveled from Sudan to Paris and Dublin before claiming asylum in Belfast.

The suspect was not known to Northern Irish police, he added.

When pressed on the question in Parliament, Northern Ireland Secretary Hilary Benn said he could not confirm whether the alleged attacker came to the U.K. illegally.

Starmer condemned the attack as "sickening" and said that he had "no tolerance for abhorrent scenes of violence like this on our streets."

His office said "it is time for calm," adding "it's important that police have the time and space to investigate appropriately."

Police and senior politicians urged people not to share the graphic images of the attack that were circulating online, or to spread disinformation about the situation.

Last week a separate case of a university student who was stabbed to death in Southampton, England in December was seized on by activists and U.S. Vice President JD Vance who blamed immigration for the violence.

Henry Nowak, who was white, was killed by Vickrum Digwa, a Sikh who falsely claimed to police that he was the victim of a racist assault by Nowak. When police officers arrived, they initially treated the wounded Nowak as a suspect before noticing his injury and trying to resuscitate him.

Digwa was convicted of murder for stabbing Nowak with a Sikh dagger and sentenced last week to life in prison with a minimum 21-year term. But the case has spurred heated debates about policing and race, and a protest over Nowak's death turned violent with some attacking police with chairs and rocks. Several people were charged with violent disorder over the protest.

Insider tour of the Sagrada Familia reveals 5 divine enigmas and hidden treasures

By JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — The Sagrada Familia basilica features sandcastle-like spires, stone carved to look like lush flora, a kaleidoscopic interior and a trove of treasures, some hiding in plain sight. Even regular worshippers at Barcelona's world-famous landmark find themselves dumbstruck with wonder.

Josep Turull, the Catalan rector of the Sagrada Familia and the priest in charge of its parish activities, recently granted The Associated Press a private tour to show off his favorite gems ahead of Pope Leo XIV's highly anticipated Mass on Wednesday night.

"We say that one of the elements of the Sagrada Familia Basilica is that you never exhaust it," Turull said. "I have spent the last eight years as its rector, and each day I discover something new."

1. Enigmas are engraved in the façades

Each morning, Turull approaches the basilica's elaborately decorated façades. They are packed with an abundance of religious scenes and symbols, some easy to interpret for anyone with a basic understanding of Christianity, while others are mysterious and even shocking to see in a church.

The westward-looking Façade of the Passion is stark, its figures tormented, their bodies strained in angular poses. That was how architect Antoni Gaudí wanted it — "harsh and cruel, as if made of bones," to show the pain and torment of Christ's final days.

Decades after Gaudí's own death, sculptor Josep Subirachs tempered the façade's misery with some playful elements. There's Gaudí himself, above the central door, staring across at Jesus carrying his cross to Calvary. And what's that suduko-like numbered grid next to Judas kissing Jesus before his betrayal?

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The “magic square” symbolizes the inevitability of Christ’s death; adding the numbers in any direction always produces 33, Jesus’s age at his crucifixion.

Another puzzle awaits the patient eye that drifts across to the scene of Peter denying Christ: a small, square-shaped labyrinth. Turull said that it alludes to the need to keep faith in God when we feel lost.

2. The tower tops hold cornucopias and real birds of prey

After celebrating Mass, Leo will step outside to offer a blessing for the Tower of Jesus Christ that made the Sagrada Familia the world’s tallest church when it was raised in October.

The basilica’s heights are bursting with nature, from the rooster who crowed while Peter denied Christ to reptiles doing the job of gargoyles, and piles of fruit that crown its spires.

There are also flesh-and-blood beasts; a family of peregrine falcons nest in the tower dedicated to St. James, keeping away pigeons and, more importantly, their excrement.

Gaudí’s masterpiece was chosen as one of the ideal spots to reintroduce the species, as it was one of the last locations in town where these birds nested before disappearing during the 1970’s. The falcons have been breeding successfully at the basilica for over two decades.

Turull said that these lightning-fast birds of prey “recover the cycle of natural life.”

3. The tour goes underground to find Gaudí’s crypt

For the millions of annual visitors who admire the colored light filtering through the basilica’s stained-glass windows, jostle for position to snap selfies and huddle around tour guides, it is easy to overlook what Turull calls its “spiritual heart.” That requires going through a modest side entrance and descending a staircase.

Underground is a much smaller, more intimate chapel, where dozens of worshippers silently attend Mass and faith manages to keep sightseeing at bay.

Fittingly, it is here where Gaudí, a fervent Catholic, rests in a discreet tomb set inside a nook. He died exactly 100 years ago to the day when he was hit by a streetcar.

“People come to ask for his intercession,” Turull said, gesturing to the tomb interred in the floor. “That’s why there are so many candles. Because people place their trust in him. Many people have received favors for having prayed at the tomb of Gaudí.”

The Vatican is in the midst of a decades-long process that could eventually make Gaudí a saint. After Pope Francis named Gaudí “venerable” in 2025, the Vatican must now confirm a miracle attributed to his intercession for him to be beatified, then a second miracle for him to be canonized.

The basilica has proposed that the pope pray at Gaudí’s tomb during his visit, but whether he does remains to be seen.

4. A seashell for holy water

Before ascending, Turull pauses at an enormous seashell — a real one, not made of stone — that serves as a basin for holy water. He said that Gaudí had the seashell from the Philippines set in wrought iron and fixed to the column.

“Gaudí always takes nature as an example,” Turull said, referencing the way the natural world inspired his designs and decorations.

5. A changing room fit for a pope

Up a twisting staircase, a private room bathed in sunlight houses two freestanding oak cabinets laced with intricate ironwork. Designed by Gaudí, they hold the basilica’s most precious relics and most important clerical clothing. Among them is Pope Benedict XVI’s chasuble — a cloak that clergy wear when celebrating Mass — from when he consecrated the Sagrada Familia in 2010.

This is where Pope Leo will change into a chasuble that is being sewn at a workshop just for this occasion.

Turull said the vestment will feature details symbolizing the day’s importance and a design related to the basilica’s recently raised Cross of Jesus Christ. But he won’t say anything more for now; some things need to stay secret.

Bill Gates to testify in congressional panel's Jeffrey Epstein investigation

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bill Gates will appear Wednesday before a congressional panel investigating the Jeffrey Epstein files, becoming the latest powerful figure linked to the disgraced financier to testify.

Members of the House Oversight Committee are slated to interview the billionaire Microsoft co-founder behind closed doors, as they have done with other witnesses in the investigation. Transcripts are often released later.

Republican U.S. Rep. James Comer, the committee chairman, formally requested that Gates testify after he appeared multiple times in a trove of documents released by the Justice Department as part of its Epstein probe.

The files read like a who's who of powerful men across tech, finance, politics and other industries. All have denied involvement in Epstein's crimes, but some maintained or formed friendships with him even after his history of sexual abuse came to light.

Included in the files are calendar entries for meetings between Gates and Epstein, email correspondence between the two about philanthropic projects and photos of Gates at events that Epstein also attended.

Their professional relationship began in 2011, three years after Epstein pleaded guilty to soliciting prostitution from a minor, and lasted until at least late 2014, according to the documents.

Epstein was federally indicted in July 2019 on charges of sex trafficking of minors and conspiracy to commit sex trafficking of minors. The Justice Department alleged that Epstein formed a vast network of underage girls, some as young as 14, for him to sexually abuse between 2002 and 2005. He died by suicide in 2019 while awaiting trial.

Gates, who chairs the Gates Foundation, has not been accused of wrongdoing in connection with Epstein and has denied any knowledge of Epstein's abuse of girls. He has said they met only to discuss philanthropy and has called his association with Epstein "a huge mistake."

Both Gates and his ex-wife, Melinda French Gates, have said his association with Epstein created tension in their marriage.

The foundation acknowledged in February that a small number of employees had met with Epstein based on his "claims that he could mobilize significant philanthropic resources for global health." They never created a charitable fund together, and the foundation made no payments to Epstein.

Foundation CEO Mark Suzman commissioned an external review in March to examine its past engagement with Epstein.

At another closed-door deposition in February, former President Bill Clinton faced more than six hours of questioning from lawmakers about his association with Epstein more than two decades ago. Epstein had visited the White House several times during Clinton's presidency, and Clinton flew occasionally on Epstein's private jet.

The former Democratic president said he had seen no signs of Epstein's sexual abuse and stopped associating with him long before Epstein's 2008 guilty plea. Clinton has not been accused of any wrongdoing in connection with Epstein.

Democrats on the House committee have pushed for testimony from President Donald Trump, a Republican who had his own relationship with Epstein. Republicans have said they have not come across any evidence that Trump did anything wrong during his well-documented friendship with Epstein.

Solar power hits new milestones in the US even as Trump boosts coal over clean energy

By JENNIFER McDERMOTT Associated Press

Even as President Donald Trump boosts coal over clean energy, solar power is hitting new milestones in the U.S. and remains the leading source of new power.

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Data released Wednesday by global energy think tank Ember, along with a report by the Solar Energy Industries Association and analytics firm Wood Mackenzie, show the continued growth of solar and decline of coal in the United States despite federal policy. In May, for the first time, solar supplied more of the nation's electricity than coal, or 12.8%, Ember said. Coal supplied 12.2%, its fourth-lowest monthly share ever.

"For years solar power has risen in the U.S. electricity mix," said Nicolas Fulghum, senior energy and data analyst at Ember. "At the same time, coal power has lost its status, first as the largest source in the U.S. mix, and then gradually over the years has fallen even further."

Solar also became the third-largest source of electricity in the U.S. in May, behind natural gas and nuclear, Fulghum said. Coal generation hit an all-time monthly low in April and rebounded only modestly in May, allowing increasing solar generation to overtake coal, he added.

Electricity is produced by converting sources of energy — fossil fuels, renewable resources and nuclear — into electrical power. Burning coal, oil and natural gas for electricity emits carbon dioxide, trapping heat in the atmosphere and warming the planet. By contrast, solar, wind, geothermal, hydropower and nuclear are carbon-free.

After about two decades of essentially flat electricity consumption in the U.S., electricity demand is increasing to power artificial intelligence, grow domestic manufacturing and electrify transportation and heating. Fulghum said he expects to see more months where solar exceeds coal generation, before overtaking it on an annual basis in a few years.

These milestones signify that solar "has staying power" at a time where there's less support for renewable energy at the federal level, he added.

Wind and solar combined have overtaken coal in the past, and wind power alone has outpaced coal during spring months when wind speeds pick up. Ember gets its hourly and monthly data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Globally, electricity generation from renewables is growing rapidly. Renewables will become the largest global energy source, used for almost 45% of electricity generation by 2030, according to the International Energy Agency.

Trump helps the struggling US coal industry while curtailing solar and wind

Last week, Trump announced a plan to boost the struggling U.S. coal industry by spending nearly \$700 million to support coal-fired power plants and coal exports. Trump said at a White House event that "coal's a great business," and that "in terms of power, there's really nothing like it."

Martin Pochtaruk, CEO and founder of Canadian-based solar panel manufacturer Heliene, said Trump can say that coal is coming back, but investors will invest their money in whatever brings the best return. And for power generation that is solar, making it the fastest-growing fuel, he added.

A White House spokeswoman defended the administration's overall energy policies, saying they were geared toward strengthening the country's security.

"The President has reversed the Left's devastating policies, saved the American coal industry, prevented the retirement of more than 17 gigawatts of power, and saved lives during heightened demand periods," Taylor Rogers said in a statement.

While Trump is trying to reverse the coal industry's decline, solar has been the top source for new power for five years, SEIA said. SEIA and Wood Mackenzie said solar and battery storage were practically the only energy resources being built in the first quarter, making up 91% of all new generating capacity.

The Trump administration has canceled solar and wind projects, implemented policies that slowed clean energy permitting and development and terminated \$7 billion in funding intended for affordable solar energy projects across the U.S.

"As power demand skyrockets, political and regulatory attacks are slowing down the exact resources we rely on," Darren Van't Hof, interim president and CEO of SEIA, said in a statement. "Impeding the only sector that is actively building new power is a reckless gamble that will only drive electricity bills higher."

Several groups sued the Environmental Protection Agency over canceling the Solar for All program. A district court dismissed the case last week citing lack of jurisdiction. The plaintiffs have another filing

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pending in the Court of Federal Claims.

In a ruling Saturday, a federal judge struck down guidance from the Internal Revenue Service restricting tax credits for wind and solar projects.

Trump has blamed renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power for skyrocketing energy costs. But energy analysts say recent price hikes are based on growing demand, aging infrastructure and increasingly extreme weather events that are exacerbated by climate change. Most recently, the war in Iran that Trump launched has also led to a spike in energy costs.

Top states for solar voted for Trump

States won by Trump in the 2024 election accounted for 74% of all solar capacity installed in the first quarter of 2026, with Texas, Florida, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Arizona and Mississippi ranking among the top 10 states for new solar additions, SEIA said. The U.S. now exceeds a total of 6 million installations nationwide across all solar sectors, which includes large-scale solar arrays, commercial, community solar and residential or rooftop solar.

Johanna Neumann, at the Environment America Research and Policy Center, said it's "good news for our health and our planet that solar continues to grow," and also, not surprising.

"Today we can harness solar more affordably than any other energy source. It's scalable. And it's also our most abundant renewable energy source," said Neumann, senior director of the center's campaign for 100% renewable energy. "So I think it's hard to keep the lid on a good idea, especially if the economics are tilting in your favor as well, which they are in the case of solar."

Environment America's renewable energy dashboard shows that 32 U.S. states generated at least 10% of their retail electricity sales from solar, wind and geothermal energy last year, compared to 18 states in 2016. Clean energy in the South is booming, particularly in Florida, Arkansas and Mississippi, Neumann said.

"I think there is a misconception in the United States that clean energy is something for the coasts and liberal cities," she said. "The true story of renewable energy is a 50-state story."

Inflation likely reached 3-year high last month as Iran war spikes gas prices

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Consumer prices probably jumped in May for the third straight month, heightening concerns for the inflation fighters at the Federal Reserve and underscoring the threat that rising costs pose for the Trump administration as midterm elections near.

Inflation is expected to reach 4.2% in May from a year earlier when the Labor Department reports last month's figures Wednesday, according to a survey of economists by data provider FactSet. The annual increase would be up from the 3.8% reading in April. On a monthly basis, prices are forecast to have risen a hefty 0.5%, slightly below the 0.6% increase in April.

Inflation had been cooling before President Donald Trump imposed sweeping tariffs in April 2025, which lifted the costs of many goods. Prices have since surged after the Iran war made oil and gas more expensive, making affordability a key political issue. The main question now is whether inflation will fade if the war ends and oil and gas prices fall, or will it persist even after the war.

Some economists worry that prices are still elevated in areas that should be unaffected by gas costs, such as dental care, motor vehicle repair, and other services. At the same time, wages are rising only modestly, which should reduce pressure on firms to raise prices further.

To that end, economists and financial markets will closely watch core prices, which exclude the volatile food and energy categories. Core inflation is forecast to have risen 0.3% in May from April, according to FactSet, a pace that is consistent with annual readings far higher than the Fed's 2% target. On an annual basis, core inflation may tick higher to 2.9% from 2.8%.

Gas prices have fallen this month, but they rose in May because of Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which has choked off about a fifth of the world's oil supply. Prices at the pump rose, on average, from about \$4.04 in mid-April to \$4.49 in mid-May, according to the Energy Information Administration.

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They have since fallen back to \$4.16 on average nationwide, according to AAA, which could lead to a cooler inflation reading in June.

More expensive diesel fuel has lifted shipping costs, with companies like UPS and FedEx adding fuel surcharges in the past couple of months. That is likely to push up grocery prices, which jumped 0.7% in April and are 2.9% higher than a year ago.

Stubbornly high inflation has shifted the debate among Fed policymakers, who had signaled at the start of the year that they were inclined to cut their key rate twice more this year. Now, more officials are saying they expect the Fed's next move will likely be a hike rather than a cut. When the Fed boosts its key rate, it typically over time leads to higher borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans, and business loans.

Wall Street investors expect the Fed to raise rates in December, according to futures prices tracked by CME Fedwatch.

Despite higher inflation, the job market appears to be improving, with hiring increasing to a healthy level in May, and the economy is still growing. These positive signs suggest the Fed doesn't need to cut rates to stimulate growth and hiring. They also signal that the Fed's rate isn't so high that it is weighing on the economy. Yet some officials want rates to cool growth a bit, because that can bring down inflation.

Interest rates on two-year and 10-year Treasury securities have increased since Friday's jobs report showed hiring accelerated in May, a sign investors expect inflation may remain elevated and eventually require Fed rate hikes.

Higher inflation has put the new Fed Chair, Kevin Warsh, in a difficult spot. He advocated for rate cuts last year and was chosen by Trump to replace Jerome Powell, after Trump relentlessly criticized Powell for not reducing rates more quickly. Yet for now, Trump and White House officials are mainly arguing that interest rates don't need to increase, rather than demanding further cuts.

Some economists still see tariffs pushing up some costs, particularly clothing, which jumped 0.6% in April and are 4.2% more expensive than a year ago. Pricier fuel may have also led to higher airline fares last month, which would lift core inflation.

Democrat Graham Platner will try to unseat GOP Sen. Susan Collins in a critical Senate matchup

By PATRICK WHITTLE and KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Graham Platner won the Maine Democratic primary for U.S. Senate on Tuesday, channeling voter frustration over the high cost of living and overcoming revelations about his past to set up a high-stakes race against Republican Sen. Susan Collins.

Speaking to supporters in the small town where he was born, Platner, an oyster farmer and combat veteran, stressed a message of redemption as he promised to oust Collins. Democrats see the race as a top opportunity to flip a GOP-held seat and a must-win as the party tries to claim control of the Senate in November.

Platner's expected win in the primary came after days of questions about his past personal conduct, particularly his relationships with women, that threatened to undermine enthusiasm on the left over his candidacy.

"If you believe, as I do, that we can change our politics and change our country, then you must also believe that people can change," Platner said during his acceptance speech in Blue Hill, a rural town where he was born, as the crowd cheered on. "And the reason I believe that is because I have lived it."

Maine is the only state with a competitive Senate race where voters supported Democrat Kamala Harris over Donald Trump in 2024. Collins is the only Republican senator from New England.

Platner, a progressive who had early support from Sen. Bernie Sanders, has said he plans to focus on economic issues such as housing and healthcare. He'll be facing one of the most powerful legislators in the Senate, and one of its few remaining moderate Republicans.

"Any of those who feel let down, or disappointed, or disillusioned, it is my job to earn your trust, faith and support, and I will spend every day of this campaign, and if I have the privilege, every day in the

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United States Senate doing exactly that," Platner said.

Maine voters also were choosing nominees for governor U.S. House. The Democratic and Republican primaries for governor and the 2nd Congressional District will be decided by ranked choice voting after no candidate won a majority Tuesday.

Platner blasts Collins as 'spineless'

After thanking his supporters, Platner quickly pivoted to attacking Collins, who was unopposed in the GOP Maine primary.

"Susan Collins has never met a war she didn't like, she's been supporting endless wars since I was a teenager, and I know, I had to fight in two of them," Platner, a Marine and U.S. Army veteran, said. "You and your friends profited, and my friends died."

He also criticized Collins for voting alongside Trump, stressing she was a key vote in support of putting conservative judges on the U.S. Supreme Court.

"She has become just as spineless and corrupt as the establishment she now serves," Platner said, noting that Collins once promised to only serve two terms.

First elected in 1996, Collins has said her experience and key position as chair of the powerful appropriations committee are two reasons to send her back to the Senate.

"While others talk about revolution and division, Susan Collins is delivering for Maine communities by funding rural hospitals, supporting our shipbuilders and fishermen, improving infrastructure, expanding broadband, and strengthening public safety," said Collins' spokesperson, Shawn Roderick. "Maine people are practical. They care about whether their communities are stronger and their families are better off. That's exactly what Susan Collins is focused on every single day."

Platner energized Democratic voters

Platner, 41, has focused his campaign on fighting the high costs he says hold down the middle class and said he got in the race to focus on income inequality. He had early support from progressive champions helping to boost his candidacy.

Democratic Gov. Janet Mills, who backed out of the race earlier this year after citing trouble raising enough funds, has yet to endorse Platner. In a statement Tuesday, the governor thanked her supporters but did not mention Platner.

Platner's background has repeatedly generated criticism from both the right and the left.

Old online comments made by Platner in which he appeared to endorse political violence, dismiss rape in the military and criticize police officers and rural America surfaced last year. Platner apologized for the comments and said he was struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder and depression when he wrote them.

He's also faced questions about a skull-and-crossbones tattoo recognized as a Nazi symbol. Platner has repeatedly said he was unaware of the symbol's association but has since had the tattoo covered with a different design. A former girlfriend told New York Times has since said that he did.

More recently, reports emerged that he previously exchanged sexually explicit text messages with several women while married. Platner hasn't directly denied the texts and instead criticized the aide who talked to news outlets and accused the media of running gossip.

The New York Times last week reported about his relationships with previous girlfriends, one of whom said Platner twisted her arm during an argument and locked her in a room. Platner's campaign disputed the allegation.

Voter Annette Babcock, from Sullivan, said she's met him a few times and likes that he's not an established politician. His recent controversies didn't dissuade her from supporting him.

"The Republicans don't have much moral high ground to stand on when they're criticizing him for what he's done when Trump is a convicted felon," she said.

Governor and 2nd House District races to be decided by ranked choice

No candidate won a majority of the vote in either primary for governor or in the Democratic primary for the 2nd Congressional District, so the races will go to ranked runoffs. Those tabulations could take more

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than a week to determine winners.

Democrats are choosing gubernatorial candidates between Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows; former Maine Senate President Troy Jackson; former Speaker of the Maine House of Representatives Hannah Pingree; energy executive Angus King III; and former director of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention Nirav Shah.

In the 2nd Congressional District, former Maine Secretary of State Matt Dunlap, state Sen. Joe Baldacci, former U.S. Senate candidate Jordan Wood and social worker Paige Loud are on the ballot for the Democrats. The winner will face former Gov. Paul LePage, a Trump ally.

On the Republican ballot for governor, voters are choosing between former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Bobby Charles; healthcare executive Jonathan Bush; former Maine Senate Majority Leader Garrett Mason; University of Maine System trustee Owen McCarthy; former Paris, Maine, selectman Robert Wesels; and business owners David Jones and Ben Midgley.

US and Iran launch airstrikes after Trump blames Tehran for downing Army helicopter

By JON GAMBRELL, KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The U.S. military launched airstrikes and Iran retaliated Wednesday following the crash of an Army helicopter near the Strait of Hormuz that U.S. President Donald Trump blamed on the Islamic Republic.

Iran launched attacks in Bahrain and Kuwait, which both sounded alerts and fired air defenses in response. Iran also said it targeted an air base in Jordan hosting U.S. forces, which was not immediately acknowledged either by American or Jordanian officials.

Since the U.S. and Israel began striking Iran on Feb. 28, the war has shaken the global economy, driven up energy prices around the world and made many basics, including food, more expensive.

Officials have been unable to turn the April ceasefire into a deal to permanently end the conflict, particularly as Israel intensifies and expands its military campaign in Lebanon against the Iranian-backed militia Hezbollah.

Strikes by US and Iran shake the Mideast

Fighter jets from the U.S. Air Force and Navy conducted the strikes in Iran, the U.S. military's Central Command said, targeting "air defense, ground control stations, and surveillance radar sites." Iran acknowledged strikes around Bandar Abbas and Qeshm Island, but gave no details on the damage.

"The operation was a proportional response to recent attacks on U.S. forces and international commercial ships transiting regional waters," Central Command said.

Trump said earlier in a social media post that Iran had shot down the aircraft while it was on patrol over the strait and declared that the U.S. "must, of necessity, respond to this attack." Iran's top diplomat said foreign military forces near its territory "are at constant risk" and later vowed that there would be a response to the new U.S. strikes.

Iranian forces "will leave no attack or threat unanswered," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on X. "Leave our region if you want to be safe."

The downing of the Apache attack helicopter and the strikes by the U.S. military further strained a two-month ceasefire a day after Iran and Israel exchanged fire for the first time since the fragile truce took effect. Iranian state television said Tuesday that the Israeli attacks killed at least two members of the country's air-defense units.

US helicopter collided with Iranian drone, official says

The Army AH-64 Apache attack helicopter went down after colliding with an Iranian drone, according to a U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation.

It wasn't clear whether the collision was intentional, and official statements only said the crash is under investigation. CNN, CBS News and other outlets earlier reported the collision.

In the first known operation of its kind by the American military, a drone boat rescued two aviators at

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3:30 a.m. local time Tuesday, about two hours after their aircraft went down during a patrol off the coast of Oman, U.S. Central Command said.

Trump said both service members were "safe and uninjured."

The U.S. service members were spotted and picked up by a drone boat that took them to another location on the water, where they were picked up by a helicopter, said Capt. Tim Hawkins, a spokesman for U.S. Central Command. He initially said the drone took the two to shore, and he did not elaborate on the updated timeline.

It was the first known drone rescue at sea by the U.S. military, Hawkins said.

AH-64 Apache helicopters have been a key asset for the American military as it enforces a blockade on Iranian crude oil shipments and tankers, seeking to pressure Tehran into a deal. The helicopters have also been used by the United Arab Emirates to shoot down Iranian drones.

The drone used to perform the rescue was a 24-foot (7.3-meter) vessel called a Corsair, Hawkins said. It's manufactured by Saronic Technologies.

The drone was assigned to the Navy's Task Force 59, established in 2021 as the Navy's first uncrewed and artificial intelligence unit. It focuses on maritime security in the Middle East, including the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez Canal.

Soon after Trump made his accusation that Iran shot down the aircraft, Araghchi said the strait is "thousands of miles away from U.S. shores."

"Foreign forces in proximity to our territory are at constant risk on account of their own human errors, plain accidents, or potentially being caught in crossfire," Araghchi wrote on social media. "To reduce risk, best solution is for them to leave."

Trump had insisted an Iran deal was coming

Before he accused Iran of downing the U.S. helicopter, Trump expressed renewed optimism over negotiations with Iran, but didn't say why there was reason for optimism.

Mediators, led predominantly by Pakistan, have been trying for weeks to get a deal across the line. However, both Iran and the U.S. have taken hard-line positions.

The U.S. wants to see Iran give up its stockpile of highly enriched uranium, which is believed to be entombed in the aftermath of American airstrikes that happened during the 12-day war in 2025. But Iran is refusing that and demanding relief from sanctions. It also wants the release of frozen assets even before a final agreement is in place, something rejected by Trump.

The continued fighting between Israel and Hezbollah is still a top Iranian priority. Lebanon's army chief, Gen. Rodolphe Haykal, traveled to Pakistan on Tuesday. There, he met Pakistan's army chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, who has been a key figure in the Iran-U.S. talks.

Haykal's visit comes as Lebanon's government takes an increasingly hard line on Hezbollah but remains unable to disarm the powerful militia. Hezbollah thanked Iran on Tuesday for attacking Israel "in defense of our Lebanese people," suggesting that Lebanon's government should take this opportunity to improve relations with Tehran.

Texas teen who fatally stabbed track athlete at school meet found guilty and sentenced to prison

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

MCKINNEY, Texas (AP) — A Texas teenager who fatally stabbed a 17-year-old track athlete from a rival team during a high school meet was convicted of murder and sentenced to 35 years in prison on Tuesday in a case that drew wide attention beyond the booming Dallas suburb where they were students. A jury rejected Karmelo Anthony's claims of self-defense during a confrontation with Austin Metcalf in stadium bleachers last year. Most people who testified were students who described a heated exchange over Anthony's refusal on a rainy spring day to leave a tent that belonged to Metcalf's team.

Anthony, now 19, did not testify at trial and only his mother took the stand during the sentencing phase, telling jurors her son was sorry.

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Notoriety about the case spread, in part, because of a flood of social media posts that amplified the killing in racial terms. Anthony is Black; Metcalf was white. Lawyers on both sides, however, told jurors that the tragedy had nothing to do with race.

Jeff Metcalf, Austin's father, had also denounced those who sought to stoke racial divisions after his son was killed. A year later, he said again in a Collin County courtroom that it was never about race while his voice swelled with anger over the death of his son.

"You failed your parents, you failed yourself and you failed society," said Metcalf, looking at Anthony after the teenager was sentenced.

Jurors, who deliberated for less than three hours, had the option of a lesser charge, manslaughter, but didn't choose it.

Prosecutor Bill Wirsky had asked for a lengthy prison term.

"Mercy to the guilty," he said, "is cruelty to the innocent."

Earlier Tuesday, during the trial's closing arguments, the jury heard dueling narratives from Wirsky and defense attorney Mike Howard about what happened in April 2025.

Several schools were competing when Anthony sat under the Memorial High School tent that was perched in the bleachers. Austin Metcalf and others had repeatedly told Anthony to leave, witnesses testified, leading to an escalating confrontation.

Howard told jurors that Metcalf had "no legal right to put his hands on Karmelo."

"Texas law does not require that you wait until you get hit," Howard said. "In that split second of chaos, you must put yourself in his shoes."

During the nearly weeklong trial, prosecutors said that Anthony provoked Metcalf, and witnesses have testified that Anthony was the aggressor.

"This is not self-defense, folks. It's murder plain and simple," Wirsky said.

Anthony at one point reached inside a bag and replied: "Touch me and see what happens," according to a police report.

Metcalf pushed Anthony, according to witnesses, who said Anthony then pulled out a knife and stabbed him in the chest.

"You don't get to meet a shove with a stab, especially if you provoke the shove," Wirsky said.

The teens, both from Frisco, didn't know each other.

"He's very sorry for what he did. Please, have mercy on my son," Anthony's mother, Kala Hayes, pleaded to jurors shortly after the verdict.

The trial drew lines of spectators hoping to find seats in the gallery and unfolded amid heavy security at the Collin County courthouse. As police officers watched Tuesday, dozens of people stood outside the courthouse in 90 degree Fahrenheit heat (32 degrees Celsius) to await the verdict. There were wails of grief from one woman — "This isn't real!" — when the result became known.

Frisco is one of Texas' fastest-growing cities and is dotted with dozens of modern school campuses and gleaming athletic facilities. The parents of Anthony and Metcalf have said they were good students who planned to go to college.

Several students testified that Metcalf, after ordering Anthony to leave his team's tent, scoffed before Anthony reached into a bag and pulled out a knife.

One teen recalled Metcalf telling Anthony, "You don't have anything in that backpack. It's Frisco."

AP Interview: Albania's leader defends Kushner-linked luxury development

By ZANA CIMILI Associated Press

TIRANA, Albania (AP) — Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama is vowing to press ahead with a luxury development linked to U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, despite a surge in protests against it there.

In an interview with The Associated Press on Tuesday, Rama dismissed environmental objections as the

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result of misinformation and said the development was turning Albania from a country once ignored by investors into one "where the big capital wants to come and the big investors want to come."

The government says the development would be transformational for the former communist nation as it seeks to enter the high-end tourism market and pushes for European Union membership.

But thousands of demonstrators have joined daily protests outside Rama's office in the capital, Tirana — including on Tuesday — against the planned project that includes hotels, apartments, villas and a marina for yachts.

The prime minister said a formal environmental impact assessment has not started, even though work has begun to clear land inside a nature reserve.

Asked if he might step back from the project, Rama refused, adding, "Step back from what?"

Albania's anti-corruption agency has opened an investigation related to the project. The government says the land is privately owned, but rival claims over its privatization have emerged.

'Your country's absolutely stunning'

Rama said Kushner's proposal began by chance. He recalled a dinner in southern Albania with Kushner, his wife, Ivanka Trump, and friends who had stopped in the port of Durres to refuel their boat on the way to Montenegro.

Months later, Kushner approached him at a gathering of world leaders and business executives in Davos, Switzerland, and expressed interest in investing in Albania, Rama said.

"Your country's absolutely stunning, and we would like to look for a chance to invest," Rama recalled Kushner telling him.

An investment firm linked to Kushner has been granted special investor status by Albanian authorities.

The luxury project has two components: a coastal development in the Narta Lagoon area, which is a wildlife reserve, and a smaller resort on the nearby uninhabited island of Sazan, a communist-era military base.

'This is still a planning process'

Work has already begun to clear land inside a nature reserve used by migratory birds, prompting environmental groups to warn of the destruction of long-preserved habitats. Albania has 450 kilometers (280 miles) of coast that remained largely underdeveloped during decades of harsh communist rule.

Rama said a formal environmental impact assessment has not started because the plan for the development has not been finalized. He said international architects and environmental specialists are still shaping the proposal.

"When it comes to the environment, there is no project yet, there is no environmental impact assessment yet, because this is still a planning process," he said.

He argued that Albania has a strong conservation record, pointing to bans on hunting and logging that he said helped flamingo populations recover.

"We have fantastic documentation of how the wildlife in Albania came back thanks to the 10 years moratorium of hunting," Rama said.

Since late May, excavators and other heavy machinery have entered the planned development area, opening access routes, digging into the sand, clearing land among pine trees and installing fencing.

Rama says criticism is full of 'half-truths'

The prime minister suggested that some of the backlash to the project was being amplified by outside interference, citing what he described as a long-running Iranian cyber campaign against Albania.

Albania has long accused Iran of backing hackers who attack the country's cyber infrastructure, after Albania sheltered members of an Iranian opposition group. Tehran has denied the allegations.

"There is a lot of manipulation. There is a lot of half-truths that become bigger and bigger lies by the hour," he said.

He emphasized that he was not accusing individual protesters of acting as foreign agents.

Democrat Xavier Becerra and Republican Steve Hilton will face off in California governor's race

By SOPHIE AUSTIN Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — The race for California governor this fall will be a battle between a Democrat promising to cement the state's status as a stronghold of liberal policies and a Republican pledging to dramatically reverse course in the nation's most populous state.

Republican Steve Hilton, a former Fox News commentator backed by President Donald Trump, has won enough votes to advance to the general election, The Associated Press determined Tuesday. He'll face Democrat Xavier Becerra, a former state attorney general and health secretary under President Joe Biden.

The winner will succeed Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom to lead the state that is home to roughly 39 million people, Hollywood, a booming tech industry and a vast farming region that helps feed the nation. By itself California represents one of the largest economies in the world.

The next governor will have to take on stubborn issues including a high cost of living, housing shortages and homelessness.

Democrats outnumber Republicans in California

Hilton is banking his campaign on voters being frustrated enough to do something they have not done in two decades: elect a Republican to statewide office. The last time that happened was when Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger won a second term in 2006. Hilton has campaigned as an outsider who would bring change after more than 15 years of one-party rule.

"If you're happy with the way that California is being run, Xavier Becerra is your guy," Hilton said in a recent interview. "If you want change, vote for me."

But simply having an 'R' next to his name stacks the odds against Hilton, since Republicans make up just about 25% of registered voters compared with Democrats' 45%. Trump's endorsement likely boosted Hilton with GOP voters during the primary but could be a major liability in the general election.

Becerra was a chief architect of the state's resistance to Trump during the first years of his presidency after then-Gov. Jerry Brown, a Democrat, appointed him attorney general in 2017. In that role Becerra filed at least 120 legal actions against the federal government.

Becerra has made pushing back against Trump's incursions a central piece of this campaign, as the president has repeatedly gone after the state during his second term including by curbing a signature plan to reduce planet-warning emissions from cars, withholding aid for wildfire recovery and suing over state policies supporting transgender student-athletes.

"Donald Trump is doubling down on decline and counting on people being too fearful, distracted or gullible to fight back," Becerra told a crowd on primary night. "As governor I will never back down from the threats of small cowards in big offices."

Results conclude a chaotic primary

It took nearly a week to determine the general election matchup for governor due to California's notoriously slow vote-counting process. Ballots are mailed to every eligible voter and they are counted if they are postmarked by Election Day and arrive at an election office within seven days. Counties process and count mail ballots in roughly the order they are received, so the last ones returned are the last ones counted.

The AP determined Friday that Becerra had won enough votes to advance to November. Hilton had been vying for a second spot against Democrat Tom Steyer, a billionaire hedge fund manager turned climate activist who poured \$215 million of his personal fortune into the campaign and blasted Californians' screens with ads.

Steyer steadily narrowed Hilton's lead for second place every day since Election Day on June 2. But he was never on track to fully close the gap. The AP advanced Hilton to the general election on Tuesday after determining there weren't enough outstanding votes for Steyer to catch Hilton.

Election data shows that large numbers of Democratic voters held onto their ballots until the final days of the election. That helped explain why Steyer did better than Hilton in the votes counted after Election Day.

Steyer conceded Tuesday and urged his supporters to back Becerra.

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"It would be a travesty for Steve Hilton to win the governorship, and Californians must unite behind Xavier Becerra to ensure he does not," he said in a statement.

Affordability is a central issue

How to make the state more affordable was a major theme throughout the primary. Hilton promised to make Californians' first \$100,000 free of income tax, create a loan program for first-time homebuyers and freeze in-state tuition at public colleges. Becerra, meanwhile, said he would declare states of emergency to address high energy costs and housing shortages and to freeze home insurance rates.

The two have one thing in common: They both come from immigrant backgrounds.

Hilton moved to California from the United Kingdom in 2012 and became a citizen in 2021. Back in the U.K., he was an adviser to Conservative Party officials including former Prime Minister David Cameron.

Hilton has poked fun at his British accent by comparing himself to the Austria-born Schwarzenegger.

"I know that some of you may be watching and saying, 'Who is this guy with a funny accent?'" he said on election night. "Well you know there was actually an immigrant who was governor of California not that long ago."

Becerra was born to Mexican immigrant parents in Sacramento and also raised there. He said his family's story mirrored his "underdog" campaign for governor.

"Like my parents, I never gave up," he told supporters on election night. "I never stopped believing in the beaconlike goodness of California. And thankfully, neither did you."

Becerra would be the state's first Latino governor since the late 1800s.

Judge bars Alabama nitrogen gas execution, says method is unconstitutionally cruel

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — A federal judge on Tuesday permanently blocked Alabama from executing an inmate with nitrogen gas after declaring the method violates the U.S. Constitution's ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

U.S. District Judge Emily Marks issued the ruling hours after an appeals court reversed her initial finding that the method was constitutional. Marks permanently enjoined the state from executing Jeffrey Lee, 49, by nitrogen gas. He was scheduled to be executed Thursday.

The decision, for now, blocks the use of the controversial new execution method that Alabama has championed since 2024. But the issue seems likely bound for the U.S. Supreme Court, which so far has never ruled a state's execution method to be unconstitutional.

Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall's office is appealing the decision, according to a Tuesday night court filing. Marshall's office did not issue an immediate comment. A spokeswoman for Lee's legal team said they did not have an immediate comment.

Marks wrote that the appeals court found the method carried "a substantial risk of serious harm." She also ruled that the state had the ability to switch to Lee's preferred method, a firing squad. Inmates challenging execution methods are required to suggest an alternative method.

"Therefore, Lee has shown by a preponderance of the evidence that the protocol constitutes cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the Eighth Amendment," Marks wrote.

Marks wrote that her order only blocks the state from executing Lee by nitrogen gas. She noted the state has two other authorized execution methods, lethal injection and the electric chair. She said Lee is "not entitled to an injunction barring the state from executing him using one of those methods."

Alabama in 2024 began using nitrogen gas to carry out some executions. The execution method involves strapping a respirator to the person's face and replacing breathable air with pure nitrogen gas, causing death from lack of oxygen. Nitrogen has been used in eight executions in the United States — seven times in Alabama and once in Louisiana. Lee was scheduled to be the ninth person executed with nitrogen.

A three-judge panel from the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Monday set the stage for Tuesday's ruling. The court said the three minutes that it could take for an inmate to lose awareness is an "intolerable"

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time frame, "given the suffering that would likely take place under Alabama's nitrogen hypoxia protocol."

The decision was welcomed by death penalty opponents and critics of the controversial execution method.

"Three minutes of conscious suffocation is torturous. If that doesn't violate the constitution, let alone international law, nothing would," said Bernard Harcourt, a professor at Columbia University Law School. Harcourt represents one of several other Alabama inmates challenging the method as unconstitutional.

The Rev. Jeff Hood, who served as spiritual adviser at two nitrogen executions, said, "I pray that we are witnessing the collapse of this horrific method nationwide."

Alabama has maintained that the method is constitutional.

In her 26-page ruling, Marks noted the constant litigation over execution methods.

"Were Alabama to adopt firing squad as a method of execution, that method would likely be challenged as well. Indeed, there is likely no method — no matter how humane — that would be immune to constitutional challenge. But the Constitution does not guarantee a painless death, and human life cannot be purposefully extinguished without some risk of pain. The Court, the condemned, and the State must all confront that sobering reality," Marks wrote.

Lee is currently housed at Holman Correctional Facility in Atmore. He was convicted of two counts of capital murder for killing Jimmy Ellis and Elaine Thompson while robbing a pawnshop on Dec. 12, 1998. Prosecutors said Lee entered Jimmy's Pawnshop with a sawed-off shotgun and shot Ellis, the owner of the store, and Thompson, a store employee.

A jury voted 7-5 that Lee should receive a sentence of life imprisonment. However, a judge overrode that recommendation and sentenced Lee to death. Alabama in 2017 ended the practice of judicial override and no longer allows a judge to disregard a jury's sentencing decision in death penalty cases.

House passes \$70B bill to fund immigration enforcement for 3 years, sending to Trump

By KEVIN FREKING and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A bill to provide nearly \$70 billion for immigration enforcement narrowly passed the House on Tuesday and now goes to President Donald Trump for his signature, bolstering the administration's deportation agenda for the remainder of his time in the White House.

Republicans used their majority to get the bill over the finish line, funding a pair of Homeland Security agencies through the next three years. The bill passed by a vote of 214-212, over the objections of Democrats. Trump is expected to sign it into law on Wednesday.

The White House says the bill will provide \$38 billion for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, \$26 billion for the Border Patrol and another \$5 billion to cover unforeseen costs. It frontloads routine annual funding, ensuring a virtually uninterrupted flow of money as the Trump administration seeks to deport some 1 million people per year.

Speaker Mike Johnson needed near-perfect attendance and unity on his side to complete weeks of action. The legislation got sidetracked over \$1 billion for White House security, including for Trump's new ballroom, and a \$1.8 billion fund to compensate his allies who claim they have been unjustly investigated and prosecuted. Those proposals proved politically toxic and were scrapped.

Now, the bill is focused entirely on immigration enforcement, a topic that Republicans have treated as a defining issue between the two major political parties and one they hope will carry them to victory in this year's midterm elections.

"It's long overdue," said Johnson, R-La., of the bill. "We have to fund border security and immigration enforcement, and it's sad that Republicans have to do it on our own."

But Democratic Rep. Lloyd Doggett of Texas called it a "slush fund for ICE."

Funding accelerates Trump's deportation agenda

The funding comes on top of the nearly \$140 billion that the Republican-controlled Congress gave ICE and Customs and Border Protection last year as part of Trump's tax and spending cuts bill.

Democrats objected to giving the agencies more money without significant changes in the way they

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operate after the deaths of Alex Pretti and Renee Good in Minneapolis. For example, Democrats insisted that agents remove masks and be required to display their ID badges during enforcement operations and that they get a judicial warrant before entering private property. Instead, the funding will come with virtually no strings attached.

Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York said Republicans weren't focused on the top priorities of the American people and have cut access to Medicaid and nutrition assistance through Trump's earlier tax and spending cut bill.

"Republicans have now come back for more, to give ICE and Donald Trump's violent mass deportation machine another \$70 billion blank check, with no oversight, no accountability and no guardrails," Jeffries said.

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise countered that Democrats were not adequately supportive of law enforcement.

"Make no mistake, if you're voting yes, you're not only voting to secure America's border, you're voting to fund law enforcement," Scalise said. "And if you vote no, you are voting to defund the police."

Homeland Security faced the longest shutdown in history

The package is the result of a monthslong standoff in Congress after Democrats refused to fund the Department of Homeland Security in the wake of the immigration enforcement actions in Minneapolis and other American cities, leading to the longest shutdown in agency history.

Negotiations had been underway with the White House to alter ICE operations as Democrats were demanding. When those negotiations failed, Republicans turned to a complicated procedural maneuver to get around the filibuster and pass the immigration funding with no Democratic votes.

Rep. Jodey Arrington, R-Texas, the chairman of the Budget Committee, said the money would provide "regular, normal funding" that ICE and the Border Patrol would get through the annual budgeting process.

"And we're going to do it, not for one year, but for three years, so we don't end up here again."

The Senate completed its work on the legislation last week during an overnight session on a nearly party-line vote, with Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska the only Republican to oppose it.

Money comes at a pivotal time for Trump's immigration agenda

The money will come at a pivotal time for the Department of Homeland Security, which is under new leadership after Trump replaced Kristi Noem with new Secretary Markwayne Mullin in March.

While Mullin has vowed to keep the department out of the headlines, the administration is under pressure from anti-immigration advocates to deliver on Trump's campaign promise of the largest deportation operation in American history.

At the same time, the administration is making it more difficult for certain legal immigrants to remain in the U.S. with Temporary Protective Status or to obtain green cards.

Lawmakers clash over DHS priorities

On the House side, Johnson had little margin for error. Rep. Kevin Kiley, I-Calif., ended up siding with Democrats on the party-line vote.

Leading up to the vote, Democrats portrayed DHS as an agency that has used its new resources to buy private jets for its leadership, warehouse immigrants in deplorable conditions and attack U.S. citizens.

"Republican leadership likes to talk a lot about common sense, but where is the common sense in giving this federal agency essentially unlimited funds without a single reform in place?" asked Rep. Pete Aguilar, chair of the House Democratic Caucus.

Republicans countered that they were fulfilling their duty to safeguard the nation and support the men and women charged with enforcing the law.

"Democrats can say whatever they want, but what it's about is public safety. What's it about is keeping Americans safe," said Rep. Michelle Fischbach, R-Minn.

Impeachment sought against federal judge over alleged sex in chambers, lying to investigators

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Two congressional Republicans from Georgia have introduced impeachment resolutions against a federal judge in Atlanta who was disciplined after an investigation found she had sex with a police officer in her chambers, attended a partisan political event and lied to investigators looking into the alleged misconduct.

U.S. Reps. Clay Fuller and Andrew Clyde filed the resolutions against U.S. District Judge Eleanor Ross. Clyde wrote Tuesday on social media that Ross' "deeply disturbing actions prove she is incapable of displaying integrity or impartiality. She must be impeached and removed from the bench."

It is up to the House Judiciary Committee to decide whether to start impeachment proceedings against Ross. Federal judges are appointed for life and can only be removed from the bench through impeachment.

A person who answered the phone in the judge's chambers Tuesday afternoon said Ross had no comment.

Ross was nominated to the Northern District of Georgia in January 2014 by then-President Barack Obama, a Democrat, and she was confirmed by the Senate in November of that year. She had previously served as a state court judge in DeKalb County, which includes a small part of Atlanta, since 2011. Before taking the bench, she had worked as a state and federal prosecutor, mostly in Atlanta, for more than a decade.

The investigation of Ross began after one of her law clerks reported that on multiple occasions the judge had engaged in sexual activity with a high-ranking uniformed police officer in her office within earshot of staff. It also was alleged that the judge didn't properly supervise clerks and on one occasion yelled and cursed at staff.

Ross received a "private reprimand" after the investigation confirmed the sexual activity and found she attended a partisan event and initially lied to deny the allegations.

The court's investigation did not publicly identify the judge or the court location within the 11th Circuit's jurisdiction, which includes Alabama, Florida and Georgia. A person familiar with the situation who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive matter confirmed to The Associated Press that Ross was the judge who was disciplined.

Separately, the Atlanta Police Department has said it has opened an investigation to determine whether the "high-ranking law enforcement officer" found to have had sex with a federal judge in the judge's chambers is a member of their department.

William Pryor, the chief judge of the 11th Circuit, opened the initial investigation of Ross. He asked her to respond to the clerk's allegations and she replied the same day and "specifically denied" each allegation. In a follow-up email the next day, the judge speculated to Pryor that the law clerk may have invented things in retaliation for being required to work in the office.

Pryor appointed a special committee to investigate. That investigation was detailed in a report attached to the disciplinary order.

The committee's review of logs and security footage showed an officer had frequently visited the judge's chambers in uniform around lunchtime. Six clerks recalled seeing someone who fit the officer's description, with three remembering overhearing what may have been sexual activity in the judge's office.

Three clerks remembered bringing summer interns on their first day to watch the judge presiding over a hearing in a criminal case. Right after that, they told the committee, the judge declined to have lunch with the interns, acknowledging having too many martinis the night before at a primary election victory party for a district attorney friend.

The clerks said the judge didn't provide sufficient guidance and "rarely, if ever, substantively edited civil orders the clerks drafted." While clerks described an "eggshell culture," the committee didn't find evidence of abusive behavior.

The judge ultimately admitted to having an extramarital sexual relationship with the officer but denied the allegations about mistreatment of staff, the committee wrote. The judge acknowledged to the committee having gone to a "mixer" of former employees of a district attorney's office, where the judge used

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to work but said it was in a separate room from the victory party.

What to know about the evolution of execution methods in the US

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

Alabama's plans to execute a death row inmate using nitrogen gas appeared to be thwarted Tuesday by a federal judge permanently blocking the state from using that method, declaring it violates the constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

U.S. District Judge Emily C. Marks issued the decision permanently enjoining the state from executing Jeffery Lee by nitrogen gas. Lee was scheduled to be executed Thursday at an Alabama prison.

A spokesman for Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall said the state is appealing the decision. The case will likely end up before the U.S. Supreme Court, which has previously let nitrogen executions proceed.

Tuesday's ruling marks the latest potential shift in the United States' ever-evolving use of capital punishment. States with the death penalty have a variety of execution methods on the books, including lethal injection, electrocution, lethal gas and firing squad.

Here's a look at the execution methods currently in use and the ones that have fallen out of favor:

Lethal injection remains the primary method in most states

Twenty-eight states and the federal government authorize the use of lethal injection, in which an inmate has one or more deadly drugs injected into their bodies as they are strapped to a gurney, according to the Death Penalty Information Center, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit center.

But lethal injection has been plagued by problems. States often struggle to obtain the necessary drugs, in part because pharmaceutical manufacturers have banned the use of the lethal injection components for executions.

Some execution teams have struggled or failed to find suitable veins, needles have become clogged or disengaged and in some cases multiple doses of the drugs have been needed to kill the condemned person.

Those problems have prompted some states to experiment with different execution methods. After a botched execution attempt in 2024, Idaho lawmakers made death by firing squad the state's primary execution method.

Lethal injection was first proposed in New York in the late 1800s, though that state eventually opted to go with electrocution, said Fordham Law School Professor Deborah Denno. The very thing that made lethal injection appealing to death penalty proponents — its relatively sanitized appearance — appalled medical societies around the country, Denno said.

"It's what people would expect when they walk into a hospital, what you would expect doctors to do who are really concerned that you don't suffer," Denno said. "So, you transplant that idea onto a method that's designed to kill somebody, and that's a really good marketing tool for the public."

Firing squads are rarely used, but that may be changing

Six people have been executed by firing squad since 1976, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. The use of firing squads is rare, but support for the approach appears to be growing in some regions.

Five states — Idaho, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Utah and South Carolina — have authorized the use of firing squads, and Florida and North Carolina both have laws allowing any constitutional method of execution to be used if necessary. Tennessee authorizes the use of methods like firing squads if its primary methods are found unconstitutional.

The U.S. Justice Department announced in April that it is adopting firing squads as a permitted method of execution as President Donald Trump's administration moves to expedite capital punishment cases.

"Not to get political, but there is a strand in our culture that is showing a greater acceptance of the use of violence in this particular context," said Denno. "In this country's history, we've never had that many states adopt firing squads ever."

In firing squad executions, a condemned person is usually bound to a chair and is shot through the heart by execution staffers standing up to 25 feet (7.6 meters) away. The method is meant to quickly stop a person's heart, but it can be botched.

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Attorneys for death row inmates in South Carolina say a man put to death by firing squad last year was conscious and likely suffered in extreme pain for as long as a minute because the bullets struck Mikal Mahdi lower than expected.

Electrocution executions are declining

Nine states authorize the use of electrocution, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Tennessee. Since 1976, 163 electrocutions have been carried out. But only 19 have been done since 2000.

In this method, a person is strapped to a chair and has electrodes placed on their head and leg before between 500 and 2,000 volts run through their body. The last electrocution took place in 2020 in Tennessee.

Texas killed 361 inmates by electrocution from 1924 to 1964, according to the state's Department of Criminal Justice.

Since 1976, 163 people have been executed by electrocution, according to the Death Penalty Information Center.

Electrocution executions have been rife with problems, particularly in Florida, where in some executions the condemned person actually caught on fire or was left with deep burns, Denno said. Two states, Georgia and Nebraska, have rendered electrocution unconstitutional.

Still, at least some death row inmates have chosen electrocution or firing squad when offered the choice between those methods and lethal injection. Those choices likely reflect more about the number of botched lethal injection executions in the U.S. than any endorsement of the other methods, said Denno.

A federal appeals court has raised questions about lethal gas executions

Nitrogen gas has been used in eight executions nationally. Seven of those were in Alabama and one in Louisiana.

Other states that include lethal gas as an authorized method are Arizona, Arkansas, California, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma and Wyoming. In lethal gas executions, a condemned person is typically strapped to a chair or gurney in an airtight chamber before it is filled with a lethal gas. A mask is placed over the prisoner's face and nitrogen gas is pumped in, depriving the person of oxygen and resulting in death. From 1979 to 1999, 11 inmates were executed using cyanide gas.

In 2024, Alabama revived the method, becoming the first state to use nitrogen gas to execute Kenneth Eugene Smith.

Smith shook violently for several minutes during the execution, and a lawsuit filed by another death row inmate contends the process was tortuous and "a human experiment that officials botched miserably."

The federal judge's ruling in Lee's case means nitrogen gas is no longer an option for executions in Alabama, but that could change if the state moves forward with its promised appeal, and if the U.S. Supreme Court agrees to consider the matter.

Lawsuits often lead states to switch execution methods

Hanging was the primary method of execution around the world for centuries, said Denno, and that didn't change in the U.S. until lawmakers became concerned that it might be struck down in the courts.

Data collected by researchers of U.S. executions from 1608 to 2002 found 9,322 people were put to death by hanging. But in capital punishment's modern era, only three individuals in the U.S. have been executed that way, one each in the years 1993, 1994 and 1996.

"Hangings are really gruesome, and they were also getting increasingly out of control with huge crowds," said Denno. "That raised a lot of public concern over what this was doing societally, and there was pressure to come up with something more humane. Parallel to all of that, there was concern among some politicians that this could lead to getting rid of the death penalty entirely, so we better come up with something else."

That same pattern continues today, said Denno.

"States typically change for one of two reasons: One, there's a series of botches in their particular state and they think the method is going to be constitutionally challenged or it is being constitutionally challenged," said Denno. "The other reason is that they look at what other states are doing. If you have a bunch of states adopting a new method, and one particular state fears their method may come under challenge, then they'll switch for that reason."

Ex-Taliban commander gets 42 years in prison in killings of US soldiers and journalists' kidnappings

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A former Taliban commander was sentenced to 42 years in prison on Tuesday for crimes including kidnapping a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and providing support that led to the deaths of three American soldiers.

Haji Najibullah's sentencing capped a daylong proceeding in Manhattan federal court that featured a dramatic few moments when the reporter, David Rohde, faced Najibullah and described how Najibullah took part in the abduction of him and two other men in 2008 in Afghanistan but was now "refusing to take responsibility as I look at him today."

Rohde, who is MSNOW's national security reporter and previously worked for The New York Times and other publications, told Judge Katherine Polk Failla that he was "surprised and disappointed" that Najibullah was trying to blame others and circumstances for his role in the kidnapping of Rohde, another journalist and a driver.

The men were held for more than seven months before making a dramatic escape from a Taliban-controlled compound in Pakistan's tribal areas.

In April 2025, Najibullah pleaded guilty to providing material support for acts of terrorism and conspiring to take hostages.

The bearded Najibullah, 50, who wore a black skull cap in court Tuesday, admitted that he provided material support including weapons to the Taliban from 2007 to 2009, knowing it would be used to kill U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan.

Speaking through an interpreter, Najibullah apologized to Rohde and his family, saying "what happened to him was terrible, and I deeply regret my role in it."

Standing at a lectern just feet from Najibullah, Rohde said it was Najibullah's lies that led him to go to what he thought was an interview but what turned into an ambush.

"Hostage taking is a cruel and cowardly crime. Family members spend weeks and months thinking they have the power to save their loved one's life," Rohde said, noting it's "an illusion" because families lack the leverage and vast sums needed to meet ransom demands.

Still, Rohde said, the pain he and those who know him have suffered is dwarfed by the deaths of three U.S. soldiers who were killed by Najibullah's cohorts in a separate operation.

Three times, he named the soldiers as he spoke, becoming emotional about their deaths, the pain his family endured and his love for journalism.

In a statement afterward, Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said the case proves that "those who harm Americans and engage in acts of terrorism will be hunted down and brought to justice, no matter how long it takes."

As she announced the sentence, the judge praised Rohde for the work that he and his wife have done on behalf of the families of others who were kidnapped.

She said she stopped short of giving Najibullah the life prison sentence that federal sentencing guidelines called for because he had pleaded guilty, sparing more trauma for his victims, and because he was subjected to harsh prison conditions for six years, including during the pandemic.

But she rejected most of the arguments for leniency made by his defense lawyer, who requested an 18-year prison term for his client as he portrayed him as doing what was necessary to protect his homeland during war.

She said fighters under his control attacked a convoy of soldiers, killing three of them.

"I don't think he needed to pull the trigger, to decapitate a body, to be responsible for what happened," Failla said.

Rohde called it the "biggest mistake of my life" to set up an interview with Najibullah that resulted in the

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kidnapping and said he would not have done it if he knew Najibullah was behind the killing of American soldiers.

He noted during his statement in court that the hostage takers had claimed he was a spy "when in fact I was a journalist" who was trying to get the viewpoint of a Taliban commander "to understand their hopes, their lives and their worldview."

Then, he repeated that he remains "a journalist and I could not be prouder of being part of this profession," a statement that briefly caused him to get choked up.

Some host cities are aiming to house, not arrest, homeless people ahead of the World Cup

By MICHAEL CASEY, R.J. RICO and CHARLOTTE KRAMON Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Just a mile from Atlanta's stadium, which will welcome tens of thousands of fans to World Cup games this month, dozens of people were camped out on a downtown sidewalk waiting for a homeless shelter to open.

Some slept in sleeping bags, face masks over their eyes to block out the afternoon sun. Others sat on the sidewalk eating from cereal boxes. Shoes lay scattered alongside empty mini-liquor bottles. A boom box blasted a Jay-Z song: "This can't be right, there's gotta be more."

Atlanta announced an ambitious plan last summer to end encampments and other street sleeping downtown ahead of the 39-day soccer spectacular that begins Thursday. Called Downtown Rising, the program said it has housed nearly 500 people. But the scene on a recent afternoon outside this shelter on Pryor Street was a visceral reminder that Atlanta has not reached everyone.

Atlanta is one of several of the cities in the United States, Canada and Mexico using the attention that comes with hosting the world's premier soccer tournament to address homelessness. Seattle announced a housing push and said it was using the World Cup to gauge its progress. Dallas said it was expanding a successful effort to house homeless people living downtown.

A survey by The Associated Press found, however, that most of the 16 venues, including New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Miami, Houston, Toronto, and Vancouver, British Columbia, are relying on existing programs — most without any new funding tied to the World Cup — to address homelessness.

Growing tent encampments have bedeviled urban leaders for years. Federal data showed a double-digit percentage increase in homelessness nationwide from 2023 to 2024, when 770,000 people were counted as homeless — a number acknowledged as an undercount. That was followed by a slight decrease last year to 745,652.

In the past, many cities have treated the homeless as an eyesore to be removed ahead of big sporting and political events.

During last year's Super Bowl, New Orleans spent millions of dollars clearing away tent encampments near the Superdome and moving the homeless into a temporary warehouse. Ahead of the 2024 Paris Olympics, migrants were bused out of the city until the Games ended. Chicago removed one of its biggest encampments ahead of the 2024 Democratic National Convention.

"These events provide a choice for communities," said Ann Oliva, CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness. "They can do the easy thing and sweep people out of encampments and into jails or other neighborhoods, or they can do the harder work that will benefit everyone in the community — housed or unhoused."

Atlanta seeks to house downtown homeless

As host of the 1996 Olympics, Atlanta removed some 9,000 homeless people to a newly built detention center. It gave others one-way bus tickets out of town and launched "Operation Olympus," detaining hundreds of people to reduce crime.

But this time around, the city was determined to do things differently.

It has raised \$185 million in state and city funding, as well as corporate grants and other donations,

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toward a goal of \$235 million, with the aim of housing 3,900 people citywide by next year. The latest city count last year showed there were some 2,900 homeless people citywide, about a third living in encampments or on the street.

"There will always be homeless people on our streets, more than likely, unfortunately," said Cathryn Vassell, the CEO of Partners for HOME, the organization tasked with creating and executing Atlanta's homelessness strategy. The goal is "to be able to identify them and quickly exit them into shelter, resources, services, and then ultimately housing."

Downtown Rising has helped Michael Sutton turn his life around. In foster care since he was an infant, he bounced from family to family. For most of the past decade, the 31-year-old slept in train stations, parks, abandoned buildings and homeless shelters.

Since September, Sutton has had a one-bedroom apartment in an Atlanta suburb and a case worker.

"Everyone has rough days, and being able to go home or vent to yourself about it, relaxing in your own home ... is priceless," Sutton said.

But not everyone can be helped.

Some homeless people recoil at shelter rules, lack the documents to quickly move into permanent housing or have complicated drug and mental health challenges, or nomadic lifestyles that make them difficult to reach.

Tommy Elam said he's been on numerous housing lists, but nothing has happened — though he's hard to find. His phone was stolen countless times and he doesn't currently have one.

"They don't know where I'm at," said Elam, who's been homeless since early 2020 and spent the last three months sleeping on the sidewalk near the Pryor Street homeless shelter, his latest spot since a crackdown on the encampment where he lived near the Georgia State Capitol building.

Standing outside the downtown supportive housing center where he now lives, Willie Jackson, who spent years on the streets, said he knows people who've been helped by the Downtown Rising initiative. But he's skeptical it will lead to lasting change after the World Cup — or that it's made a significant impact on downtown's homelessness problem.

"Just look around," he said.

No more tents in Dallas

Two years ago, it was hard to miss the hundreds of tents around Dallas City Hall.

But ahead of the World Cup, there were no tent encampments downtown, where FIFA's broadcast center is set up, or at the nearby fan zone. The matches will be played at Dallas' stadium in suburban Arlington.

Sarah Kahn, president and CEO of Housing Forward, which leads the homelessness response for Dallas and nearby Collin counties, said a \$30 million campaign since 2024 reduced the number of people sleeping on downtown streets by 87% and placed some 2,000 into permanent housing.

In March, an additional \$28 million was allocated to expand countywide, with a goal of providing 1,100 people housing, the agency said. Outreach workers deploy daily within a quarter-mile of transit hubs, the fan zone and the FIFA broadcast center to find anyone sleeping outside and offer services, it said.

Elisabeth Jordan, founder of The Human Impact, which helps the chronically homeless, praised the initiative as "the single greatest change ... in homeless response in Dallas."

But she criticized Dallas police tactics that included zip-tying and removing people who remained after their encampments were cleared. Dozens of people from one encampment were housed in May, but about 20 who remained were detained, she said. In a statement, the Dallas police department called such detentions "standard practice" for people "violating the prohibited camping law" and who refuse housing.

Kacey Coker, who spent years on the streets or in jail, described a dramatic improvement in how the homeless are treated. Authorities used to "come through with a bulldozer and take our stuff and throw it away," said the 51-year-old, who lost her birth certificate and social security card in those sweeps.

In May, she was offered a subsidized one-bedroom apartment for a few hundred dollars a month. For the first time, Coker feels safe.

"I can actually build something," she said.

Tiny homes emerge in Seattle

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At a vacant lot several miles from Seattle's stadium, workers were putting the final touches last week on 75 tiny homes.

The 70-square-foot units with a bed, space heater and air conditioner are part of Seattle Mayor Katie Wilson's ambitious plan to open 500 units of new shelter by the start of the World Cup.

It's a goal she acknowledges she has missed — by 425 units.

"The World Cup provided just kind of a good goal post," Wilson told the AP in an interview, saying the city will open an additional 228 beds by the end of the summer.

"When you put a number out there, that has the advantage of galvanizing people," but it can also be framed as a failure if you miss it, Wilson said. "So, I really hope that the message ... is look, we are making progress."

Homelessness advocates said they weren't surprised Wilson didn't meet such a lofty goal within six months of election. The World Cup isn't what's important; getting people housed is, they added.

"I'm just happy that anything has happened so far," said Bruce Drager of Ballard Community Task Force on Homeless and Hunger near where the tiny homes were built.

Camped out with his wife between a sidewalk and train tracks just blocks from the stadium, Chris Moore said he hasn't heard about the city's housing plans.

A large encampment nearby has been cleared twice in the five months since he's been there, said Moore, who's been homeless for eight years. But dozens of tents were back again a week before the first game.

"I guess because the World Cup's coming, you don't want homeless people around," he said.

Inglewood spruces up the stadium area

In Inglewood, California, site of the Los Angeles area stadium, roads were squeaky clean and paved with fresh asphalt. Bright flowers filled planters downtown and near the stadium.

"There's no homeless in Inglewood," Mayor James Butts told the AP when asked about the city's plans for housing people living on the streets ahead of the World Cup. "Just look at the numbers."

Indeed, Inglewood's homeless count last year was small — just under 400, about a third of whom were living on the street in the city of 100,000 people — compared to LA, where 43,695 homeless were counted in the city of 3.8 million-plus.

But less than 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) from the stadium and just outside Inglewood city limits, the non-profit St. Margaret's Center was handing out dozens of sack lunches for the homeless on a recent morning.

Carter Hewgley, who oversees strategic partnerships at LA County's Homeless Services and Housing Department, said it has secured three motel sites ahead of the World Cup — "not because there's games, but because there's homeless." The sites, including in Inglewood, range from 54 to 104 rooms. The agency also maintains tens of thousands of shelter beds, he said.

In Toronto and Vancouver, business as usual

In Canada, Toronto and Vancouver said they were relying on their already extensive services to provide thousands of shelter beds and temporary housing rooms, as well as outreach to those living on the streets. Vancouver has also set up centers where matches will be shown. Both said there were no plans to relocate homeless people ahead of the games.

Still, there were sporadic reports by advocates of crackdowns targeting homeless people.

In Toronto, where Canada's largest shelter system supports more than 8,500 people each night, advocates held a rally last month denouncing what they said were transit police tactics aggressively targeting the homeless at the city's main train station.

Toronto Underhoused and Homeless Union said its survey of dozens of homeless people found some forcibly removed from lavatories and elsewhere, and subjected to verbal abuse by transit police. In a statement to the AP, the city did not directly address the complaints but said it doesn't "tolerate, ignore, or condone discrimination or harassment."

In Vancouver, hundreds of activists held a protest in April over increased security ahead of the World Cup. A 2025 count showed 2,715 homeless people, some in Vancouver's Downtown East Side area near the stadium.

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Last month, at a downtown park where homeless people are allowed to stay overnight, Harley Ransom was resting in his tent and said he's seen aggressive tactics.

Nearby, Francesca Crane, who said the van she lived in with her pet rabbits had been towed away, accused the city of "sweeping the homeless people under the carpet for FIFA to make it look like a clean city, no homelessness."

"They are catering to people from other countries but stepping on the people of their own city and province," she said. "What they're doing is wrong."

More swings for AI stocks drag Wall Street back on the roller coaster

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Another sudden reversal for high-flying artificial-intelligence stocks sent Wall Street reeling on Tuesday.

The S&P 500 fell 0.3% after careening between an initial gain of 1% and a midday loss of 2.3%, pulling further from its all-time high set a week ago. After similar yo-yo moves, the Dow Jones Industrial Average added 86 points, or 0.2%, and the Nasdaq composite dropped 1%.

Indexes swung lower after companies selling computer chips, memory and other building blocks of the AI boom broke from early gains to losses. Micron Technology went from a jump of 4% to a plummet of 10%, for example, before finishing with a drop of 1.4%. That's a day after it soared 9.9% and two days after it plunged 13.3%.

The computer memory company's stock has already tripled so far this year, raising criticism that it's gone too far, too fast. Following last week's industrywide sell-off, the question is whether AI stocks broadly are heading for a long downturn or just needed a shake-out to get rid of excessive optimism.

Marvell Technology dropped 7.6%, and Advanced Micro Devices sank 3% after both AI winners also erased early-morning gains.

All the while, several big-name AI companies are racing to list their stocks on a U.S. exchange and sell them at high prices. OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT, said Monday it was the latest to file confidential paperwork with U.S. regulators to open the door for an initial public offering. SpaceX's IPO could happen later this week.

The weakness for AI stocks drowned out the benefit Wall Street got from easing oil prices. Nearly three out of every four stocks within the S&P 500 rose, despite the sharp swings for the overall index, as the price for a barrel of Brent crude oil sank 3% to \$91.45.

Oil prices have been unsteady as hopes rise and fade that the United States and Iran can reach a deal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. A reopening would allow oil tankers to resume delivering crude from the Persian Gulf to customers worldwide.

Oil prices pared their losses, though, after President Donald Trump said Iran was responsible for downing an American military helicopter near the Strait of Hormuz and that the United States "must" respond to the attack.

High oil prices caused by the war with Iran have already created a painful acceleration of inflation for U.S. shoppers. They have also pushed bond yields higher worldwide, raising the pressure on stock prices.

Treasury yields eased Tuesday with the fade in oil prices, relaxing some of that pressure. The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.52% from 4.56% late Monday, though it's still well above its 3.97% level from before the war with Iran.

The latest monthly updates on U.S. inflation will arrive later in the week, with one on consumer prices coming Wednesday and one on wholesale prices coming Thursday.

Inflation is high enough, and the U.S. job market looks strong enough, that traders on Wall Street largely expect the Federal Reserve will have to raise its main interest rate at least once by the end of this year. Higher interest rates would keep a lid on inflation, but they would also threaten to slow the economy and undercut prices for stocks and all kinds of other investments.

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The average long-term U.S. mortgage rate recently hit its highest level in nine months, and high costs to borrow money could discourage the building of AI data centers that are fueling the U.S. economy's growth.

On Wall Street, airline stocks flew higher after the drop in oil prices hinted at less pressure on their fuel bills. American Airlines rose 3.6%, and Delta Air Lines gained 3.8%.

J.M. Smucker jumped 10.4% after reporting a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. The company behind the Folgers, Hostess and other brands benefited from higher prices charged for coffee and sweet baked goods. It joined a long list of U.S. companies delivering stronger profit growth than analysts expected, which has helped drive the S&P 500 to record after record this year.

Nuvalent soared 39.3% after GSK agreed to buy the biotech company for \$10.6 billion. The shares of U.K.-based GSK that trade in New York added 1.2%.

All told, the S&P 500 slipped 19.08 points to 7,386.65. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 86.10 to 50,872.11, and the Nasdaq composite fell 250.84 to 25,678.82.

In stock markets abroad, indexes dipped in Europe following bigger moves in Asia.

South Korea's Kospi jumped 8.2% and nearly recovered Monday's plunge of 8.3%. It's been beholden to the performance of big tech stocks like SK Hynix and Samsung Electronics.

NASA unveils Artemis III astronauts to test technology for a future moon landing

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — NASA on Tuesday revealed the crew for its Artemis III mission, the next step in the space agency's plan to eventually land astronauts on the moon.

The announcement came two months after Artemis II's record-breaking trip around the moon that surpassed the distance record of Apollo 13.

NASA's Randy Bresnik, Frank Rubio, Andre Douglas and the European Space Agency's Luca Parmitano won't fly to the moon or land on the surface. Instead, they'll orbit Earth while practicing docking their Orion capsule with two lunar landers.

"To the Artemis III crew, we wish you Godspeed on the journey ahead," said NASA administrator Jared Isaacman.

Elon Musk's SpaceX and Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin are racing to deliver the lunar landers. The two-week demo is targeted for 2027. Blue Origin suffered a recent setback when its massive rocket exploded during an engine-firing test on the launch pad in Florida, shaking nearby homes and illuminating the sky with an orange fireball.

NASA's Jeremy Parsons said the setback is a learning opportunity and that the space agency is confident Blue Origin's rocket will be ready in time.

NASA's Artemis program aims to return astronauts to the moon's surface for the first time since the 1970s. A recent revamp of the program announced by Isaacman aims to fast-track it similarly to the Apollo era, adding the upcoming spaceflight around Earth before eyeing a lunar landing in 2028.

"We are certainly humbled as a crew to be able to be your crew that executes this Artemis III mission in space," said Bresnik, Artemis III commander.

Added Douglas, mission specialist: "My brain — it is going a mile a minute right now. But my heart, it is so warm. It is so full."

In May, NASA awarded hundreds of millions of dollars in contracts to four companies, including Blue Origin, to build landers, rovers and drones for a future moon base. Isaacman said the goal of the moon base is to lay the foundation for a Mars expedition.

Cuba's top envoy to US calls Trump's sanctions on Cuban leaders a 'pretext' for military action

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Recent U.S. sanctions targeting Cuba's leadership and the indictment of former President Raúl Castro are a "pretext" for the Trump administration to persuade the American people to support a military intervention, Cuba's top diplomat to the United States told The Associated Press.

In an interview on Tuesday, Ambassador Lianys Torres Rivera repeated accusations against the Trump administration made by other Cuban officials, including the foreign minister and the president, and complained bitterly that the U.S. is targeting Cuban civilians with its decades-old embargo and new blockade of energy shipments to the island.

"The sanctions against our leaders, we see as a pretext to make the American people think we are a threat," she said at Cuba's embassy in Washington. "We are not a threat to the U.S., and we don't want confrontation."

Torres Rivera, who holds the formal title of chargé d'affaires, described the situation as "a war without bombs." She said efforts to change Cuba's government by coercion or force would be met by fierce resistance.

"Raúl is sacred," she said of the indictment by a federal grand jury last month of Castro. The 95-year-old former president faces conspiracy and murder charges related to the 1996 shootdown of two unarmed civilian planes operated by the Miami-based exile group Brothers to the Rescue while he was serving as Cuba's defense minister.

"Raúl is a sacred symbol of the revolution, and we will defend Raúl — as we will the country — until the end," Torres Rivera said. "If we are attacked, we are going to respond, and we are prepared for that. But we don't want it."

Her comments reflect a belief among many Cubans and Cuba analysts that the charges against Castro and the sanctions imposed on others in the socialist government's leadership are similar to those the Trump administration touted as a reason for the military intervention in Venezuela in January that deposed then-President Nicolás Maduro.

On Thursday, the same day the U.S. Treasury Department leveled sanctions on Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, Castro's son and grandson, along with others, U.S. President Donald Trump said of Cuba: "We're going to handle that as soon as we've finished" military operations in Iran.

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

Torres Rivera said the moves by the Trump administration to tighten the screws on Cuba's already faltering economy have resulted in untold misery for ordinary Cubans who are struggling to survive with power cuts of up to 20 hours a day and exorbitant costs for gasoline, kerosene and everyday goods, including food and medicine.

"What is happening now is tough," she said. "It is heartbreaking."

Trump, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and other administration officials have repeatedly denied that Cuba's economic strife is America's fault and repeatedly cast the blame on the Cuban government's socialist policies. They have not ruled out military action against the island but have said they are willing to give Cuban authorities time to make reforms.

Torres Rivera said that recent discussions between senior U.S. and Cuban officials in Havana and elsewhere have been "professional and respectful." But she said that Cuba is not willing to change unless reforms are made from within and not under duress.

A former Cuban ambassador to Vietnam, another socialist country with which Cuba has long-standing ties, she noted that Washington and Hanoi have forged a positive relationship over the past four decades, but only because the Vietnamese enacted reforms at their own pace. The same should be permitted for Cuba, she said.

"We want to make sure that the only changes to the system are done by us," she said.

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

"I really don't believe this system is capable of reform unless new people take over or a new mindset takes hold," he told lawmakers at a congressional hearing last week.

The State Department didn't immediately respond to a request for comment on the Cuban ambassador's comments.

Pope's youth rally in Spain gets raw, with frank discussion of depression and domestic violence

By NICOLE WINFIELD and JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Pope Leo XIV on Tuesday sought to encourage Spain's young people to persevere in their faith, as he presided over an evening rally that was notable for its frank discussion of depression, domestic violence and "toxic" family relationships.

The U.S.-born pope received a raucous welcome at the Olympic stadium in Barcelona, the second stop of his weeklong visit to Spain that has drawn huge crowds despite the country's strong secular bent.

The crowd, estimated at 40,000, erupted in cheers when Leo emerged from the stands in his popemobile and looped around the grounds. He thrilled sections of the crowd each time he stopped to bless babies or to do the "6-7" hand gesture that has now become a signature.

The event featured several nods to Catalan culture, including a demonstration of the region's famed human tower acrobats, known as castellers. The eight-level tower drew an appreciative applause from the pope after the smallest child reached the top, waved, and then quickly shimmied down.

Leo also spoke in Catalan, more than initially foreseen, during the prayer vigil that featured a question-and-answer session with young adults. Such exchanges are scripted in advance and are typical features of papal trips. But Tuesday's edition was particularly raw given the subject matter Leo covered.

One young woman told Leo of a suicide attempt and the "darkness" she had experienced with bouts of depression. Another spoke about her father's attempt to kill her mother and a childhood spent in juvenile detention. She asked how she could ever forgive her father.

Leo thanked the youths for their honesty and willingness to share their stories publicly. He blamed the malaise on what he said was a society that demands perfection of its youth and silences "moments of darkness and suffering."

He compared the "silent illness" of depression among young people to the suffering of Christ on the cross.

"In those dark hours, as he was dying on the cross, Jesus shared our pain and revealed to us the face of a compassionate God, who bears our sorrows, who suffers with us, weeps our tears and remains at our side with his presence full of love and mercy," Leo said.

But he also identified abusive families where domestic violence is normalized as being behind many problems facing today's young people.

"So many crime reports, even today, reflect a toxic climate in family relationships marked by abuse and oppression and, in particular, by violence against women, which unfortunately often leads to femicide," Leo said.

Leo urged young people to find solace in their faith. And he drew applause when he demanded better health services and care for mental health problems and domestic violence.

"We are all called to address this dramatic reality, both personally and as a society, because we are responsible for confronting it in all its dimensions," he said.

Leo has been emphasizing a message of hope for youths in Spain, a once overwhelmingly Catholic country that experienced a religious crisis after its 20th century dictatorship ended and democracy took root.

Recently, church officials and sociologists alike have pointed to indications that young Spaniards are showing an increasing interest in their spiritual lives, with anecdotal reports of rises in conversions among young adults.

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Patricia Garzón, a 25-year-old who attended the prayer vigil with her friend, said her faith helps her every day.

"I believe that it is more difficult (for young people) today because before social media didn't exist, and today we are constantly comparing ourselves with one another (online)," she said. "And we need someone from above to help us, to help us see that he loves us for who we are, not how others want us to see ourselves."

The highlight of Leo's visit to Spain comes Wednesday when he inaugurates the soaring central Tower of Jesus Christ on Barcelona's famed Sagrada Familia basilica.

Largest ICE detention facility wasted millions and put detainees at risk, report finds

By MICHAEL BIESECKER and RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Mismanagement at a massive Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility in Texas created unsafe conditions that contributed to detainee deaths and suffering even as millions of wasted tax dollars enriched contractors, according to a federal report released Tuesday.

The Government Accountability Office report documents serious problems at Camp East Montana, a sprawling tent facility at Fort Bliss in El Paso where three detainees have died in little more than six months. Evidence in one of those deaths, of a 55-year-old Cuban migrant who died in January after being held down by guards, was "missing or destroyed," the report found.

ICE rushed to open the camp in August before construction was complete and failed to conduct required oversight to ensure detainees were held in sanitary conditions and receiving adequate medical care, according to the report.

The Department of Homeland Security noted that ICE has replaced the contractor running the facility. "This new contractor will allow Camp East Montana to continue abiding by the highest detention standards with the ability to provide more medical care on-site," said DHS spokesperson Lauren Bis.

The GAO's findings echo past reporting by The Associated Press and other news outlets about dangerous conditions at Camp East Montana, which quickly became the nation's largest immigration detention facility.

But the government report also details previously undisclosed incidents, including that a detainee escaped in October due to what ICE called the contractor's oversight failure. In January, a security guard lost a loaded firearm inside the facility that was never recovered.

The contractor failed to administer skin tests to screen detainees for tuberculosis, relying on a questionnaire instead, the report said. The inadequate screening allowed a detainee with tuberculosis to be housed with the general population, which later suffered an outbreak.

GAO is an independent, nonpartisan agency in Congress that investigates how federal funds are spent and evaluates whether programs and policies are operating effectively. The office opened its review into Camp East Montana at the request of Democrats in the House and Senate.

Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois called the report's findings "damning."

"We now know even more details of how dangerous and irresponsible the Trump administration's mass deportation campaign truly is," said Durbin, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, adding that "those detained are experiencing conditions that shock the conscience."

A rush to build led to an inexperienced contractor

Facing pressure to increase its detention capacity, the Trump administration routed the contract to build Camp East Montana through the Army to speed construction after ICE twice failed to successfully award one. That resulted in selecting a small, little-known contractor, Acquisition Logistics, for the \$1.3 billion deal despite it having no prior experience operating detention facilities and facing what ICE called a "significant learning curve."

The Army — and later ICE after the camp was transferred to the agency — wasted millions of dollars paying for services it did not need because the contract did not account for fluctuations in the detainee population, the report said.

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The Army blew up to \$11.5 million paying for guards, medical services, transportation and meals in the weeks before the camp held detainees. The agencies wasted millions more because it was contracted to pay the cost of meals for the camp's maximum population of 5,000, even when the number of detainees there dropped to around 1,600, the report said.

Facility didn't initially meet detention standards

The facility did not meet ICE detention standards or the contract's requirements in several ways when it opened, in part because it had not been inspected as required by ICE policy, the report said. The camp lacked security cameras on the perimeter and had other surveillance blind spots that raised the risk of sexual assaults or escapes.

The camp could not accommodate detainees using wheelchairs and had no showers compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, resulting in the disabled being held in medical care rooms.

The recreation area wasn't available for several days, and after one yard was opened, it wasn't enough space to provide required time for detainees. The law library, space to meet with attorneys and a visitation area did not open for weeks, resulting in detainees being deprived of legal resources and contact with family and friends, the report found.

The problems persisted as ICE began transporting more detainees there from across the country, the GAO found. While built to house up to 5,000 immigrants for short-term stays, its population has averaged about half of that from October until April, according to ICE's most recent data.

Missing evidence and other problems

Detainees held at the facility didn't receive comprehensive health assessments, which meant that those with chronic conditions received substandard care, the report said.

The contractor cleaned the dormitories weekly rather than daily as required, resulting in unsanitary conditions. Some guards offered detainees cookies if they would clean their own rooms. Acquisition Logistics didn't reply to messages seeking comment.

The GAO report says investigations into the January death of Geraldo Lunas Campos were undermined after "evidence associated with the incident was missing or destroyed." It did not elaborate. Campos died after he was restrained by guards and an outside autopsy report ruled the death a homicide due to asphyxia. The contractor at the facility did not provide use-of-force and death reports to ICE as required, according to the new report.

An investigation by ICE's Office of Professional Responsibility into the death is on hold pending a criminal investigation by the FBI.

On Jan. 14, Nicaraguan detainee Victor Manuel Diaz, 36, died of suicide after staff put him in a medical holding room instead of suicide-resistant cell and left him unattended for intervals longer than 15 minutes, the report said. Staff could not see into the room because the contractor had failed to install vision panels that had been requested months earlier, it found.

"These are huge discrepancies in their failure to prevent suicides," said Diaz family attorney Randall Kallinen, noting that the report strengthens a potential wrongful death claim he's considering. "They are part of an entire laundry list of problems at Camp East Montana."

Christian leaders in Lebanese city of Tyre call for quick international action after Israeli warning

By MALAK HARB and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

SIDON, Lebanon (AP) — Christian religious leaders from Lebanon's southern port city of Tyre on Tuesday called on the international community and Lebanese officials to act quickly to prevent Israel from attacking the city's Christian district. Airstrikes on nearby neighborhoods killed eight people and wounded dozens of others, officials said.

The Israeli military issued an evacuation warning for the port city, including the Christian quarter, which has been spared so far.

The statement by the Christian leaders was from George Iskandar, the metropolitan archbishop of Tyre

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for the Melkite Greek Catholic Church; Elias Kfoury, the Greek Orthodox metropolitan of Tyre, Sidon and Dependencies; and Charbel Abdullah, the archbishop of the Maronite Catholic Archeparchy of Tyre.

Israeli warning leads to evacuations

The warning from Israel's military prompted hundreds of people to flee the Christian district along the Mediterranean coast, while members of the Civil Defense evacuated older people to safer areas, the state-run National News Agency said.

Cars packed with mattresses, luggage and household belongings stretched for kilometers (miles) along Lebanon's coastal highway, as residents fled Tyre following the latest Israeli warning. Traffic ground to a halt as families crammed whatever they could into vehicles, with carpets protruding from rooftops, and trunks left partially open to accommodate furniture and personal belongings.

"After the warnings in Tyre, we left. We picked up and left," said Ali Bahar, who was traveling with his wife and three children in a car loaded with possessions.

"Where should we go? There is nowhere to go," he said. "We will end up in the streets. We are heading to Sidon."

Nearby, Hussein Darwish sat in the gridlock after packing his vehicle with what he could carry. "We left to be reassured and safe," he said.

An Israeli airstrike Tuesday in another neighborhood in Tyre killed eight people and wounded 32 others, according to the Health Ministry.

The three Christian leaders called on the international community and Lebanese leaders to "take immediate and serious action to spare the old quarter of Tyre from destruction and human tragedies."

The Israeli warning to Tyre came after Israel and Iran traded fire following Israel's targeting of Hezbollah in Beirut on Sunday, triggering heightened tensions in the Middle East and fears that the conflict could spread further.

Over the past few weeks, Israel's airstrikes have caused wide destruction in Tyre, the fourth-largest city in the country.

Tyre is a UNESCO World Heritage Site

Considered one of the oldest metropolises in the world, Tyre has several archaeological sites, some of them submerged. The city was officially declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1984.

"The old city is not merely a residential area," the clergy said in their statement. "It is the historical and human heart of Tyre, home to thousands of civilians, including families, children, and the elderly."

They said the old quarter also holds a rich cultural, religious and civilizational heritage dating back centuries. "Any targeting or destruction of this neighborhood would constitute a humanitarian and national catastrophe with irreversible consequences," they warned.

Kfoury said the ongoing conflict isn't only a war on Hezbollah. "The war is against all of Lebanon, not just one particular group within Lebanon," he said.

"They are destroying Lebanon. Period," Kfoury said about the ongoing Israel-Hezbollah war that broke out on March 2, when Hezbollah fired rockets at northern Israel two days after the U.S. and Israel began attacking Iran on Feb. 28.

He said the fighting should stop because it's a "destructive war."

Last week, Israel warned the Christian neighborhoods in Tyre that Hezbollah members were among them. Many Lebanese Shiite Muslims fled to those areas over the past two weeks, because they were spared from the aerial bombardment along the Mediterranean coast.

After last week's warning, the Lebanese army deployed to the Christian district of Tyre to try and prevent Israeli attacks there and to show that Hezbollah has no armed presence in the area.

On Tuesday, the Israeli military's Arabic-language spokesperson, Avichay Adraee, posted on X that as the military warned days ago that Hezbollah members were working inside the Christian district, the Israeli military "will have to act against their terrorist activities in the neighborhood soon."

Adraee said that any building used by Hezbollah for military purposes "may be subject to targeting."

Israeli security chief proposes arresting Hezbollah family members

Later on Tuesday, Israeli media outlets, including The Jerusalem Post, quoted Israel's far-right national

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security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir as proposing the arrest of family members of Hezbollah fighters. Ben-Gvir told members of Israel's parliament that the arrest of women and youth would hurt Hezbollah members the most.

Ben-Gvir's office confirmed when contacted by The Associated Press that he made the comments in a closed security discussion that leaked but declined further comment saying the office does not comment on internal discussions.

The latest Israel-Hezbollah war in Lebanon has killed around 3,500 people and displaced more than 1.2 million.

Trial for the man charged in Ukrainian woman's killing on train is delayed for mental health reasons

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — A man charged in the fatal stabbing of a Ukrainian refugee on a North Carolina commuter train cannot currently stand trial because of his mental illness and will undergo medical treatment to try to restore his competency, a federal judge ruled Tuesday.

Decarlos Brown Jr., 35, faces a federal charge of causing death on a mass transportation system in the killing of 23-year-old Iryna Zarutka in Charlotte, a charge that is punishable by death. A separate state case against Brown in which he is charged with first-degree murder is on pause pending the outcome of the federal case.

At the request of Brown's attorneys, U.S. District Judge Kenneth D. Bell found that their client is not currently competent to stand trial and ordered him to spend up to four months in a prison medical facility to try to restore his competency.

Defense attorneys said in a court filing Tuesday that Brown insisted that they provide the judge with the following information: "I would like to tell the court I have a body emergency. Someone has full access to my body and they are controlling me wrongfully. And law enforcement refuses to investigate it. And it requires for an investigation. When describing the technology someone was using I was misdiagnosed with schizophrenia."

Brown told his lawyers he wants a court order directing law enforcement to investigate his body emergency, they wrote.

A forensic evaluation by federal mental health examiners was filed under seal in the federal case in April. It found that Brown "is presently not competent to stand trial, but that his prognosis for restoration to competency is favorable with appropriate medication therapy," the judge wrote in his order.

Brown "is suffering from a mental disease or defect that renders him unable to understand the nature and consequences of the proceedings or to assist properly in his defense," Bell wrote.

The judge ordered Brown committed to the custody of the attorney general for hospitalization and treatment "to determine whether there is a substantial probability" that Brown will be able to proceed "in the foreseeable future."

Once that period is over, the judge will determine whether Brown's competency has been restored and whether the case can move forward, whether continued treatment is needed or whether Brown cannot be made competent, the judge wrote.

Vance demands Justice Department probe of Minnesota officials as White House presses 'war on fraud'

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President JD Vance is pressing federal prosecutors to investigate Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz and state Attorney General Keith Ellison over allegations they failed to stop widespread social services fraud, amplifying concerns the White House will use a new Justice Department division to target political rivals.

Vance, who has been tapped to lead the Trump administration's anti-fraud efforts as he seeks to raise

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his political profile as a potential 2028 presidential candidate, cited in a letter to the Justice Department a report from the Republican-led House Oversight Committee that alleges Walz and Ellison were aware of pervasive abuse of government programs for years and let it flourish.

The Justice Department didn't immediately respond to questions Tuesday about whether it would open an investigation. It was unclear what, if any, potential violations of federal law could support a probe into the Democratic Minnesota officials, who have defended their efforts to combat fraud and have characterized a separate Justice Department investigation involving state leaders as politically motivated.

Minnesota has long been under a microscope for staggering amounts of fraud in programs for children and other social services, with dozens of defendants charged under the administrations of President Joe Biden, a Democrat, and President Donald Trump, a Republican. Vance's referral for an investigation into state leaders, however, marks an escalation in the Trump administration's stated "war on fraud" that officials have said would not be political or partisan.

Vance is seeking an investigation by a new Justice Department division that has drawn intense scrutiny over the potential for political influence given its close relationship with Trump's White House. The White House announced the division's formation in January and initially said its leader would answer directly to the president instead of the typical Justice Department command.

Walz spokesperson Teddy Tschann derided the House committee as "nothing more than a joke" that continues to "re-hash COVID-era fraud."

"Governor Walz is glad to see fraudsters are going to prison," Tschann said in an email. "If the committee is concerned about corruption, they should investigate why President Trump continues to let fraudsters out of prison." Trump has granted clemency to numerous defendants convicted of financial crimes, including a man sentenced to 50 years in prison for orchestrating a more than \$200 million Medicare fraud scheme.

Ellison called the allegations unfounded and dismissed Vance's referral as "a political stunt from an administration that uses the machinery of government to target its perceived opponents while extending leniency to those aligned with its interests."

"It is deeply troubling to see official powers and public resources diverted away from serving the people and instead aimed at pursuing political adversaries," Ellison said in a statement. "That is not what government is for, and it diminishes public trust in our institutions."

The House committee alleges that "fraud warnings were elevated to the most senior levels of the Minnesota state government" and payments continued "long after credible signs of fraud emerged." In his referral, Vance wrote that officials in Minnesota or anywhere else in the country "must be held accountable" if they facilitated fraud, prevented officials from stopping it or retaliated against whistleblowers who tried to report it.

"Minnesota state officials are not above the law," Vance wrote in a post on X.

The Trump administration has clashed repeatedly with Minnesota officials not only about fraud but also the massive federal immigration crackdown that swept across the Minneapolis-St. Paul area and other communities and led to widespread protests.

The Justice Department in January served grand jury subpoenas to Minnesota officials as part of an investigation into whether they obstructed or impeded federal law enforcement through public statements they made. The status of that investigation is unclear.

The Trump administration has touted the creation of the National Fraud Enforcement Division as a crucial step in its efforts to prevent the misuse of taxpayer dollars. The division's leader, Assistant Attorney General Colin McDonald, is a veteran prosecutor who has vowed to pursue cases "without fear or favor."

Critics, however, have questioned the administration's motives behind the new division given that fraud was already prosecuted by the agency's Criminal Division, which last year announced the largest coordinated takedown of healthcare fraud schemes in Justice Department history.

Takeaways from AP's report on how World Cup host cities are approaching homelessness

By MICHAEL CASEY and R.J. RICO Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — With the World Cup set to kick off across North America, some host cities have been using the 39-day soccer spectacular as a catalyst to address homelessness.

Among them is Atlanta, which last summer announced an ambitious plan to end encampments and other street sleeping downtown ahead of the tournament. Called Downtown Rising, the program said it has housed nearly 500 people. Yet, the persistent sight of individuals waiting outside downtown shelters serves as a visceral reminder that the efforts have not reached everyone.

Dallas and Seattle have also launched targeted initiatives, with Dallas expanding an effort to house homeless people living downtown, and Seattle announcing a housing push to secure housing for hundreds of people.

However, a survey by The Associated Press found that most of the 16 host cities, including New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Miami, Houston, Toronto, and Vancouver, British Columbia, are relying on existing programs — most without any new funding tied to the World Cup — to address homelessness.

In the past, many cities have treated the homeless as an eyesore to be removed ahead of big sporting and political events.

"These events provide a choice for communities," said Ann Oliva, CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness. "They can do the easy thing and sweep people out of encampments and into jails or other neighborhoods, or they can do the harder work that will benefit everyone in the community — housed or unhoused."

Here are highlights from the AP's reporting:

Differing strategies across U.S. host cities

Atlanta has raised \$185 million in state and city funding, as well as corporate grants and other donations, toward a goal of \$235 million, with the aim of housing 3,900 people citywide by next year. While the program has helped hundreds of people secure housing, others remain skeptical that it's made a significant impact on downtown's homelessness problem.

In Dallas, a \$30 million campaign since 2024 reduced the number of people sleeping on downtown streets by 87% and placed some 2,000 into permanent housing. But advocates have criticized police tactics that included zip-tying and removing people who refused to leave after their encampments were cleared.

Workers in Seattle have been putting the final touches on 75 tiny homes featuring beds, space heaters and air conditioners, scheduled to open just before the World Cup. But that housing falls far short of Mayor Katie Wilson's ambitious plan to open 500 units of new shelter by the start of the World Cup. One homeless man camped out just blocks from the stadium said he hadn't heard about the city's housing plans, and expressed fears that he and his wife will be forced to move.

In Inglewood, California, site of the city's stadium outside Los Angeles, Mayor James Butts told the AP, "There's no homeless in Inglewood," pointing to a low local count. However, less than 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) from the stadium and just outside Inglewood city limits, nonprofits continue to distribute aid, and LA County's Homeless Services and Housing Department has secured motel sites ahead of the matches.

Canadian cities rely on existing services

In Canada, Toronto and Vancouver said they were relying on their already extensive services to provide thousands of shelter beds and temporary housing rooms, as well as outreach to those living on the streets. Vancouver has also set up centers where matches will be shown. Both said there were no plans to relocate homeless people ahead of the games.

Still, there were sporadic reports by advocates of crackdowns targeting homeless people, including that transit police at Toronto's main train station had forcibly removed people last month from lavatories and verbally abused them. In a statement to the AP, the city did not directly address the complaints but said it doesn't "tolerate, ignore, or condone discrimination or harassment."

In Vancouver, hundreds of activists held a protest over increased security ahead of the World Cup. One

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woman said the van she had lived in with her pet rabbits was towed away last month.

This city is "sweeping the homeless people under the carpet for FIFA to make it look like a clean city," she said.

From tennis to T-ball, the White House's South Lawn is no stranger to sports. But not like the UFC

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Teddy Roosevelt boxed. Richard Nixon bowled.

Dwight D. Eisenhower put in a putting green. George H.W. Bush added a horseshoe pit. Herbert Hoover played a game named for himself to get more exercise, while George W. Bush threw open the space for youth T-ball.

The White House and its storied South Lawn are no strangers to sporting events. But they've never seen anything like the UFC show President Donald Trump is hosting to celebrate his 80th birthday on Sunday or the eight-sided, wire-mesh cage complete with an open overhead dome featuring large screens that are surrounded by thousands of arena seats.

Sometimes called America's backyard, the South Lawn was until now known for low-contact sports and joyful events geared toward children or bipartisanship, like the annual Easter Egg Roll or the congressional picnic.

The same space being used for blood sport, feting a president who relishes it and playing out in a hulking structure featuring a complicated overhead lighting scheme known as The Claw, illustrates yet another of the White House norms that Trump is gleefully laying to rest — or, in UFC parlance, forcing to tap out.

That the president has begun suggesting that he could make the cage-fighting venue a permanent South Lawn fixture further underscores just how far from T-ball the White House has come.

"Sports has been central to presidents. I don't know that it's been quite the spectacle that it is with the Trump administration," said Michael Patrick Cullinane, senior historian at the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library.

Teddy Roosevelt pioneered sports at the White House

Many early presidents were talented athletes before taking office. Abraham Lincoln and William Howard Taft were celebrated young wrestlers. John Quincy Adams was fit enough to take daily naked swims in the Potomac River while in office.

But Teddy Roosevelt was the first to make sports a large part of White House life, installing a tennis court on the lawn. His wife, Edith, was concerned about his workload, and the grass court outside his office was meant to force more relaxation.

Cullinane, who is the author of "Theodore Roosevelt and the Tennis Cabinet" and is a history professor at Dickinson State University, said Roosevelt loved tennis and, though he didn't play well, he did so "long and vigorously."

Roosevelt would take the court daily at 3 p.m., rain or shine, for seemingly endless six-game sets against top aides. He also boxed, holding bouts in the White House that were far more intimate affairs than Sunday's UFC fight. While sparring with his military aide Col. Daniel T. Moore in 1905, Roosevelt detached the retina of his left eye.

During a recent New York Post interview, Trump was asked about Roosevelt and replied that he "had a lot of energy, loved the outdoors." He indicated that he knew about Roosevelt's having boxed at the White House but didn't comment on how the UFC event might compare.

Other presidents brought more sports with them

Hoover used the lawn to play a combination of tennis and volleyball involving 6-pound (2.7-kilogram) medicine balls that White House physician Adm. Joel T. Boone was credited with inventing to improve his fitness. The game eventually became known as Hoover-ball.

His successor, Franklin D. Roosevelt, had an indoor pool built for polio therapy. Harry S. Truman ordered

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an old horseshoe pit removed from the White House grounds, but the first President Bush reinstalled it in 1989.

His son hosted T-ball on the South Lawn beginning in 2001 and presided over 20 games, with his last featuring Little Leaguers who were the children of active-duty military personnel.

Eisenhower used the putting green outside the Oval Office frequently enough to leave golf-spike marks on the floors inside. Barack Obama had White House tennis facilities repainted as a basketball court, though they were converted back as part of a pavilion improvement project overseen by first lady Melania Trump during her husband's opening term.

Presidents often mixed sports and politics

Playing, or at least being avid fans of, sports has long given presidents ways to connect to everyday voters while also projecting vitality.

John F. Kennedy largely hid his skill as a golfer because he was afraid of bad political optics. But he promoted footage of himself and his family playing touch football and frolicking in the surf, seeking to convey his youth and energy.

Nixon had a single-lane bowling alley built in the White House yet spoke much more frequently in public about his love of football, trying to appeal to sports fans in ways that his advisers initially feared might alienate some. Obama made an event of filling out NCAA brackets with his predicted tournament winner each year.

Trump has attended a series of major sporting events, including Monday's trip to the NBA finals in New York. The UFC coming to him, however, is unlike anything the presidency has seen.

"There's definitely precedence for athletic events, but this is a combination of athletic event and a celebrity event," said Tevi Troy, a presidential historian and senior fellow at the Reagan Institute.

Troy noted that, as the bevy of musical acts pulling out of the Trump-led celebration to mark America's 250th birthday illustrates, "The entertainment world is just hostile to Republicans and Trump. So he goes to find his celebrities where he can."

Trump has been a UFC fan for decades. His 2024 presidential campaign showcased his friendship with the league's chief, Dana White, and Trump also attended bouts around the country, hoping to energize voters not usually interested in politics.

UFC's cage matches mirror Trump's bare-knuckled approach to politics and sometimes can overlap with his policy initiatives. In making the case for his immigration crackdown, Trump once told White to consider setting up a league in which migrants could fight one another — with the winner then squaring off against the UFC champion. He suggested the "migrant guy might win."

Cullinane noted that the "UFC is dominated by men and this idea of masculinity," which means "whenever you aim for a certain demographic, you are almost naturally politicizing the sport."

'Maybe we'll never take it down'

The South Lawn's octagon was built in a matter of weeks and designed to be temporary, unlikely to survive prolonged exposure to the elements. But that hasn't stopped Trump from musing about leaving it up permanently.

The president has likened his birthday party to an international celebration of yore and The Claw to an architectural marvel in France. He noted on TikTok that Paris' Eiffel Tower was built to be a temporary structure for the 1889 World's Fair but then, "They said, 'You know we sort of like it,'" and eventually, "They never took it down."

"You know, we're building something in front of the White House that's quite attractive to a lot of people," Trump said before adding, "And I'm looking at it, and maybe we'll never, ever take it down."

Troy said that, 20 years from now, the spectacle that is the UFC on the White House lawn may feel normal as accepted traditions on celebrity and sports shift. If so, Trump's tradition-busting will have played a role.

"Trump, I think, is more willing than other presidents to be asked that question: 'Why aren't you doing it the way the previous presidents did?'" Troy said. "Breaking the precedent doesn't bother him."

Ukraine is ready to share drone technology with Nordic and Baltic countries, Zelenskyy says

By KOSTYA MANENKOV Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with Nordic and Baltic leaders who were in Estonia for a regional summit Tuesday, a visit that comes amid friction over Ukrainian drones straying into the region in recent months.

The drones have crashed into the chimney of a power plant in Estonia, hit empty fuel tanks in Latvia and been shot down by Romanian fighter jets stationed in Lithuania. Ukrainian officials apologized, saying the drones had been aimed at military targets in Russia but were sent off course by Russian electronic interference.

Estonia hosted the summit in its capital of Tallinn amid Russia's 4-year-old, full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Estonia holds the rotating presidency of the NB8, a regional grouping of the five Nordic and three Baltic countries, and brought together the bloc's prime ministers, along with Zelenskyy.

Sharing Ukraine's drone expertise

Zelenskyy and Estonian President Alar Karis agreed to work on cheaper ways to shoot down drones that have flown over Estonia, including one that a NATO fighter jet shot down over the south of the country in May.

"We have shown that we can shoot the drones down with the planes," Karis said at a news conference. Using fighter jets to shoot down the drones is expensive, he added, so he hopes to partner with Ukraine for its technology and expertise to do it more cheaply.

Zelenskyy said Ukraine was ready to do so, drawing on its experience with helping countries in the Middle East shoot down drones, where it had sent experts to train local forces. "We did this in the Middle East, and it worked," he said.

He said Ukraine could offer the low-cost interceptor drones it has deployed at home to build an inexpensive shield against Russian drone attacks, and that Kyiv could send experts to its European partners "at any moment."

Karis said he expects drones to cross into Baltic airspace as the war continues and urged the public to remain calm. Estonia and the other Baltic nations are among Ukraine's staunchest supporters in its war against Russia.

Ukraine's bid for EU membership

Zelenskyy said his talks with the leaders had focused on advancing diplomacy, strengthening air defenses and Ukraine's path to European Union membership. He said Kyiv had met the conditions to open its accession negotiations and urged the bloc to approve them this summer.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in Brussels that Ukraine is "making extraordinary progress" on reforms to allow it to join the EU and that "it's high time for us also now to deliver."

Prospective members must complete negotiations in 35 policy areas, or chapters, ranging from agriculture to trade in a process that can take years.

Zelenskyy also said Ukraine and Latvian Prime Minister Andris Kulbergs signed a drone deal to deepen joint defense and co-production.

Russia's deadly strikes on Ukraine

Russia, meanwhile, kept up its strikes across Ukraine. In the northeastern Kharkiv region, three people were killed and 25 others, including three children, were wounded in attacks in the past 24 hours, said Oleh Syniehubov, head of the regional administration.

In the Dnipropetrovsk region, three people were wounded when several districts came under attack overnight, said regional administration head Oleksandr Hanzha.

Russia launched 166 long-range strike drones and two guided missiles at Ukraine overnight, Ukraine's air force said, with air defenses shooting down 146 of the drones.

Russia's Defense Ministry said its defenses downed 140 drones overnight. A woman was killed when a Ukrainian drone hit an apartment building in the Belgorod region neighboring Ukraine, regional emergency

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officials said. In Brussels, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said Ukraine is "making extraordinary progress" on reforms to allow it to join the EU and that "it's high time for us also now to deliver."

Seeking more sanctions on Russia

Zelenskyy said he had pressed for tougher sanctions on Russia, including its shadow fleet. He also held talks with Finnish President Alexander Stubb and Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre on bolstering Ukraine's air defenses.

"All of our partners now note that Ukraine's positions on the front are significantly stronger, and so our diplomacy, which we are working to step up, must proceed from that," Zelenskyy said. "Unfortunately, Russia is trying to make up for its enormous battlefield losses with strikes on our cities and communities, and on civilian infrastructure."

In Brussels, Von der Leyen announced proposals for new sanctions against Russia targeting its energy, financial and trade sectors, including fisheries for the first time with a ban on cod, among other measures.

She also proposed banning EU entry for "anyone who has served in the Russian armed forces since the beginning of the war" to ensure that Europe stays off-limits "for anyone who has participated in the invasion of Ukraine."

The sanctions must be endorsed by the 27 EU member countries before they can come into force.

On Monday, Zelenskyy said he had held positive talks with U.S. representatives Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner during a stopover at an airport in Moldova's capital, describing them as focused on ending the war. In a social media post, he said the two sides discussed diplomatic prospects ahead of this month's Group of Seven summit, and that he had briefed the U.S. side on Ukraine's assessment of Russia's intentions.

Rob Reiner's son Nick seeks money from trust parents left him for his defense in their killings

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Rob Reiner's son Nick Reiner is seeking unpaid money from a trust his parents established for him, saying he needs it to help in his defense against charges that he killed them.

A petition filed by the 32-year-old Nick Reiner's civil attorneys in a Los Angeles County court on Monday says that trustees overseeing the funds have denied them to him without legal justification, and he needs and should get them now.

"Nick loved his parents, and he is devastated by their deaths. But the facts about what did and did not happen to them are not at issue in this Trust litigation," the petition says. "Like anyone accused of a crime, Nick is presumed innocent, and he is entitled to mount his defense with the resources that are lawfully his own."

The director and Hollywood luminary Rob Reiner and his wife, photographer and producer Michele Singer Reiner, were stabbed to death in their home in the upscale Brentwood section of Los Angeles on Dec. 14. Nick Reiner was arrested hours later and has since pleaded not guilty to two counts of murder.

Reiner retained high-profile private lawyer Alan Jackson to represent him, but less than a month later Jackson left the case for reasons he said he couldn't share. The new filing reveals that Reiner's siblings, Jake and Romy Reiner, had initially agreed to pay for Jackson, but reversed course.

In a declaration included with the petition, Jackson said "my firm stands ready, willing, and able to resume representation of Mr. Reiner" if the funds become available.

The filing says that apart from the larger Reiner family trust, which is not at issue, Rob and Michele Reiner established smaller individual trusts for Nick Reiner and his siblings. It says they left "unambiguous instructions" in Nick Reiner's trust, established in 1993, that he was to receive half its money when he turned 30 and the rest at 35.

But, the filing says, Reiner never received the funds he was entitled to at 30, and that the trustee overseeing them since February — attorney Paul R. Kanin — has given "a shifting series of excuses and justi-

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fications" to deny Reiner the money, including concerns about Reiner's competence that have no bearing on a payout that is mandatory.

Reiner says he should also get the money he was to receive at 35 immediately because his defense and his need for basic necessities in jail require it.

The petition says the trust has at least \$1.5 million in assets, but that Kanin will not share the exact amount of its value.

Kanin did not immediately respond to an after-hours email seeking comment.

Proceedings in Reiner's murder case are moving slowly. He is scheduled to return to court for a pretrial hearing in September. He is eligible for the death penalty, but District Attorney Nathan Hochman has said his office has not yet decided whether to seek it.

Authorities have said nothing about possible motives, and leaks in the case have been virtually nonexistent on both sides. A court order has kept most details of the autopsy secret. Many of the most basic questions about the killing remain unanswered publicly.

On the day he left the case, Jackson, speaking outside court, declared adamantly that "pursuant to the laws of California, Nick Reiner is not guilty of murder."

In April, Jake Reiner gave his first detailed account of the experience of losing his parents and having his brother at the center of it, calling it "a living nightmare" that is "too devastating to comprehend."

Rob Reiner was a prolific director whose work included some of the most memorable and endlessly watchable movies of the 1980s and '90s. His credits included "This is Spinal Tap," "Stand By Me," "A Few Good Men," and "When Harry Met Sally..." during the production of which he met photographer Michele Singer. They wed soon after and were married for 36 years.

Analysis: Chinese President Xi's silence on nuclear arms is a gift to North Korea's Kim Jong Un

By FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Chinese and North Korean state-run media this week devoted thousands of words to Xi Jinping's summit with Kim Jong Un, but made no mention of a key matter for Washington: the North's steadfast pursuit of nuclear weapons that could threaten the United States and its allies in Asia.

The silence says more than reams of the carefully framed propaganda.

Until disarmament talks finally fell apart in 2019, Washington and Beijing were yearslong partners in diplomacy seeking to persuade North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions in return for much-needed aid and political recognition.

Beijing routinely called for "denuclearization" — a bureaucratic term for nuclear disarmament — and there was hope in Washington, as well as in Seoul and Tokyo, that China would use its perceived influence as Pyongyang's diplomatic and economic protector to push the North on the nuclear standoff.

Xi's visit to Pyongyang on Monday and Tuesday — his first visit there in seven years — could spell the end of that hope — and signal a significant shift in how he views the North's nuclear weapons.

From Beijing's perspective, Xi's silence may be an acknowledgment of how far North Korea's nuclear program has come since Kim Jong Un took power in 2011 — and also how unlikely it is that diplomacy could get the North to give up the weapons it sees as its largest guarantee against outside interference.

Xi's silence on nuclear arms is golden for North Korea

The Chinese leader's last trip to North Korea, in 2019, was starkly different — Xi was quoted in Chinese media as saying his nation would play a constructive role in the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Beijing wants, above all, stability in North Korea and the region. A collapse in Pyongyang could send millions streaming across their long shared border.

To that end, China has often avoided directly pushing for the end of North Korea's nuclear program, according to an analysis by Jiyong Zheng, dean of the Institute of Regional Studies at Tianjin Foreign Studies University in China.

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Instead, Beijing called for the denuclearization of the entire Korean Peninsula — a careful wording that allowed China to also express a desire for an end to U.S. commitments to use its nuclear arsenal to protect South Korea and the deployment of U.S. nuclear capable bombers near the Korean Peninsula.

In recent months, Beijing has signaled it wants to prioritize stabilizing the situation on the peninsula, with denuclearization as a second aim, Zheng wrote.

"China is increasingly concluding that a rigid denuclearization-first approach is impractical and may worsen the regional security environment," he said.

For Kim Jong Un, the lack of any public mention or criticism of his nuclear bombs is a win. He has long demanded international recognition for his country as a nuclear weapons state, which could lead to the lifting of U.N. sanctions.

For Seoul and Washington, Xi's silence is bad news

When asked on Tuesday whether Seoul should lower its expectations about Beijing after Xi appeared to avoid the nuclear issue in Pyongyang, South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesperson Park Il insisted that China continues to support the nuclear disarmament goal.

Similarly, after last month's summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and Xi, the White House said the two leaders confirmed their shared goal to denuclearize North Korea.

China, however, only said the U.S. and Chinese leaders discussed the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula.

On Sunday, Kim's sister and senior official, Kim Yo Jong, dismissed as "false information" the U.S. readout of the Xi-Trump meeting.

Last week, Kim Jong Un unveiled a new plant to produce nuclear ingredients and vowed to bolster nuclear forces "at an exponential rate." His sister also said that any U.S. push for the denuclearization of North Korea was an "anachronistic dream."

It may be that China doesn't want to see North Korea and the U.S. growing too close, said Park Won Gon, a professor at Seoul's Ewha Womans University, adding that Beijing might prefer to keep the North within its sphere of influence and use that relationship as leverage with the U.S.

Xi may be tacitly accepting North Korea's push for nukes

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung told reporters on Monday that North Korea is producing enough nuclear fuel annually for about 10 to 20 bombs and is close to perfecting its intercontinental ballistic missile technology, which could deliver a nuclear bomb to the U.S. mainland.

Kim, meanwhile, has stressed that nuclear weapons are an essential part of the North's national identity. He has enshrined North Korea's nuclear status in the constitution and dedicated a growing share of resources, industry and bureaucracy toward sustaining it.

Some analysts see China's avoidance of the word "denuclearization" in Xi's visit this time as a clear change in Beijing's stance, and a tacit acceptance of North Korea's nuclear status.

This shift could mean that efforts by the U.S., Japan and South Korea to deter the North will become a regular push rather than something seen as more temporary, according to Seong-Hyon Lee, a senior fellow at the George H.W. Bush Foundation for U.S.-China Relations.

"Beijing's silence should not be viewed as a bureaucratic oversight but as a deliberate strategic signal," Lee said. "By tacitly accepting North Korea's nuclear status, Beijing strengthens its position as an indispensable stakeholder in any future negotiations."

Even so, China's acceptance of North Korea's military ambitions may have limits.

While Xi's visit signals a "strategic embrace of Kim," it is "not a blank check for North Korea," said Leif-Eric Easley, also a professor at Ewha Womans University.

Beijing wants stability and respect for its regional ambitions, Easley said. "North Korea's persistent expansion of military capabilities is pushing the limits of what its larger neighbor will tolerate."

Congo's Ebola outbreak rises to over 100 deaths out of 550 cases as conflict slows response

By CHINEDU ASADU and JUSTIN KABUMBA Associated Press

BUNIA, Congo (AP) — More than 100 people have died from Ebola less than a month after authorities declared an outbreak of the disease in eastern Congo, a grim toll as officials intensify efforts to slow the disease discovered weeks late.

Attacks on health workers from angry residents, skepticism among some locals and armed conflict in hot spots continue to challenge efforts to stop the Ebola outbreak declared on May 15, caused by a severe form of the disease.

Out of the 550 cases confirmed as of Sunday, there have been 101 deaths and 19 recoveries, the latest situation report said late Monday. The outbreak is concentrated in Congo's eastern province of Ituri, which accounts for more than 90% of the cases. Cases have also been recorded in the North Kivu and South Kivu provinces, and has spread across the border to Uganda.

However, the number of cases in Congo is believed to be higher because the outbreak was confirmed weeks late and the contact tracing coverage rate, which has improved in recent days, is still at 64%.

The World Health Organization said Tuesday that over the last 24 hours, only 137 samples have been tested, with 35 coming back positive.

The latest Ebola outbreak is caused by the rare Bundibugyo virus, which does not have an approved vaccine or treatment unlike the "Zaire virus," another name for the Ebola virus, responsible for most of Congo's past 16 outbreaks of the disease.

The rapid increase in the number of cases is partly due to the scale up of diagnostic capacities, enabling testing of the backlog of previously collected samples, authorities said.

The outbreak disrupts a provincial capital

Health measures put in place to limit the spread of Ebola have disrupted daily life in Bunia, the bustling capital of Ituri province.

Justin Abekani, who ferries customers on his motorcycle, said they are "now only allowed to carry one customer per motorbike."

There is still widespread skepticism and disregard for health protocols in some parts of the province. Survivors of Congo's 2018 Ebola outbreak, the second-biggest in history, have warned that a repeat of past mistakes could lead to a high number of preventable deaths.

Front-line health workers, who labor with little pay or rest, have been attacked multiple times by angry residents, and have been unable to reach some communities cut off by conflict involving armed rebels.

Eastern Congo has for years seen attacks by dozens of separate rebel and militant groups, some of them with links to foreign countries or the extremist Islamic State group.

Since the outbreak was declared in mid-May, more than 520 incidents impacting the work of health professionals have been reported, according to Marie Roseline Darnycka Belizaire, WHO's emergency director for Africa. She did not elaborate on the incidents or say whether anyone was hurt.

Conflict and movement complicate disease tracing

The fighting is "disrupting surveillance and response activities, and increasing the risk of undetected transmission," WHO said Monday. "Such incidents underline the challenges of the context and the importance of working closely with local leaders and communities."

Nearly a million people have been displaced by conflict in Ituri, according to the U.N. humanitarian office, making contact tracing difficult as people flee attacks or move frequently in the vast province with dense forests, poor roads and remote villages that can take days to reach.

Tracing also is difficult among the thousands of artisanal miners who regularly move between remote sites in the mineral-rich region.

WHO currently assesses the risk of spread for the rest of Africa and at the global level as low.

"(Ebola) patients can recover if they get the medical support they need," WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Monday during a visit to Uganda.

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Protests in Kenya over US plans for Ebola quarantine

On Tuesday, Kenyan police fired tear gas to disperse protesters in the town of Nanyuki, near a military air base where the United States plans to build an Ebola quarantine center, a project that has since drawn protests but was later halted by the courts.

A heavy deployment of riot and regular police prevented the protesters from marching toward the base.

Last month, U.S. officials said Washington intends to send Americans exposed to Ebola while abroad to a new facility in Kenya rather than flying them back home. They said the center would be located at Laikipia Air Base with a capacity of 50 quarantine beds.

A Kenyan court later suspended construction of the facility and barred the arrival of any foreign patients, pending the outcome of a case filed by the Law Society of Kenya and a constitutional watchdog group. The petitioners cited concerns about Kenya's fragile health system and the lack of transparency surrounding the bilateral agreement.

Kenya has not recorded any Ebola cases but neighboring Uganda has reported 19 confirmed cases.

Rahm Emanuel's uphill climb in New Hampshire tests a 2028 presidential bid

By STEVEN SLOAN Associated Press

WARNER, N.H. (AP) — For Rahm Emanuel, the road to the White House runs through the uphill climbs of rural New Hampshire.

The onetime Democratic congressman, White House chief of staff, Chicago mayor and U.S. ambassador to Japan hasn't formally announced his ambition to return to power in Washington. But his weekend trip through the state that typically holds the first presidential primary was hardly subtle.

There were the union hall visits and intimate house parties, staples of New Hampshire political rituals. At one event in the backyard of a handsome home in Concord, Emanuel greeted voters and practiced a stump speech that highlighted strains on the middle class and the excesses of the tax system.

And then there was the bike tour.

Over the course of three days, Emanuel pedaled more than 117 miles (188 kilometers) across New Hampshire from Portsmouth on the coast to Hanover on the Vermont border in what he dubbed the "Spin-Free Tour," a nod to his blunt demeanor that he sees as an asset for a Democratic Party trying to move beyond its devastating losses in 2024.

"Tough times require a tough leader," Emanuel told The Associated Press during a break at a coffee shop in Warner. "I don't think this is just about learning the words to 'Kumbaya.'"

For someone who has spent the better part of three decades in the highest orbits of political power, the 66-year-old Emanuel is in the unusual position of lacking a natural platform. His likely rivals in a Democratic presidential contest are mostly younger and, as governors, senators or a recently departed vice president, can more easily attract attention.

And despite his thick resume, Emanuel isn't especially well known outside political circles, as demonstrated by a woman who asked who he was after he left the coffee shop. When informed that it was Emanuel and that he was considering a campaign, she responded, "A campaign for what?"

How Emanuel taps into tenacity to overcome hurdles

Emanuel is tapping into his hard-wired tenacity in hopes of overcoming such challenges.

As many prominent Democrats focus on castigating President Donald Trump, Emanuel has released a flurry of policy proposals addressing everything from social media bans for children to prediction markets and a mandatory retirement age of 75 for those in public office. That would prevent him from seeking a second term if he were elected.

Emanuel is often on the road, talking education in Mississippi and Michigan. He'll travel to Israel next month to address the U.S.-Israeli relationship as the war in Gaza has spurred new divisions in both political parties, especially among younger voters.

He is a regular guest on podcasts ranging from those hosted by Katie Couric and Kara Swisher to shows

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focused on fly fishing. He often uses the appearances to knock his own party for overreaching in cultural debates, particularly those involving the rights of transgender people. It's a message of centrism that has echoes of that of the first president he served, Bill Clinton.

"We did things that were really ridiculous," he said of Democrats on an episode of Couric's podcast that posted last week. "Rather than worry about classroom excellence, we were worried about bathroom and locker room access."

And he hops on the bike.

The tour gives him a chance to both demonstrate his physical fitness at a time of heightened awareness of the nation's aging political leaders and to introduce himself to the state's notoriously picky voters before the rest of the field swoops in after the November midterms.

"It is early," said Rep. Maggie Goodlander, D-N.H., who appeared alongside Emanuel at the Concord house party. "But what I'd say is the people in New Hampshire know how to vet candidates and they're the most engaged electorate in the country."

Martha Kruse, a 76-year-old retired special education teacher from Laconia, New Hampshire, is just that type of voter. Active in her local Democratic Party, she traveled to the Concord event to see Emanuel after hearing him in interviews.

"I'm going away really enthused about him," she said, adding that he was "right on" to prepare a campaign so early.

Riding through the hills of rural New Hampshire

The future of the presidency seemed a world away during a hilly 20-mile stretch of the ride on Saturday, which included an elevation gain of more than 1,300 feet (395 meters). Along with a cadre of friends and aides, Emanuel cycled past homes where residents were tending to their yards or celebrating a recent graduation on their front patio. He was chatty at times as he rode with the pack and cycled alone at other points, showing little strain in navigating the steep hills.

With summer finally creeping into New England, the humidity was high and the rain was occasionally intense. The group stopped for water and snacks every 10 to 15 miles (16 to 24 kilometers), huddling under a barn during one rainy stretch. A small group of local activists met up with Emanuel at the coffee shop in Warner, where he held court from a rocking chair.

But the realities of modern politics occasionally asserted themselves. The group cycled past signs praising Trump and denigrating his predecessor, Joe Biden. As the miles dragged on, a chase vehicle crept by periodically with cameras poking out the window to capture scenes that could later be shared on social media, where Emanuel now has an almost daily presence.

And the whirl of the midterms wasn't far away. In neighboring Maine, Graham Platner was contending with a drumbeat of reports about his history with women that has left some Democrats worried that the party's path to a Senate majority is suddenly imperiled. Emanuel, who helped power Democrats to their sweeping 2006 victories in the U.S. House, said the "jury is still out" on whether Platner can win the Senate race.

"Everybody is holding their breath whether this is the start of something or the end of something," he said.

Emanuel hopes voices of moderation are prevailing

But as the broader debate over the Democratic Party's ideological future unfolds, Emanuel said he thought voices of moderation were prevailing. He noted recent wins by Rebecca Bennett, who emerged from a crowded Democratic primary in New Jersey with the nomination for a competitive House seat, along with Josh Turek, the new Democratic Senate nominee in Iowa.

"There's a bigger character piece to this than ideological," Emanuel said. "There's radical moderates and their profile and character speak to kind of fighting a system, which is what's needed right now."

The bike tour was certainly not John McCain's "Straight Talk Express," the 2000 campaign bus from which the Arizona Republican senator opined on any question that came his way to seize attention and mount a surprise New Hampshire win over front-runner George W. Bush. But some voters said they were open to Emanuel.

Don Daley, a 60-year-old state employee from Concord, watched Emanuel talk from a bench in the

backyard of the house party. He said that Emanuel probably "steps on a few toes."

"But I think that's what we need right now," he said. "Some of our Democratic leaders haven't been strong enough."

Pentagon labels tech giant Alibaba and electric car maker BYD as aiding Chinese military

By DIDI TANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon has added several prominent Chinese businesses, including the tech giant Alibaba, electric car maker BYD and search engine Baidu, to its list of Chinese military companies, preventing them from getting U.S. defense contracts.

The list, updated and published Monday by the Pentagon, now sanctions well-known, non-state-owned Chinese companies that are not traditionally considered to be in the defense or security sector. It reflects growing wariness of Beijing's strategy of tapping the strength of non-state businesses for military purposes.

Created in 2021 by a congressional mandate, the list seeks to identify Chinese companies that the Pentagon considers to have links to the Chinese military — not only those directly controlled by the Chinese military and security forces but also those contributing to the country's defense industrial base.

When updating the list last year, the Pentagon said the Chinese military sought to acquire advanced technologies and expertise developed by Chinese companies, universities and research programs that "appear to be civilian entities."

The Chinese Embassy on Monday accused the U.S. of "overstretching the concept of national security and making discriminatory lists to go after Chinese companies." It said Chinese companies observe the laws and regulations of the countries where they do business. "The U.S. should stop its wrong practice and create a fair, just and non-discriminatory environment for Chinese companies," the embassy said in a statement.

Alibaba, BYD and Baidu said there is no basis for including them on the list. "Alibaba is not a Chinese military company nor part of any military-civil fusion strategy," a statement from the leading e-commerce company said. Baidu, which has expanded into artificial intelligence and self-driving taxis, said the suggestion that it is a military company is "entirely baseless."

BYD said in a statement it is "not a military enterprise" and that the determination "seriously contradicts the facts." It also said it "will actively safeguard its legitimate rights and interests through all feasible administrative and legal means."

This year's list has grown to 188 Chinese entities, up from last year's roughly 130 named by the Pentagon. It already had covered companies such as DJI, a major maker of consumer drones. While a company on the list can still do business in the U.S., it faces reputational damage and could be subject to more restrictions.

After the Pentagon released the updated list, the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party called it "a warning to American businesses, all levels of government, and the American people." It said the companies on the list that are traded publicly on U.S. exchanges should be delisted and no American company should do business with those on the list, "otherwise they are enabling China's military ascendance."

In naming Alibaba, the Pentagon said the tech giant helps boost China's defense industrial base because it is affiliated with the country's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. Alibaba is traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

The Pentagon said BYD and Baidu are affiliated with the same ministry, which oversees China's technology and industrial policies. BYD is dominant in the global electric vehicle market, and President Donald Trump said in January that he would welcome Chinese carmakers such as BYD if they built plants in the U.S. and hired American workers.

However, a number of U.S. lawmakers have said they will seek a ban on Chinese electric vehicles.

Another addition is the Chinese robotics company Unitree, whose dancing robots impressed Simon Cowell

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on NBC's "America's Got Talent." The Pentagon said the company "knowingly received assistance" from the Chinese government through its designation as a small or medium-sized company that is highly innovative, highly competitive globally and critical to the country's supply chain. Unitree did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Today in History: June 10, Opportunity rover sends last message from Mars

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, June 10, the 161st day of 2026. There are 204 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On June 10, 2018, NASA's rover Opportunity sent its last message from the surface of Mars. Originally expected to serve a three-month mission, Opportunity functioned for over 14 years, traveling over 28 miles (45 kilometers) across Mars and providing critical discoveries about the planet's geology.

Also on this date:

In 1692, the first execution resulting from the Salem witch trials in Massachusetts took place as Bridget Bishop was hanged.

In 1854, the U.S. Naval Academy held its first graduation ceremony.

In 1940, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini declared war on France and Great Britain, formally entering Italy into World War II.

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy signed into law the Equal Pay Act of 1963, aimed at eliminating wage disparities based on gender.

In 1967, six days of war in the Mideast involving Israel, Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq ended as Israel and Syria accepted a United Nations-mediated ceasefire.

In 1977, James Earl Ray, the convicted assassin of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., escaped from Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary in Tennessee with six others. He was recaptured three days later.

In 1978, racehorse Affirmed, ridden by Steve Cauthen, won the 110th Belmont Stakes to claim the 11th Triple Crown. Alydar, ridden by Jorge Velasquez, finished a close second in each of the Triple Crown races.

In 1991, 11-year-old Jaycee Dugard of Meyers, California, was abducted by Phillip and Nancy Garrido; Dugard was held by the couple for 18 years before she was found by authorities.

In 2009, white supremacist James von Brunn, 88, opened fire in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., killing security guard Stephen T. Johns. (Von Brunn died in 2010 while awaiting trial.)

In 2020, protesters pulled down a century-old statue of Confederate President Jefferson Davis in Richmond, Virginia, the former capital of the Confederacy.

In 2023, Theodore "Ted" Kaczynski, the Harvard-educated mathematician dubbed the "Unabomber" by the FBI, died in a federal prison in North Carolina at age 81. Before his capture, Kaczynski conducted a 17-year bombing campaign that killed three people and injured 23 others.

Today's Birthdays: Political commentator Jeff Greenfield is 83. Actor Frankie Faison is 77. Football Hall of Famer Dan Fouts is 75. Actor Gina Gershon is 64. Actor-model Elizabeth Hurley is 61. Comedian Bill Burr is 58. Alphabet and Google CEO Sundar Pichai is 54. R&B singer Faith Evans is 53. Actor Hugh Dancy is 51. Country musician Lee Brice is 47. Actor Leelee Sobieski is 43. Olympic figure skating gold medalist Tara Lipinski is 44. Model Kate Upton is 34. Former first daughter Sasha Obama is 25. Actor Eden McCoy is 23.