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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

Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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



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.

Friday, June 12

Senior Menu: Tuna salad sandwich, California blend, fruit.

Jr. Legion at Clark Tournament

T-Ball hosts Warner, 6 p.m., Nelson Field

Saturday, June 13

U14 Legion at Platte Tournament

Jr. Legion at Clark Tournament

U12 Baseball at Milbank Tournament

U8 Baseball at Milbank Tournament

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1440

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

World Cup Begins

The FIFA Men's World Cup kicks off today and runs through July 19 across the US, Mexico, and Canada. Host nation Mexico opens the tournament against South Africa's Bafana Bafana at the historic Estadio Azteca in Mexico City at 3 pm ET.

Spain and France enter as favorites to lift the iconic 18-karat gold trophy, though the winning team does not keep it. The US national team is fielded by a so-called "golden generation" of young players developed at top European clubs and is predicted by many to reach the Round of 16, as it has in its last three World Cup appearances.

FIFA launched the World Cup in 1930 as an alternative to the Olympics, which barred professional athletes

Belfast Violence Continues

After anti-immigrant violence overtook the city of Belfast in Northern Ireland for a second night yesterday. Nationalist-populist influencers have called for unrest over an attack described online as an attempted beheading.

The attack took place Monday, when a Sudanese-born suspect was filmed using what is believed to be a kitchen knife to hack at a white man in Belfast. The victim lost his eye and was hospitalized with serious injuries as of this writing. Anti-immigrant protests have since erupted, amplified by nationalist-populists including Tommy Robinson and billionaire Elon Musk. The protests turned violent, with people setting fire to buses, cars, and homes in immigrant neighborhoods. The family of the victim has denounced the riots, calling for any demonstrations to be peaceful.

The unrest comes days after the sentencing of a Sikh man over the murder of white teenager Henry Nowak. That attack has also sparked ethnic tensions, after police initially took the attacker's allegations at face value.

We Are Not Ambiturners

Humans consistently show a preference toward moving counterclockwise, a study published yesterday reveals. The phenomenon is not yet understood but holds true across variations in environment, age, gender, culture, and handedness.

The inclination was first observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, when researchers in Spain considered how to maintain social distancing in crowds. In 32 out of 33 experiments, pedestrians ended up veering left and moving counterclockwise. Since most animals walk without directional preference (exceptions include temnothorax ants), researchers were puzzled. They conducted further experiments in Spain and Japan, corroborating the findings, including with teenagers, toddlers, and adults in various settings and crowd sizes. That preference was especially pronounced in a nursery school, suggesting the phenomenon may have biological roots.

Researchers hope to conduct further studies in virtual reality spaces. The findings could help inform how airports, malls, and other public spaces are designed.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

New York Knicks beat San Antonio Spurs 107-106 in Game 4 of the NBA Finals, rallying from a 29 point deficit.

Stanley Cup Final between the Las Vegas Golden Knights and Carolina Hurricanes is tied 2-2 heading into Game 5 tonight at 8 pm ET.

Sean "Diddy" Combs accused of sexually assaulting an unidentified child actor in 2007; Combs denies the allegations filed in California this week.

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Science & Technology

Waymo develops a computer model to predict how people behave in crash and near-crash scenarios, helping its robotaxis better avoid potential collisions.

Galaxy-killing wind that blows away fuel for new stars may explain why astronomers have found an unexpectedly large number of dead galaxies in the early universe.

Novel ultrasound system with a virtual-reality headset lets medical professionals see a 3D augmented-reality image of the scanned tissue, making it easier to identify and analyze.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -1.6%, Dow -1.9%, Nasdaq -2.0%) following latest inflation reading.

Consumer price index rose 4.2% year over year in May; figure is the fastest pace in three years but in line with expectations.

SpaceX to begin publicly trading tomorrow, with its price set for \$135 per share, valuing the company at around \$1.8T.

Amazon to expand its trucking and freight services to third-party shipping, triggering sell-off in major trucking and freight stocks.

Politics & World Affairs

US military says it began striking multiple targets in Iran after President Donald Trump says ceasefire negotiations have stalled.

House Oversight Committee questions Bill Gates about his interactions with Jeffrey Epstein from 2011 to 2014 in closed hearing; Gates says Epstein sought to blackmail him over his affairs with Russian women but denies illicit conduct.

President Donald Trump signs bill allocating \$70B toward immigration enforcement through the end of his term, capping partisan fight over the future of Department of Homeland Security funding.

★ 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!



Gregory County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash
Where: US Highway 18, mile marker 296, 10 miles east of Burke, SD
When: 7:24 p.m., Tuesday, June 9, 2026

Vehicle 1: 1939 Chevrolet JB Coupe
Driver 1: 71-year-old male from Stuart, NE, fatal injuries
Seat belt Used: Under investigation

Gregory County, S.D.- A Nebraska man died in a single vehicle crash Tuesday evening, 10 miles east of Burke, SD.

The name of the person involved has not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 1939 Chevrolet JB Coupe was traveling eastbound on Highway 18 when the vehicle left the roadway and entered the ditch. The vehicle struck an approach, went airborne, then rolled.

The driver died at the scene.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

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This tree on the north boulevard of the Groton Community Center was broken in half from the strong wind that went through Groton early Wednesday morning. Other trees had broken branches and there were lots of twigs. No structure damage was noticed.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

State board approves up to \$30 million in rebated taxes to help Sioux Falls pork plant's move

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

A South Dakota board approved rebating up to \$30 million in sales taxes to Smithfield Packaged Meats Corp. for construction costs associated with its move from downtown to northern Sioux Falls, raising total state support of the project to \$42 million.

Governor's Office of Economic Development Commissioner Bill Even said in a news release Wednesday that the company's construction of a new slaughtering and processing facility is "the largest private capital investment in South Dakota history, and reinforces the critical role agriculture and food processing play in our economy while supporting thousands of South Dakota families and producers."

Even has a pork-industry background that includes farming, leading the state Department of Agriculture, and serving as the CEO of the National Pork Board.

The state's Reinvestment Payment Program allows companies to earn a rebate on sales taxes paid for upgrading equipment or constructing a new building or expansion in South Dakota. The program is limited to building projects over \$20 million or equipment upgrades over \$2 million. Companies must meet certain expectations — such as the number of jobs created, wages paid and physical footprint — laid out in the plan to qualify for the rebate.

The state Board of Economic Development approved the application for up to \$29,975,400 in rebates associated with Smithfield's estimated \$1.29 billion project.

The new facility will replace Smithfield's existing downtown Sioux Falls operation "and will incorporate advanced automation and modern processing technology," said the press release. The new site is near the intersection of Interstates 29 and 90.

The state previously committed \$12 million in grants from its Future Fund to the Sioux Falls Development Foundation to help with the project. The money will help reimburse the foundation for the land where the new plant will be located, and for costs associated with preparing it for construction.

Meanwhile, T. Denny Sanford, a philanthropist and owner of First Premier Bank and Premier Bankcard, both headquartered in Sioux Falls, is donating \$50 million to the development foundation to acquire and demolish structures at the downtown 120-acre Smithfield site for future redevelopment.

The Sioux Falls City Council approved a \$90 million Tax Increment Financing district for the project, although opponents have sued the city over the project and TIF approval. A TIF allows a city to use new and higher property tax revenue generated by a development to finance eligible project costs.

Smithfield is part of the publicly traded WH Group, based in Hong Kong.

Other board actions

The state board also approved a \$7.5 million loan from the Revolving Economic Development and Initiative Fund, known as the REDI Fund. It offers low-interest loans to startup firms, businesses that are expanding or relocating, and local economic development corporations.

The loan is for Elevate Rapid City to purchase and develop 128 acres just north of the Uptown Rapid Mall into a new business park in Rapid City, according to the Governor's Office of Economic Development.

Additionally, the board awarded a \$500,000 grant from the state's Local Infrastructure Improvement Program to Lake County to support reconstruction of County Road 17. The project will improve transpor-

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tation infrastructure serving the Dakota Ethanol facility near Wentworth and "accommodate increased commercial traffic generated by the company's ongoing expansion," the state development office said.

The board also canceled a \$1.3 million Reinvestment Payment Program incentive for Gevo Inc., because the incentives are contingent on completion, and the company did not build its project. Gevo had withdrawn its application.

Gevo is a Colorado-based renewable fuels company that aimed to build a sustainable aviation fuel plant near Lake Preston. The project depended on Summit Carbon Solutions' carbon sequestration pipeline project, which would have captured carbon dioxide from the plant and other ethanol plants and transported it for underground storage in North Dakota. Summit was denied a permit by the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission, and South Dakota lawmakers approved a ban on eminent domain for carbon pipelines.

Gevo has since shifted its focus to projects in North Dakota.

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.

US Senate committee endorses \$20 million for Missouri River drinking water pipeline studies

BY: JOHN HULT

Two bills to fund studies on proposed Missouri River drinking water pipelines for South Dakota are headed to the U.S. Senate after a Wednesday vote by the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

The bills are sponsored by Senate Majority Leader John Thune and Sen. Mike Rounds, Republicans from South Dakota. Together, they would provide \$20 million for Bureau of Reclamation feasibility studies for the Western Dakota Regional Water System and Dakota Mainstem Regional Water System, with \$10 million for each study.

The Western Dakota Regional Water System aims to build a pipeline from the Missouri River to supply communities across the western portion of the state, whose drinking water needs are currently served by aquifers.

The Dakota Mainstem Regional Water System would serve areas in eastern South Dakota, western Minnesota and northern Iowa.

The bills for South Dakota, which would not fund pipeline construction, were among 13 bills taken up by the energy committee on Wednesday morning and passed with no opposition on a voice vote.

Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, has sponsored identical bills to the ones passed by the Senate committee on Wednesday. Each of Johnson's bills had hearings in April before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries and await a vote by the full committee.

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.

Court hears arguments on ballot-question deadlines as petition drive continues past disputed dates

Dakotans for Health leader Rick Weiland says group will continue collecting signatures

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

As a three-judge federal appeals court panel heard arguments Tuesday over South Dakota's petition deadline for citizen-initiated ballot questions, efforts to gather signatures continued long past the disputed dates.

Petitioners need 17,508 signatures from registered voters to put a proposed law on the ballot in South Dakota, and 35,017 signatures to put a proposed state constitutional amendment on the ballot. South Dakota lawmakers approved legislation last year that moved the deadline for filing signed petitions in a general election year from the first Tuesday in May to the first Tuesday in February.

A group that's been involved in numerous ballot questions, Dakotans for Health, filed a lawsuit. In August, a district court judge ruled the law violates the First Amendment, writing that moving the deadline three months earlier "arguably goes beyond merely inconvenient and enters the realm of severe." The state appealed, and an 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals panel heard arguments Tuesday in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Origins of litigation

The law's prime sponsor, state Speaker of the House Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, was motivated in part by a 2024 legal fight over an abortion-rights ballot question, Amendment G. Dakotans for Health sponsored the measure.

Hansen opposed that initiative in his capacity as co-chair of the Life Defense Fund. His group's lawsuit challenging the validity of Amendment G's petition signatures wasn't resolved before Election Day in 2024, which Hansen cited as a reason to require earlier deadlines so legal challenges have more time to unfold. Voters rejected the amendment.

On Tuesday, the state's lawyer, Paul Swedlund of the state's Attorney General's Office, made similar statements while urging judges to overturn last year's lower court decision.

"The more time that you have to litigate a case, the better chance it is that you're going to get it finished," Swedlund said.

Jim Leach, lawyer for Dakotans for Health, argued that the earlier deadline "eliminates three months of core political speech for no good reason." He said the state's Supreme Court has shown its willingness to consider post-election litigation, ruling on laws that voters have already voted to approve.

"No matter how you decide this case, that's still going to be the law in South Dakota," Leach said.

Swedlund said litigating ballot measures after elections leaves voters feeling like their voices aren't heard.

"They lose confidence in the system when these things appear on the ballot, and then a court comes along later and says, 'Nope, we're nullifying, we're not going to recognize the outcome of this vote,'" Swedlund said.

Leach called that position the "ultimate, unprincipled flip-flop" from where some state officials stood five years ago in *Thom v. Barnett*, when the state's Supreme Court ruled the legalization of recreational marijuana use was unconstitutional after voters had approved it.

The panel of federal appellate judges will issue a ruling at a later date.

Petition circulation continues

Meanwhile, state lawmakers have not passed any further legislation regarding the petition deadline. That's left Dakotans for Health's Rick Weiland believing there's no legally enforceable deadline, so his group is circulating petitions for two proposed Nov. 3 ballot questions.

"We don't really have a date to turn in at this point because the Legislature dropped the ball," Weiland said. "So, we're going to continue to collect until we have enough signatures and hopefully submit them and get it approved, so that the voters are going to have a chance to decide on our two initiated amendments."

The first of those amendments would protect voter-approved ballot measures from being changed by state lawmakers for seven years. Then, lawmakers would need a supermajority vote in both chambers

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and would still need voter approval.

The second would require that changes to the initiated ballot measure process that are approved by the Legislature — like regulations on how organizations or individuals collect signatures — would also have to be approved by voters at the next general election.

The legal limbo could give the state standing to challenge the group's signatures, Weiland said, "but you'd have to ask them what their legal arguments are going to be."

"My guess is that they're going to try to wait it out and see if we have enough signatures to submit, and then there'll be a fight," Weiland said.

In addition to Dakotans for Health's potential ballot questions, legislators have placed four state constitutional amendments on the November ballot. Those amendments would allow the state to withdraw from expanded Medicaid if federal funding for it declines, clarify that a voter must be a U.S. citizen, establish a trust fund for unclaimed property proceeds, and require that future state constitutional amendments receive 60% support from voters rather than a simple majority.

Meghan O'Brien is the audio reporter for South Dakota Searchlight where she covers the state government and its impact on South Dakotans. She's previously reported in Nebraska with a focus on health care and rural communities across the state.

Inflation spiked to 4.2%, a three-year high, in May

BY: TIM HENDERSON

Consumer price inflation reached 4.2% in May, the highest mark in three years, boosted largely by higher energy prices that have spiked because of the Iran war, according to federal numbers released on Wednesday.

The higher year-over-year inflation rate was expected. But at more than double the Federal Reserve's target rate of 2%, the new numbers dimmed hopes for a cut in the interest rate.

The so-called core inflation rate, which excludes volatile food and fuel costs, was 2.9%. Apparel costs were up 4.8% and the cost of transportation services increased by 4.1%.

Even before today's report, the conservative-leaning American Enterprise Institute said that "Trump's war of choice in Iran, coupled with his reckless budget and import tariff policies, offer strong arguments against the appropriateness of an interest rate cut at this juncture."

The costs of the Iran war have already outstripped recent economic benefits from bigger tax refunds under the Trump administration, according to a June 1 report from Moody's Analytics.

"The bigger tax refunds Americans have received this year no longer cover the higher costs of gasoline, diesel, and jet fuel caused by the war," Mark Zandi, chief economist for Moody's Analytics, wrote in a social media post. "This is a big economic blow, but deficit-financed tax cuts have cushioned it — until now," Zandi wrote.

The largest cost increases in the past year were for fuel oil, up 58.9% and gasoline, up 40.5%. The only decreases were in used car and truck prices, down 2%, and medical care commodities, down 1.8%.

Overall inflation was highest in the Northeast and Midwest at 5%, and lowest in the West at 3.5%. It was 3.9% in the South.

A few metro areas reported separately. The highest rate was 5.1%, for both Honolulu, Hawaii, and the New York City area, including parts of New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The next highest rates were 4.7% for Minneapolis-St. Paul, 4.1% for the Washington, D.C., area including parts of Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia, and 3.2% for the Tampa, Florida, area.

Stateline reporter Tim Henderson can be reached at thenderson@stateline.org.

This story was originally produced by Stateline, which is part of States Newsroom, a nonprofit news network which includes South Dakota Searchlight, and is supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity.

Tim Henderson covers demographics for Stateline. He has been a reporter at the Miami Herald, the Cincinnati Enquirer and the Journal News.

US House passes bill to combat 'ghost' federal student aid applicants

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — A bill to crack down on financial aid fraud passed the U.S. House on Wednesday.

The measure, which passed 249-172, would require the U.S. Department of Education to set up an identity fraud detection system for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, better known as FAFSA.

Nearly 40 Democrats voted for the GOP-led bill.

The bill safeguards against fraudulent "ghost students," which lawmakers say have cost taxpayers millions of dollars by applying for federal student aid and college under stolen identities and enrolling in classes, only to later disappear with such funds.

The measure would codify a FAFSA fraud detection tool already underway at the Education Department and comes as President Donald Trump's administration pursues a sweeping anti-fraud effort across the federal government.

Rep. Burgess Owens, who sponsored the measure, said during floor debate Tuesday that his bill "builds on the good work already done by the Trump administration to protect taxpayer dollars and help safeguard the integrity of the student aid system by ensuring federal aid goes to real students."

The Utah Republican added that his legislation "takes a straightforward approach, identifies suspicious student aid applications and ensures these applications are for who they say they are before dollars go out the door."

A similar, bipartisan effort was introduced in the U.S. Senate earlier this year.

Education Secretary Linda McMahon said her department was "proud" to see the House pass the bill, which she said "will cement our ongoing efforts to eliminate fraud, waste, and abuse by requiring screening for suspicious federal student aid applications," in a Wednesday statement.

"Since Day One, the Trump Administration has been committed to restoring existing fraud detection capabilities while building the most comprehensive fraud-detection system in the Department's history," she said.

Fraud detection system

Under the bill, the Education secretary would be required to use the identity fraud detection system to assess each FAFSA submitted on or after Oct. 1.

If a "reasonable suspicion of identity fraud" on the FAFSA is presented, the secretary must notify the applicant and the schools designated on the application that they are subject to "additional identity verification requirements" before they can receive federal financial aid.

The bill also requires both an annual audit of the system and a report to Congress on its effectiveness.

The measure loops in provisions from a separate bill from Pennsylvania GOP Rep. Glenn "GT" Thompson that also aims to combat student aid fraud.

That includes a requirement that the Education secretary prioritize program reviews of institutions that have "demonstrated a pattern" of providing federal financial aid to students whose FAFSA "presented a reasonable suspicion of identity fraud."

'Vague enforcement standards'

Rep. Bobby Scott, ranking member of the House Committee on Education and Workforce, voiced his opposition to the measure during floor debate Tuesday, saying the bill "could reasonably be viewed as part of a broader strategy to weaponize student aid."

The Virginia Democrat noted that while preventing federal student aid fraud and protecting taxpayer dollars "is always a good idea," the bill's "creation of vague enforcement standards and punitive mandates without clear guidance" for schools and students could make it more difficult for legitimate students to access aid in order to attend college.

Scott also pointed to the Education Department's April launch of an identity fraud detection system, saying Congress should allow the tool to operate and wait for the agency to evaluate the results.

"Codifying this new system without assessing its effectiveness just doesn't make any sense," he said.

Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom's Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

USDA Secretary Rollins blames Biden border policies for screwworm threat

BY: SAM GAUNTT

WASHINGTON — Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins on Wednesday blamed the Biden administration's "open-border policies" for the six confirmed cases of the New World screwworm that have reached the United States, repeating a theme among Republicans.

Speaking to members of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee during an oversight hearing, Rollins said it was the previous administration as well as Mexican cartels' "refusal to crack down" that allowed the New World screwworm fly to migrate north. The pests can be transported via infested livestock or pets.

"Everyone took their eye off the ball years ago, and unfortunately, because of the border policies, it's coming our way," Rollins said.

According to Rollins, there are now six confirmed cases of the New World screwworm in the U.S., with five in South Texas and one in New Mexico.

The New World screwworm is a devastating pest that can wreak havoc on cattle herds and other livestock. The screwworm is a type of fly that spreads by laying eggs in other animals, with the eggs then hatching into larvae that will eat the animal's flesh, causing significant harm and even potential death, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The fly had been eradicated in the U.S. since 1966.

USDA staff reductions

Throughout the hearing, committee members and Rollins agreed on the importance of working to eradicate the screwworm in the U.S.

But some Democrats said recent Trump administration decisions could hinder the department's ability to carry out that task.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., voiced concerns about the impact of recent layoffs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture on the department's ability to combat issues like the screwworm threat. She noted that the department's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service lost 25% of its staff, including more than 300 veterinary services employees.

"Clearly, we need a long-term response," Klobuchar, the committee's ranking member, said. "I continue to be concerned about some of the reorganization's cuts to USDA. How that could affect our long-term response."

Since President Donald Trump returned to office last year, the USDA has lost more than 21,000 employees, according to data from the Office of Personnel Management. It ranks among the largest decreases of any federal department or agency.

But Rollins reiterated that the staff dedicated to preventing the spread of the screwworm has actually increased. At the beginning of last year, she said, the USDA had 10 full-time staff members working on screwworm prevention, while it now has more than 120.

She said the department has allocated \$1.3 billion to combat the screwworm.

"We're prioritizing where the big threats are as we're working to ensure that we're meeting all of the

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needs across the country," she said.

During the hearing, Sen. Roger Marshall, R-Kansas, also pointed the blame toward the Biden administration.

"We saw this coming under the previous administration, and they refused to respond," he said. "When you let millions of people migrate through Central America this way, we saw the screwworm just come with them — whether it was on their pets or maybe they were bringing livestock."

USDA slowed screwworm spread

The agency's internal predictions, according to Rollins, were that the screwworm, which is still widespread throughout South and Central America, would have reached the U.S. by last summer. But she said the department was able to slow the devastating pest's arrival by closing all ports across the Southern border to livestock trade last summer.

USDA is primarily combating the spread of the New World screwworm by breeding and releasing sterile screwworm flies, which will limit the number of flies that can reproduce and ultimately reduce the population.

She said the U.S. currently produces about 100 million sterilized flies a week, but needs to increase its production to 500 million a week to eradicate the fly.

But Rollins stressed that while the screwworm poses a threat to U.S. livestock, particularly cattle herds, it doesn't risk tainting the food supply itself.

"The food supply is 100% safe," she said. "This is not a disease. It's not a virus. It's a fly."

Sam Gauntt is an intern at States Newsroom's Washington bureau through the Dow Jones News Fund internship program. He is a senior journalism major at the University of Maryland and editor in chief of The Diamondback, the university's independent student newspaper. He previously interned with Maryland Matters, an affiliate of States Newsroom.

Billions for the next 3 years of Trump's mass deportation campaign signed into law

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump significantly bolstered funding for immigration enforcement Wednesday when he signed into law a nearly \$70 billion package that will keep key federal agencies operating without any new restrictions.

Democrats pressed for guardrails after immigration officers shot and killed two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis in January. But when talks broke down, Republican lawmakers drafted their own bill without any additional constraints.

"The bill provides crucial funding for domestic law enforcement investigations and combating child exploitation, continuing our work to restore law and order across our nation, and to protect America's youth," Trump said during an Oval Office event.

The measure moved through Congress this month with nearly every Republican voting to approve the additional spending, which will last through September 2029.

Democratic lawmakers argued immigration officers should adhere to the standards other federal law enforcement agencies follow, like wearing body cameras, getting a warrant from a judge before entering someone's home and identifying themselves by removing masks.

Republican leaders said during talks they were open to instituting limitations on how immigration officers behave, but opted not to include any curbs in their party-line bill.

ICE, CBP funded

The law will provide Immigration and Customs Enforcement with another \$38.53 billion. Customs and Border Protection will receive an additional \$26.02 billion and the secretary of Homeland Security will be

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given \$5 billion more in funding.

The money is in addition to the \$170 billion Republicans included in their "big, beautiful" law, as well as the funding approved in the annual DHS appropriations package.

Nearly every Republican in the House voted to approve the measure, though New Jersey Rep. Thomas H. Kean, Jr., who has been absent due to an undisclosed illness, and South Carolina Reps. Nancy Mace and Ralph Norman, who were competing in their state's gubernatorial primary, missed the vote.

Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski was the sole Republican to vote against approving the legislation in that chamber, writing in a statement negotiators should have worked out a bipartisan solution in the annual funding bill instead of using the complex budget reconciliation process to get around procedural votes that would otherwise have required the support of 60 senators.

"By choosing to appropriate funding for three fiscal years instead of one, this measure weakens the normal budgeting process and sets another precedent for avoiding it when we find ourselves in disagreement," she wrote. "In doing so, it reduces Congress' ability to apply reasonable checks on immigration policy for the remainder of this administration and into the next."

Murkowski added that she would have voted for the package had it "provided immigration funding for one year, included clear restrictions on what those funds can be used for, and eliminated any potential for taxpayer dollars to be allocated to the administration's brazen 'anti-weaponization' fund."

That \$1.776 billion account would have paid restitution to people who believe they were wrongly prosecuted by the Justice Department. Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche testified before Congress the administration wasn't planning to proceed with that proposal after Republicans on Capitol Hill voiced opposition.

Trump, however, hasn't completely retracted his support for the fund, saying in an NBC News interview this weekend that he and other Republicans believe it "is a great idea."

"You have to get it approved," he said. "If they get it approved, that's great. If they don't get it approved, I'd be disappointed."

South Dakota's votes

FROM SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, Sen. Mike Rounds and Rep. Dusty Johnson, Republicans from South Dakota, all voted in favor of the nearly \$70 billion package that will keep key federal immigration enforcement agencies operating without any new restrictions.

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.

After nursing home crises, states target private equity's role

New proposals increase oversight, transparency for private equity-backed facilities

BY: ANNA CLAIRE VOLLERS

Nearly 200 residents at the St. Joseph's Center nursing home in the affluent Connecticut suburb of Trumbull were evacuated last year after Legionella bacteria was found in the facility's water system. Two months later, they were evacuated again over critical failures in the building's fire safety systems.

Three years earlier, residents at another Connecticut nursing home, the Quinnipiac Valley Center, were relocated after two resident deaths triggered a state health investigation.

The nursing homes were both owned by private equity-backed Genesis HealthCare, among the largest skilled nursing operators in the nation. It's already faced lawsuits or investigations in California, Georgia, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nevada and Vermont over allegations of patient neglect and abuse.

This year, Connecticut enacted what may be the strongest law in the country addressing transparency and accountability for private equity-owned nursing homes.

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It is the latest in a string of states stepping into a regulatory vacuum created by limited federal laws and a presidential administration that's proven friendly to private equity while showing little appetite for scrutinizing private equity's role in the healthcare industry.

Private equity's foray into healthcare over the past several years, particularly into hospital ownership, has drawn public outrage and legislative scrutiny.

It's all happening as states are staring down steep federal cuts to Medicaid, the public health insurance for people with low incomes that is also the primary payer for long-term nursing home stays. Those cuts, experts fear, could ultimately direct more older Americans into nursing home care.

Last year, at least seven states (California, Indiana, Massachusetts, Maine, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington) passed legislation putting more guardrails around private equity's involvement in healthcare.

Virginia is still considering a bill to curb predatory property financing practices that have been used by private equity in nursing homes.

Illinois lawmakers sent two measures to Democratic Gov. JB Pritzker that aim to strengthen oversight and transparency requirements of healthcare mergers or acquisitions, and place new restrictions on private equity ownership of disability service providers. The first bill was Democratic-sponsored, while the second had both Democratic and Republican sponsors.

Democratic Gov. Ned Lamont signed Connecticut's measure last week. The new law requires nursing homes that are owned by private equity to disclose their financial dealings with the state and bans private equity from controlling day-to-day care decisions about nursing home residents. Lamont also signed a related bill to curb private equity's influence over hospitals in the wake of financial moves by equity-owned health groups in his state that led to hospital closures.

Genesis HealthCare declined an interview with Stateline, but provided a statement saying it "remains focused on supporting our affiliated centers in delivering high-quality care to patients and residents."

The nursing home industry argues that private equity controls a relatively small share of the nation's facilities, and that reported problems have been the result of a few bad actors. The federal government estimated that about 5% of Medicare-enrolled nursing homes nationwide had private equity owners in 2022, but admitted that some nursing homes don't always list all of their owners in the federal database. Some researchers have pegged the real share as high as 13%.

"Focusing on private equity in long term care has become a distraction from the real issues that impact the majority of providers, like chronic Medicaid underfunding and a growing caregiver shortage," said John Kane, a senior vice president at the industry group American Health Care Association/National Center for Assisted Living, in a statement to Stateline.

"If we truly want to improve care throughout the health care system, we need policymakers to find a proper balance of oversight while still encouraging more investments."

But a growing number of states are moving to regulate investment companies that draw heavily on Medicaid and Medicare dollars.

"The big question about private equity is not whether profit belongs in the nursing home; it's whether public dollars meant for care are being converted into financial returns (for investors) without enough accountability," said Gregory Orewa, an assistant professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio whose research has focused on private equity ownership in U.S. healthcare.

"Nursing homes exist to care for the most vulnerable who cannot care for themselves," he said, "so we should be holding private equity or anybody to high standards on providing quality care."

Quality and profits

Private equity firms use pooled investments from pension funds, sovereign wealth funds, endowments and wealthy individuals to buy a controlling stake in a company. Then they try to maximize the company's value before selling it at a profit, usually within a few years.

Nursing homes and other long-term care facilities are attractive to investors because demand is always there; the share of Americans 65 and older has been steadily rising and is expected to continue.

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Nursing home care is heavily subsidized by the government through Medicaid and to a lesser extent Medicare, the public insurance program for adults over 65 and some people with disabilities, offering investors a predictable revenue stream.

And it's an industry where investors can scoop up struggling independent facilities and improve their margins through corporate consolidations, streamlining management, adjusting staffing or capitalizing on valuable real estate owned by the nursing homes.

Private equity's defenders say it provides nursing homes with much-needed capital, disciplined management and operational improvements that help facilities scale up their services.

But the private equity model's primary goal in any sector is to generate returns for shareholders, usually within a few years.

Critics say that priority conflicts with the kind of long-term investment that's needed to provide quality healthcare, such as paying enough to hire sufficient staff or upgrading facilities.

"One of the biggest misunderstandings is that private equity ownership is only bad," said Orewa, of the University of Texas at San Antonio. "The issue is more structural. Nursing homes operate on very thin margins, they depend heavily on public dollars and they care for the most vulnerable people who can't easily exit when nursing home quality declines."

Nursing home residents aren't like other healthcare consumers. They may lack financial literacy, or their decision-making may be impaired by cognitive decline, which could lead to them making choices not in their best interests, researchers have noted. They're a captive audience, often choosing a facility that's nearby or near family, rather than shopping around for the best option.

Research on how private equity ownership affects nursing homes has found few positive effects. One large 2023 study found it increases a nursing home's death rate by 11%. Private equity-owned facilities tended to maintain care quality for sicker patients by adding registered nurses, but researchers found those gains were offset by staffing cuts to the frontline nursing assistants who handle most of the hands-on care. Other studies have linked private equity involvement to increases in emergency room visits and rising Medicare costs.

Orewa and his colleagues published a comprehensive review last year of a dozen major studies, linking private equity ownership to a higher number of deficiencies in nursing homes, increased hospitalization rates and higher mortality. They also found that private equity-owned facilities bill Medicare more than other nursing homes.

Facilities' financial outlooks initially improved after a private equity buyout, Orewa said, but they later faced long-term challenges. The financial maneuvers that private equity uses to extract more revenue from nursing homes can hurt their stability long term.

Hidden disclosures

All nursing homes that receive federal funding are required to publicly disclose the names of any entities that exercise financial control over them. But companies can use complex methods to mask that ownership, meaning it's difficult even for experts to find out who really owns a nursing home.

"A lot of nursing homes will not provide that information, and their information may not be audited," said Michael Fenne, healthcare policy coordinator at the Private Equity Stakeholder Project, a research group that tracks the private equity industry.

For example: The private equity-backed Portopiccio Group acquired more than 130 nursing homes across 9 states from 2016-2022 and yet didn't appear in federal data as an owner of those facilities, according to the consumer advocacy nonprofit Public Citizen.

And ownership information matters to consumers looking for a safe place for their loved ones: The Portopiccio Group's nursing homes have faced heavy fines. A 2023 study by watchdog group Good Jobs First found Portopiccio had an average fine per facility of more than \$81,000, landing it on a list of parent companies with largest average penalties in the U.S.

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Predatory tactics?

Virginia lawmakers are considering a Republican-sponsored bill that would cut funding to nursing homes that pay excessive rents to landlords. If passed, it could become a first-in-the-nation effort to directly curb a financial maneuver known as sale-leaseback that state regulators have deemed predatory.

In sale-leaseback arrangements, a private equity-backed firm buys a healthcare company, such as a nursing home chain, and then sells its underlying real estate property to a separate investment trust. This sale generates quick returns for investors but saddles the nursing homes with monthly rent payments they may struggle to make, leaving less money available for patient care.

It's a tactic that has contributed to healthcare bankruptcies across the nation, including for Genesis HealthCare and for Georgia-based nursing home chain LaVie Care Centers.

Increased need for nursing homes

By 2030, 1 in 5 Americans will be 65 or over, and most older adults say they would prefer to remain living in their homes for as long as possible.

For many, that's possible because of services — such as home health aides or visiting nurses — that are funded through Medicaid.

But elder care experts worry those services will be the first on the chopping block for cash-strapped states facing \$665 billion in Medicaid cuts over the next decade from President Donald Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act. This is because federal law requires state Medicaid programs to cover nursing home care, but home-based services are optional.

Most people who receive those home-based Medicaid services need the kind of care that would land them in a nursing home without such services, said Jason Resendez, president and CEO of the advocacy group National Alliance for Caregiving.

"When we take those benefits away, it doesn't take away the need for that care," he said. One of the impacts of cuts to home-based services "will certainly be more folks forced to make the hard choice of going into more institutional-based care."

And cuts to Medicaid could financially weaken smaller, independent or safety-net nursing homes that serve lower-income patients who heavily rely on Medicaid.

"Those distressed facilities may become cheaper acquisition targets for private equity," Orewa said. "That creates an opportunity for investors with capital to buy at a discount."

Stateline reporter Anna Claire Vollers can be reached at avollers@stateline.org.

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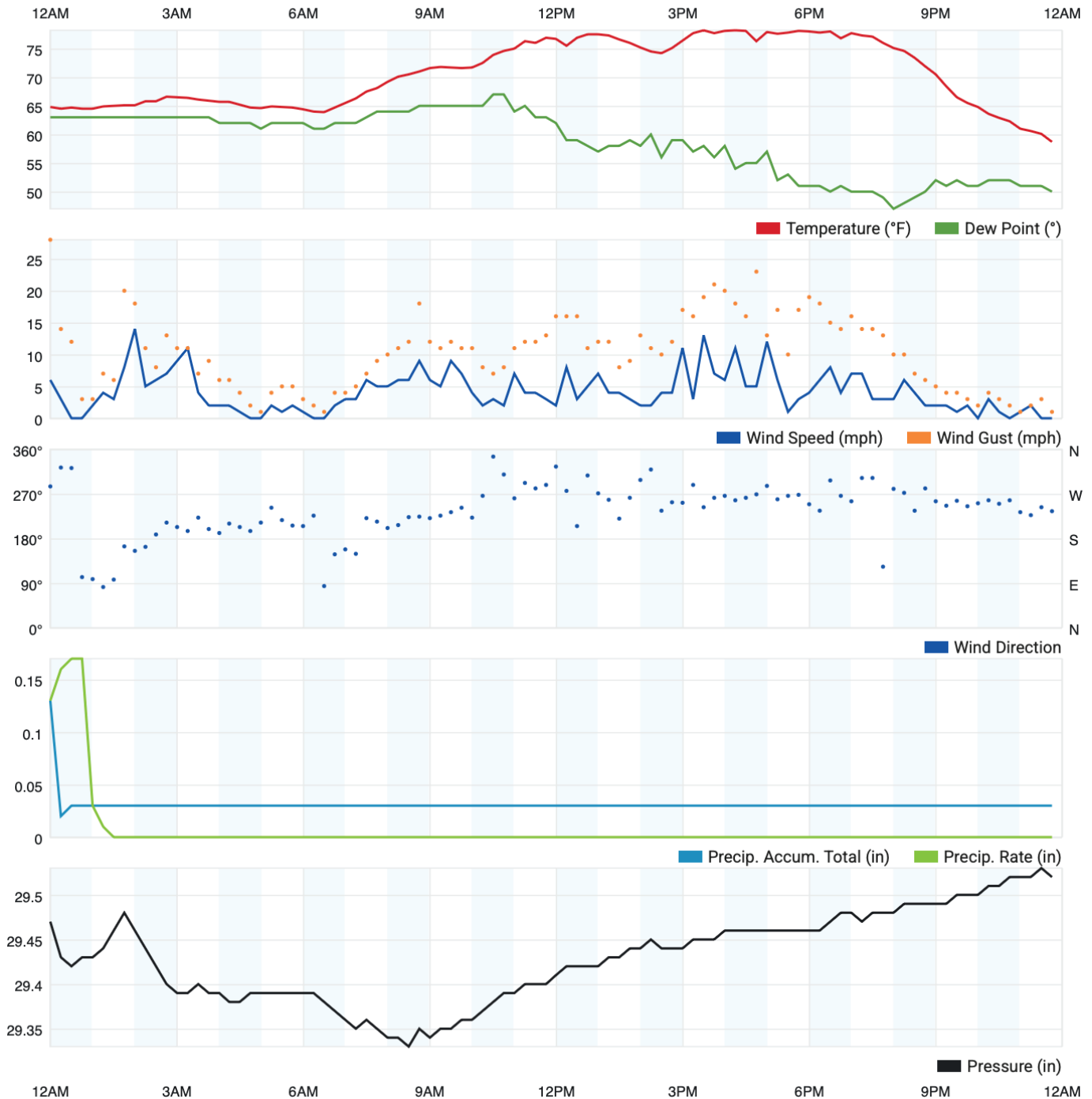
Anna Claire Vollers covers health care for Stateline. She is based in Huntsville, Alabama.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

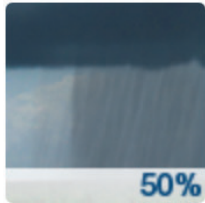
June 10, 2026



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Thursday



High: 74 °F

Chance
Showers and
Breezy

Thursday
Night



Low: 53 °F

Mostly Clear

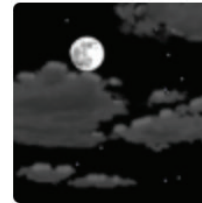
Friday



High: 84 °F

Sunny

Friday Night



Low: 52 °F

Partly Cloudy

Saturday



High: 71 °F

Partly Sunny
then Mostly
Sunny and
Breezy



Cooler & Windy With Showers/T-Storms Today

June 11, 2026
3:00 AM

Chart Depicts Forecasts for Temperature, Max Wind Gusts/Wind Direction and Precip Chances

		6/11 Thu					
		6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Murdo	Temp (°F)	55	56	62	67	71	67
	WindGust (mph)	32↗	41↗	44↗	41↗	37↗	25↗
	Precipitation (%)	45	5	15	5	0	0
Mobridge	Temp (°F)	50	53	61	68	72	66
	WindGust (mph)	30↗	31↗	31↗	32↗	33↗	24↗
	Precipitation (%)	15	15	50	35	25	10
Pierre	Temp (°F)	57	59	65	70	73	69
	WindGust (mph)	29↗	35↗	37↗	35↗	32↗	23↗
	Precipitation (%)	55	15	25	10	5	0
Gettysburg	Temp (°F)	54	57	62	66	70	66
	WindGust (mph)	30↗	36↗	37↗	36↗	35↗	26↗
	Precipitation (%)	45	10	40	25	15	10
Miller	Temp (°F)	58	60	66	69	72	67
	WindGust (mph)	28↗	35↗	37↗	38↗	35↗	26↗
	Precipitation (%)	35	30	10	10	5	0

		6/11 Thu					
		6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Redfield	Temp (°F)	55	61	69	70	73	68
	WindGust (mph)	24↗	31↗	37↗	37↗	33↗	26↗
	Precipitation (%)	25	30	15	20	15	10
Aberdeen	Temp (°F)	55	61	69	69	73	68
	WindGust (mph)	24↗	29↗	31↗	31↗	31↗	25↗
	Precipitation (%)	30	10	50	35	10	5
Watertown	Temp (°F)	57	61	64	67	68	65
	WindGust (mph)	14↗	23↗	29↗	31↗	30↗	23↗
	Precipitation (%)	45	45	35	15	10	0
Sisseton	Temp (°F)	58	63	68	69	70	66
	WindGust (mph)	21↗	25↗	29↗	31↗	30↗	25↗
	Precipitation (%)	25	20	25	45	20	5
Wheaton	Temp (°F)	59	66	70	70	68	65
	WindGust (mph)	16↗	22↗	25↗	28↗	26↗	22↗
	Precipitation (%)	20	20	45	55	40	5



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

An upper level disturbance will move across the Dakotas today into tonight leading to a chance for occasional showers and thunderstorms throughout the day. This in conjunction with mostly cloudy skies and breezy to windy west to northwest winds will result in cooler than normal temperatures. No severe weather is expected. Warmer and drier conditions will return on Friday with high temperatures back in the 80s.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 79 °F at 5:26 PM

Low Temp: 60 °F at 11:29 PM

Wind: 24 mph at 4:42 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 104 in 1893

Record Low: 31 in 1938

Average High: 79

Average Low: 54

Average Precip in June.: 1.27

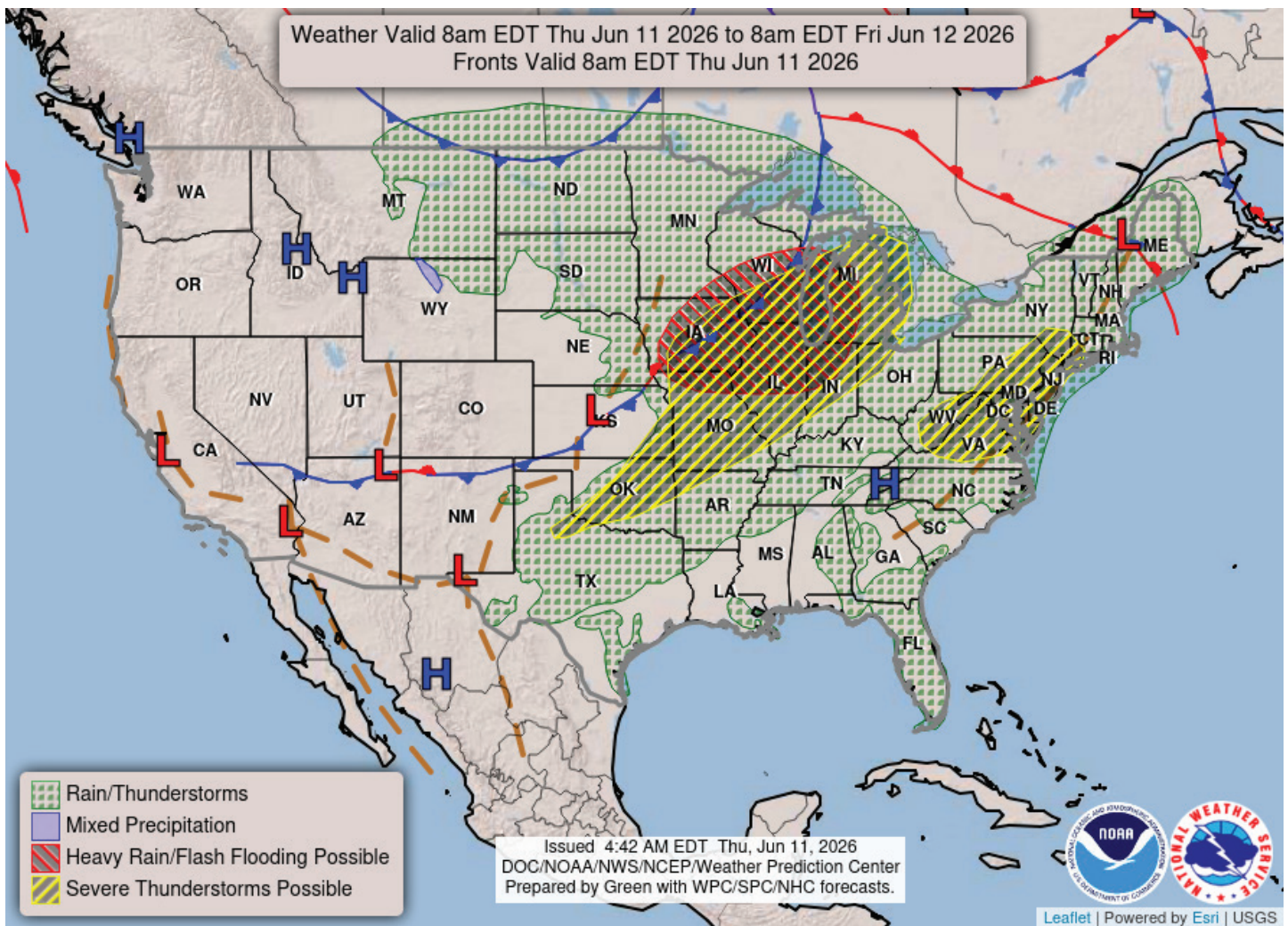
Precip to date in June.: 0.96

Average Precip to date: 8.52

Precip Year to Date: 7.32

Sunset Tonight: 9:20 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:43 am



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Today in Weather History

June 11th, 1982: Golf ball-sized hail fell in Hayti, in Hamlin County, creating three-foot hail drifts.

June 11th, 1990: Golf ball-sized hail cut a swath 1.5 miles wide and 50 miles in length from the Missouri River east of the Hyde County line. Thunderstorm winds destroyed a granary roof and downed numerous trees. Damage from large hail was considerable to crops, and entire fields were wiped out. The County Agent placed crop damage estimates at 1.8 million dollars in Sully County. Hail also produced window damage to cars and homes.

June 11th, 2008: A strong inflow of moist and unstable air into and over a warm surface front resulted in training thunderstorms and very heavy rain across parts of northeast South Dakota. Rainfall of 2 to 6 inches occurred across much of the area, resulting in widespread flash flooding. The flooding damaged many roads, bridges, and cropland. In Milbank, many basements were flooded and received sewer backup.

June 11th, 2010: Thunderstorms produced damaging winds over a large part of southeast South Dakota, beginning just before midnight on June 10th and continuing well into the predawn hours of June 11th. The storms also produced heavy rain, which caused flash flooding at several locations. Heavy rainfall of at least 3 inches caused Enemy Creek to overflow and flood nearby roads. The expense also caused flooding of roads and basements in Mitchell. A motorcycle business was flooded, damaging merchandise, although little damage to the motorcycles was reported. Thunderstorm winds caused widespread damage in the Sioux Falls area. Wood and siding were blown off a new house, and a nearby fence was blown over. The winds caused tree damage, including 2 to 3-foot diameter trees blown down. Debris from the tree damage blocked several roads. Garages were blown off three homes next to each other, and other nearby homes suffered significant damage in an area on West Eli Court that was subjected to the strongest winds, estimated at 100 mph. Windows were blown out in several homes, and a large camper was overturned in the same area. A wind gust of 74 mph was measured elsewhere in the city. The winds blew down power lines in parts of the city. Heavy rain caused flash flooding of several streets in southern Sioux Falls, with water up to two feet deep. Basement flooding was also reported.

1842 — A late season snowstorm struck New England. Snow fell during the morning and early afternoon, accumulating to a depth of ten to twelve inches at Irasburg VT. Berlin NH was blanketed with eleven inches of snow during the day. Snow whitened the higher peaks of the Appalachians as far south as Maryland. (David Ludlum)

1877 — The temperature at Los Angeles, CA, reached 112 degrees during a heatwave. It would have been the all-time record for Los Angeles but official records did not begin until twenty days later. (The Weather Channel)

1972 — Heavy showers brought 1.64 inches of rain to Phoenix AZ, a record for the month of June. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — South Texas endured another day of torrential rains. Up to twelve inches of rain drenched Harris County, and nearly ten inches soaked Luce Bayou, mainly during the afternoon hours. Thunderstorm rains left seven feet of water over Highway 189 in northern Val Verde County. Flooding caused nine million dollars damage in Real County. A thunderstorm at Perryton, TX, produced golf ball size hail and 70 mph winds, and spawned a tornado which struck a mobile killing one person and injuring the other four occupants. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Thirty cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including El Dorado, AR, with a reading of 48 degrees. Canaan Valley WV and Thomas WV dipped to 30 degrees. Flagstaff AZ was the cold spot in the nation with a low of 30 degrees. Coolidge, just 180 miles away, was the hot spot in the nation with an afternoon high of 105 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the south central and southeastern U.S. during the day and night. Thunderstorms spawned eleven tornadoes, including one which tore the roof off a restaurant at Bee Branch, AR, injuring six persons. The tornado tossed one car into the restaurant, and another car over it. Temperatures soared into the 90s across much of Florida. Lakeland reported a record high of 99 degrees for the second day in a row. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



Can We Change a Hardened Heart?

**When we return to God in worship and prayer,
we rediscover the joy only His presence brings.**

Hebrews 3:12-19: 12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,

15 while it is said, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME."

16 For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?

17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?

19 So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

A hardened heart doesn't develop overnight. Often it begins when we become preoccupied with things of little spiritual value. Once our focus drifts from God, these distractions gradually consume more of our time and attention. Before we realize it, what matters most to the Lord has been crowded out.

As our spiritual life weakens, habits like genuine devotion and worship may fall away. When we function apart from God, our heart naturally becomes self-focused and less sensitive to His voice.

This is when we become most vulnerable. With our attention elsewhere and our heart growing distant, we can more easily rationalize choices we once would have recognized as sin. The Holy Spirit's gentle promptings become muffled, and temptation grows stronger.

Scripture warns that even sincere believers are susceptible to this gradual hardening (v. 13). But we're not without hope. Through honest repentance and renewed devotion to God, our heart can be soft again. As we return to Him in worship and prayer, sensitivity to His Spirit is restored, and we rediscover the joy of walking closely with Him.

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

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The Groton Independent

Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.10.26

9 20 25 31 39 4

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 34 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.09.26

9 30 36 38 40 3

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$413,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 19 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.10.26

6 9 23 45 51 6

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$29,530,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 34 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.10.26

4 14 16 26 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$129,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 49 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.10.26

8 35 41 42 67 11

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 18 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.10.26

12 31 38 60 66 14

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$258,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 18 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

How a hospital is helping solve a hometown housing shortage

By BART PFANKUCH/South Dakota News Watch South Dakota News Watch

In a first-of-its-kind project in South Dakota, the small hospital in this southern Black Hills town is investing in a subdivision project to provide housing for its employees.

Fall River Health Services, an independent nonprofit medical center in Hot Springs, is paying \$2.3 million of the overall \$3.4 million cost of infrastructure for a subdivision that could create 48 new affordable housing units a few hundred yards from the hospital campus.

Like many South Dakota employers, Fall River Health is enduring a long-range worker shortage that has put pressure on its existing staff and driven up costs due to hiring of expensive traveling, short-term medical employees.

As of May 29, the hospital had 19 job openings, most of them in direct patient care, a shortage of 10% of its needed workforce of 190. In the past couple years, the hospital has lost dozens of prospective health care workers because they couldn't find affordable or suitable local housing, said Jesse Naze, chief financial officer at Fall River Health.

"You can't stop providing care, so we need workforce to care for our local population," Naze told News Watch in an interview. "It's not wages or benefits keeping employees away, it's simply that housing just isn't available."

The hospital's investment in the Cascade Hills subdivision project is part of a growing trend in which South Dakota employers are finding ways to provide housing for their workers.

Wall Drug president Rick Hustead told News Watch in 2025 that he provides mobile homes and other housing for more than 100 seasonal employees who would otherwise have nowhere to live.

Similarly, business operators in Keystone have said they provide recreational vehicles as housing for summer workers who arrive under the H-2B Visa program each year.

However, Chas Olson, executive director of the South Dakota Housing Development Authority (South Dakota Housing), told News Watch he isn't aware of any South Dakota project in which an employer invested money on permanent housing that will benefit the business as well as the community at large for years to come.

The private hospital with 25 beds saved money for years to be able to invest in the proposed housing project in which some homeowners could see a financial benefit if they take jobs at the hospital and stay for at least five years.

"The hospital is fronting the cash to get this infrastructure put in so we can get this project going," Naze said. "There's only so much local workforce, so we need to attract employees, and this should be a big help."

Evidence: Various sizes and price points

South Dakota Housing has high hopes for the Hot Springs project and in October approved a nearly \$1.2 million grant to support the project. The money came from the \$200 million Housing Infrastructure Financing Program approved by the Legislature in 2023.

Olson said the authority had been in discussion with officials from Hot Springs and Fall River Health for several years to generate a plan for an affordable housing project.

"We knew they were having issues recruiting and keeping workers there because the (existing) housing is old and aging," Olson said.

The Cascade Hills project has a solid development plan, highly engaged people managing construction and strong overall community support, he said.

"When you combine all those things, it gave us comfort that the housing will get built," Olson said.

According to a project summary by South Dakota Housing, the infrastructure grant could help lower lot prices by \$30,000 each and allow rents to be up to \$100 a month cheaper. The grants typically help pay expenses such as installation of utilities, streets, and curb and gutter.

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The current plan for the subdivision is to build a mix of single-family and multi-family buildings that will create 48 total housing units with a wide range of square footages and prices, said Dennis Fischer, a former Hot Springs schools superintendent who now serves on the local hospital and housing boards.

Single-family homes of about 1,300 square feet should cost about \$350,000, including the lot. Smaller villas, duplexes and townhomes could come in as low as \$285,000, including lot costs, he said. Any of those prices fall within the South Dakota Housing Authority threshold for "affordable" housing projects.

"We're hoping that isn't out of reach for homeowners," he said.

Project managers are working out details of a special mortgage for hospital employees who buy a home in which lot costs of up to \$54,000 could be returned if they remain employed for five years, Fischer said.

As of May 27, the subdivision site remained open pastureland, though Fischer said infrastructure work could begin any day, with utility installation and road work the starting points. The 11-acre project on state Highway 71 south of the city will include space for a community park, he said.

The housing units will be built by private developers, who are not yet on board, Fischer said.

The local school district has some of the same hiring challenges as the hospital, he said.

"Teachers who couldn't find housing turned down job offers or left after a couple years because they didn't feel like they were getting ahead in terms of home ownership," he said.

The partnership approach to funding the subdivision has expedited the timeline of the project, Fischer said. "The hospital didn't have deep enough pockets to do it on their own."

Fischer said a hopeful timeline for full development and sale of the housing would be in eight to 10 years, though he acknowledged it could be longer.

Insights: Study shows need for new ideas

A 2023 housing study revealed some of the challenges facing Hot Springs, many of which are common in small cities across the state. The city lost 4.5% of its population from 1990 to 2000 and saw another 10.1% decline from 2000 to 2010, falling from 4,129 to 3,395 over that 20-year period, according to the U.S. Census.

Perhaps more alarming and indicative of the city's increasing position as a retirement community is that 60% of the city's population was age 45 or older in 2022, with a loss of 125 people age 14 or under in the decade prior.

Meanwhile, from 2010 to 2020, Hot Springs lost 121 households, roughly 7% of its housing stock, though some data models anticipated household growth in the near future.

The study also noted strengths and weaknesses in the city's current and prospective housing efforts. Strengths include the city's role as a regional economic center, strong educational and health care systems, abundant outdoor recreation, attractiveness to retirees and generally affordable housing.

Negatives include the increasing population age and declining condition of housing, low-pay jobs, commutable proximity to Rapid City and a lack of available infrastructure.

The study ultimately called for development of about 100 local rental units, finding more developable land for single-family homes, and improvement or demolition of dilapidated houses and mobile homes.

Interestingly, the study called directly for two components that would be achieved by the Cascade Hills subdivision: promoting employer involvement in housing development and greater development of twin-home and townhouse units.

Limitations: Holistic housing approach needed

So far, the city of Hot Springs and its residents have been big supporters of the Cascade Hills project, said Aerial Allison, city administrator.

With no significant resident opposition and a unanimous city council vote, the city approved a \$2.3 million tax increment financing (TIF) district to expedite development, she said.

No local tax money is expected to be needed on the project that could generate opportunities for new or existing employers to hire workers and potentially expand, Allison said.

"We've got some job openings (in city government) and I know they've been struggling at the hospital to fill jobs and retain them," she said. "But I think all our employers would see a benefit."

Yet the subdivision is only one part of a larger strategy to increase housing options in Hot Springs, Al-

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lison said.

Quality housing has been increasingly hard to come by as the city's reputation as a pleasant retirement community has grown. Adding to the demand is a large number of out-of-state people who moved to Hot Springs and bought homes during and since the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Not to blame them for anything, but we're really excited this project is focused on workforce housing," Allison said. "We're trying to get people of working age to come here and bring their family and put their kids in our schools and shop at our local stores."

Meanwhile, the city has become more assertive recently in trying to buy and rehabilitate or tear down dilapidated housing, especially in some aging local mobile home parks. Part of that plan is to find suitable housing for people who leave those aged houses, Allison said.

The city is also trying to connect homeowners with resources to help pay for home improvements or to upgrade their housing status, she said.

"Our jobs here haven't really kept up with other rising costs, and especially housing costs, so people may need some help," Allison said.

If the Cascade Hills project goes well, and houses get built and sold fairly quickly, it could spur more housing development, population growth and economic activity in the city, she said.

"It's a good first step for us, a really big first step," she said.

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Iran retaliates to a second day of US strikes by firing at Gulf states and Jordan

By JON GAMBRELL, MICHELLE L. PRICE and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The U.S and Iran traded strikes for a second day, pushing the Middle East closer to the resumption of a full-scale war.

The American attack, which lasted into Thursday morning in Iran, appeared more intense and wider than the day before, but Tehran released little information on the extent of the damage. An Indian official said a U.S. attack on an oil tanker allegedly trying to violate Washington's blockade on Iranian ports killed three Indian mariners, underscoring the danger to seafarers.

It was the third time this week that back-and-forth strikes have rattled the Middle East. The first involved attacks between Iran and Israel, followed by the two rounds of fire between the U.S. and Iran, which hit countries in the region that host American bases.

The new exchange of fire came as efforts to negotiate an end to the war appeared stuck, with U.S. President Donald Trump warning that Tehran would "pay the price" for stalled negotiations. Iran's Foreign Ministry said in a statement Thursday that the U.S. attacks had "effectively rendered the ceasefire ... meaningless," without saying it was abandoning it.

Central to the negotiations is Iran's stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz, which has disrupted global energy supplies, driven up fuel prices and made food and other basics more expensive well beyond the region.

Iran announced Thursday that the strait was closed — but it was unclear what that meant since it has severely restricted traffic through the waterway since early in the war and only a trickle of ships have gotten through. The U.S. military's Central Command disputed the claim — and Trump said Wednesday that the U.S. has undertaken a secret mission in recent weeks to sneak ships through the passage.

The two sides also remain at odds over Iran's nuclear program, which Tehran insists is peaceful but which the U.S. and Israel fear could be used to build an atomic weapon due to its stockpile of highly enriched uranium. The U.S. and Israel said a major reason they went to war on Feb. 28 was to ensure that Iran would never be able to do that.

US strikes Iran and Iran fires back at Gulf states

Central Command said its latest round of airstrikes came "in response to Iran's unwarranted and con-

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tinued aggression" and targeted "Iranian military surveillance capabilities, communication systems and air defense sites." It did not elaborate on the damage done by the strikes, which it said ended just before sunrise Thursday in Iran.

Explosions from the strikes echoed around Iran's capital, as well as the port city of Bandar Abbas and other southern areas along the Strait of Hormuz. Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard later said sites hit included a manufacturing complex, a military barracks and a local Guard base outside of Tehran.

Iran said it fired back at Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan, as it had a day before.

Kuwait closed its airspace for several hours because of the attack, but did not elaborate on any damage. Jordan said it intercepted 20 Iranian missiles fired toward an area that is home to a base hosting U.S. troops, though no one was hurt.

Bahrain's Interior Ministry said an 11-year-old girl was hurt and cars and homes were damaged by debris from interceptions responding to the Iranian attack.

Meanwhile, Israel warned residents in the country's north to seek shelter after the detection of suspected incoming fire from Lebanon, where Israel is fighting the Iran-allied Hezbollah militant group.

Trump says the US is sneaking oil through the Strait of Hormuz

Iran's ability to control the Strait of Hormuz has proved a strong bargaining chip since the narrow waterway's effective closure has severely disrupted the global economy.

Trump said Wednesday that the U.S. military has undertaken a mission since last month to sneak oil shipments past Iran's forces in the strait, aided by the destruction of Iranian radar equipment.

Trump said as a result more than 100 million barrels of oil have evaded Iran's chokehold. There was no immediate confirmation of that figure, which equals roughly five days of oil shipments through the waterway before the war began.

But the seas remain dangerous for mariners. Indian Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Sarbananda Sonowal announced on X that three Indians missing after the American attack on the tanker Settebello had been killed. The U.S. military's Central Command had accused the Settebello of having "violated the ongoing blockade by attempting to transport oil from Iran." American forces fired into the ship's engine room to stop it Wednesday.

The leader of the International Maritime Organization, a United Nations agency, condemned the attack.

Another tanker near where the Settebello was struck off Oman experienced a fire in its engine room on Thursday, according to the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Operations center. It wasn't immediately clear what sparked the blaze.

Big disagreements stand in the way of a quick peace deal

Trump suggested earlier this week that an agreement with Iran could be close — but the exchanges of fire have called that into question, and big differences remain.

The U.S. wants to see Iran give up its stockpile of highly enriched uranium, which 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 Trump rejected.

Iran has insisted that any deal to end the war must also end fighting between its ally Hezbollah and Israel. But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appears intent on pursuing his goal of destroying the militant group.

A Qatari diplomatic delegation, negotiating in coordination with the U.S., left Tehran on Thursday morning after holding talks, according to an official with knowledge of the team who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the mediation. Pakistan, meanwhile, expressed deep concern over rising tensions and urged both Iran and the U.S. to adhere to the ceasefire.

World shares are mixed after another sell-off of AI stocks on Wall St, while oil prices ease

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

World shares were mixed on Thursday following another sell-off of artificial-intelligence stocks that dragged the U.S. market sharply lower.

Oil prices fell after rising earlier as the U.S. launched a second round of airstrikes against Iran.

In early European trading, Germany's DAX was nearly unchanged at 24,188.88 and the CAC 40 in Paris gained 0.4% to 8,192.55. The FTSE 100 in London added 0.5% to 10,307.39.

The future for the S&P 500 was up 0.8%, while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 0.7%.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 edged up less than 0.1% to 64,217.27 after falling earlier in the day, while the Kospi in South Korea gained 0.4% to 7,763.95.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.7% to 24,249.29, while the Shanghai Composite index was down 0.2% to 3,987.01.

In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 likewise shed 0.2% to 8,633.20.

Taiwan's TaieX slipped 0.2% and India's Sensex rose 0.2%.

On Wednesday, Wall Street's former superstars continue to face heavy scrutiny.

The S&P 500 dropped 1.6% for its first back-to-back drop in three weeks. Closing at 7,266.99, it's back to where it was in early May.

The Dow tumbled 1.9% and the Nasdaq composite led the market lower with a 2% slide.

Wall Street has been shaky since last week, when AI stocks went from roaring to records to suddenly turn lower. Among the worries is that their prices may have shot too high, too fast because of AI mania. The question now is whether the break lower has cleared out excessive optimism that may have built into their stock prices, or if it's the start of a longer downturn.

Micron Technology swung from an early loss of nearly 4% to a modest gain and back to a loss of 4.7%. It's coming off a wild stretch where it sank 7.7% last Thursday, then plunged another 13.3% Friday and rallied 9.9% Monday.

Nvidia, the chip company that's grown into a nearly \$4.9 trillion behemoth because of the AI boom, was the heaviest weight on the S&P 500 after falling 3.7%. The second heaviest was another AI winner, Broadcom, which fell 5.1%.

Some of the pressure on AI stocks could also be coming from investors pulling cash out to prepare for high-profile debuts on the U.S. stock market for several AI giants. SpaceX's initial public offering could come later this week, for example.

Early Thursday, Brent crude oil, the international standard, fell \$1.30 to \$91.80 per barrel. It was at around \$70 a barrel before the start of the war in late February.

U.S. benchmark crude oil was down \$1.22 to \$88.81 a barrel.

Oil prices climbed on Wednesday after President Donald Trump warned Iran would "pay the price" for stalled negotiations between the two sides. The war in the Middle East has been keeping the Strait of Hormuz effectively shut to oil tankers, which has prevented the delivery of crude from the Persian Gulf to customers worldwide.

High oil prices have sent inflation higher, and a report on Wednesday showed that prices for U.S. consumers jumped in May at the highest speed in three years.

Traders are betting the Federal Reserve will have to hike its main interest rate at least once this year, given price pressures and the strength of the U.S. job market.

High yields can slow entire economies and undercut prices for all kinds of investments, including stocks and cryptocurrencies. They hit investments seen as the most expensive in particular, and some critics are calling AI a bubble where investment inflated too far.

In other dealings early Thursday, the dollar slipped to 160.54 Japanese yen from 160.56 yen. The euro fell to \$1.1534 from \$1.1537.

Thai court sentences 2 Uyghur men to death over 2015 Bangkok bombing that killed 20

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — A court in Thailand on Thursday convicted and sentenced to death two members of China's Muslim Uyghur minority over a 2015 bombing at a Bangkok landmark that killed 20 people and injured more than 120.

Yusufu Mieraili and Bilal Mohammad were arrested shortly after the Aug. 17, 2015, bombing of the Erawan shrine, which is a popular tourist destination, particularly for visitors from China.

The men were charged with a variety of offenses, including murder, attempted murder and illegal possession of explosive materials. They allegedly were linked by video, fingerprints and other evidence to the bombing.

Four judges presided over the ruling at Bangkok South Criminal Court. The court ruled the two were found guilty due to overwhelming evidence against them and were unable to provide substantial evidence proving otherwise.

After the judges left the courtroom, Mieraili shouted in broken Thai that he rejected the ruling and was innocent.

"I mourn for Thailand," he said. "I did not receive justice ... I ask Thai people to help me."

Mieraili learned Thai while in detention, according to his lawyer. He also speaks English and on Thursday was asked to translate the proceedings into Uyghur for Bilal because only an English interpreter was available in court. The trial was repeatedly delayed because of difficulties finding suitable translators.

Chuchart Kanpai, one of the defense lawyers, said they will appeal as there are still several aspects of the case that were not taken into consideration.

The two men allegedly confessed during the initial questioning but pleaded not guilty when the trial began in 2016. The proceedings originally took place in a military court before the case was transferred to the civilian Bangkok South Criminal Court in 2019.

The men said they suffered mistreatment and torture in jail after their arrests. But the judges said Thursday there was no evidence of torture and that investigators did not appear to have coerced the confessions.

China on Thursday said it welcomed the verdict.

"The terrorist bombing that year killed 20 people, including seven Chinese citizens, and injured more than 100 others. The perpetrators were utterly inhumane and guilty of heinous crimes," Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Lin Jian said. "China supports Thailand in conducting the trial in accordance with the law and severely punishing the perpetrators."

Several human rights groups have criticized the procedures and the lengthy trial. In 2023, the International Federation for Human Rights based in France submitted a petition to the United Nations alleging numerous violations of human rights and due process, including the lack of a legal basis for the arrests and discriminatory treatment.

Authorities identified 17 suspects in connection to the blast but only three were apprehended. Charges against a Thai woman were dropped in 2024 due to lack of evidence.

Police said they believe Mieraili detonated the bomb minutes after a backpack containing the device was allegedly left at the shrine by Bilal, who also is known as Adem Karadag.

Thai authorities have said the bombing was revenge by a people smuggling gang whose activities had been disrupted by the police. Thailand cracked down on human traffickers earlier in 2015 after abandoned camps for Rohingyas fleeing persecution in Myanmar and economic migrants from Bangladesh were found in the jungles along the Thai-Malaysia border.

However, some analysts suspect the bombing was the work of Uyghur separatists angry that Thailand had forcibly repatriated scores of Uyghurs to China in July 2015. Many Uyghurs try to escape persecution and tight control in China with the help of professional smugglers.

Thailand deported 40 Uyghur asylum seekers back to China in 2025, which drew international criticism.

The shrine's popularity among Chinese tourists lent support to the theory that the bombing had a political element.

The 'King of the North' seeks a path to becoming Britain's next leader in a special election

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

ASHTON-IN-MAKERFIELD, England (AP) — About 75,000 voters in a pocket of northwest England are about to make a momentous decision. They will cast ballots in a contest that may well pick the U.K.'s next prime minister, or plunge Britain's febrile politics into even more turmoil. Possibly both.

Some of them aren't too enthusiastic.

"I think they're all a waste of time," said Shirley Prior on the choice of candidates in Makerfield, where a special election on June 18 has drawn interest from journalists around the world. That level of attention is all-but unheard of for a midterm by-election to fill one of the 650 seats in the House of Commons.

If Andy Burnham from the center-left Labour Party wins, there's a strong chance he will replace embattled Prime Minister Keir Starmer as leader of both party and country. He's up against Reform UK, a hard-right party hoping to prove that this longtime Labour stronghold is fertile ground for its anti-immigration message, with potentially seismic consequences for British democracy.

This district has elected Labour lawmakers for 120 years, but Burnham is not a shoo-in. Reform, led by the veteran anti-immigration politician Nigel Farage, won 24 of the 25 council seats up for grabs in local elections in this area last month.

"I always voted Labour because my dad, my grandad, everybody voted Labour then," Prior said. "I've never done that for a lot, a lot of years."

Immigration is a top issue

The election is taking place amid heightened tensions over immigration. A stabbing in Belfast this week, for which a Sudanese man has been charged with attempted murder, triggered violent protests in Northern Ireland in which cars and houses torched.

In the constituency's main town of Ashton-in-Makerfield, 200 miles (320 kilometers) northwest of London, some voters echo Reform claims that recent arrivals are straining housing and public services.

"Immigration's too high, all the services are being put under pressure and Labour just keep inviting more and more people into the country and it's the taxpayer who has to pay for them," said retiree Phil Arrowsmith.

Annual net migration to the U.K. reached more than 900,000 in 2023, under the previous Conservative government, before falling to 171,000 last year.

That decline has done little to boost a Labour government that has floundered since winning election in July 2024.

Starmer has struggled to deliver promised economic growth, repair tattered public services and ease the cost of living, and been hamstrung by repeated missteps, including his decision to appoint Peter Mandelson, a scandal-tarnished friend of Jeffrey Epstein, as Britain's ambassador to Washington.

A dismal performance in local elections last month sparked a clamor from Labour lawmakers for Starmer's resignation. He has refused, but Cabinet minister Wes Streeting quit so he can run in a leadership contest that could come soon.

Burnham, the popular mayor of Greater Manchester, also harbors leadership ambitions, but needs a seat in Parliament if he wants to challenge Starmer. An opening emerged when Josh Simons, the Labour lawmaker for Makerfield, stepped down to trigger a special election.

Burnham said he understands that voters are "fed up" and calls the large Reform UK vote "a cry for real change" that Labour must heed.

The 'King of the North' eyes power in London

The Makerfield constituency is a capsule of British history, a collection of former coal-mining communities turned commuter suburbs. The slag heaps and slum housing in the area described by George Orwell in his 1937 book "The Road to Wigan Pier" have been replaced by suburbs of tidy modern houses amid Victorian workers' cottages, interspersed with farmers' fields.

Though far from the city center, it is part of Greater Manchester, and Burnham gets honks and thumbs'

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ups from passing drivers as he walks down the street in his smart-casual uniform of dark jeans with a navy blue shirt and jacket.

The 56-year-old has been mayor of the region of 3 million people since 2017, a period that has seen central Manchester boom, with skyscrapers blooming on postindustrial sites. Many residents praise him for championing the city, and for taking a piecemeal public transport system under municipal control as the Bee Network.

For a decade and a half before that he was a lawmaker in Parliament, and a minister in Labour governments. He doesn't emphasize that part of his CV, preferring the outsider status that has seen him nicknamed the King of the North.

"What we've built in Greater Manchester needs to go national," Burnham told reporters during a campaign event this week. "I know what it is to turn places around."

Many predict a close contest

The campaign is an odd mix of the local and the international. Some voters cite immigration as a top concern. Others mention struggling main street shops, potholes and petty crime.

Burnham's main rival is Reform UK candidate Rob Kenyon, a 41-year-old plumber and local councilor who came second to Labour here in the 2024 national election. He says he's an unpolished regular bloke, though opponents have criticized him over crude, sexist and anti-vaccine comments on social media.

Reform voters are also being targeted by Restore, an even more hardline anti-immigration party.

Michael Poultney, a retired teacher and Labour supporter, thinks the unpopularity of Starmer's government means Burnham faces a stiff challenge.

"Without his personal vote, I think we would struggle," he said. "Keir Starmer has done reasonably well on the international stage, but the government are yet to be in control of the economy."

Burnham insists he is running for the people of Makerfield, not his own ambition, and is not taking victory for granted.

"I am making no assumptions beyond the 18th of June," Burnham said.

But he stressed that "this is a change byelection."

"I will take the fight for the changes I want to see in politics as far as I can take it," he said.

Philippine town seeks immediate airlift of food to ease hunger in quake-hit villages

By JOEAL CALUPITAN and BASILIO SEPE Associated Press

GENERAL SANTOS, Philippines (AP) — The mayor of a southern Philippine town that was devastated by a powerful earthquake pleaded Thursday for helicopters to transport food to stave off hunger in several landslide-isolated villages.

The 7.8 magnitude offshore quake, one of the strongest to hit the Philippine archipelago in a half century, struck Monday off the southern province of Sarangani and has left at least 47 people dead and injured 688 with 31 still missing.

More than 45,000 people remained displaced, about half in emergency shelters, after the quake damaged more than 12,600 houses in farming towns and cities. Many were still too traumatized to return home due to aftershocks, provincial officials said.

Sarangani reported 20 dead from the quake, the highest toll from the affected provinces, mostly due to a landslide that buried houses in the coastal town of Glan, according to the government's Office of Civil Defense, which deals with major disasters.

Glan Mayor Victor James Yap said power has not been restored to his province and 10 of 31 villages in his town of more than 100,000 people remained inaccessible mostly due to landslides. He asked the government to immediately deploy air force helicopters to deliver food and other aid to the stricken areas.

"We need food and water but it's difficult to transport them to some of our villages which remain isolated," Yap told DZMM radio network. "Choppers are needed to transport food because people there are already very hungry."

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A key access road to the town has been reopened and will allow the delivery of fuel as early as Thursday, but the town remained without power and cellphone services were still spotty, according to Yap.

The Office of Civil Defense said more than 26 million pesos (\$426,000) worth of food packs, cash and other aid have been provided so far and 180 government and military planes, helicopters, ships and trucks have been deployed to respond to the disaster.

About 3,400 government and military personnel were involved in search efforts for the missing, debris-clearing in roads, damage assessment and other disaster-mitigation work, it said.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Wednesday visited the hard-hit city of General Santos city, where he inspected damaged hospitals and schools and discussed recovery efforts. He ordered the release of 100 million pesos (\$1.6 million) for the repair of the partly collapsed city hall and 50,000 pesos (\$820) for the families of each of the victims who died in the quake.

Most of the deaths from the quake were caused by falling debris from collapsed buildings and landslides in Sarangani, the coastal city of General Santos, and the outlying provinces of South Cotabato and Davao Occidental.

Two swimmers drowned and one remained missing off General Santos after being swept out to sea shortly after the quake hit. Waves of up to 1.4 meters (4.6 feet) above tide level were measured in the country's south and smaller waves washed ashore in Indonesia and Palau and as far away as southern Japan.

The earthquake was one of the strongest to hit the country since an 8.1 magnitude quake and tsunami on Aug. 17, 1976, that killed about 8,000 people.

The Philippines is often hit by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions due to its location on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," an arc of seismic faults around the ocean.

Police blast water cannons at Belfast protesters as unrest flares again after stabbing

By PETER MORRISON and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

BELFAST, Northern Ireland (AP) — Police blasted water cannons Wednesday at protesters in Northern Ireland who set small fires and hurled bricks, rocks and bottles at them during a second night of violence over a brutal stabbing on a Belfast street.

Demonstrators wearing masks tore bricks from the walls outside homes and smashed sidewalks with sledgehammers to toss at riot police. In one place, the unruly crowd used sections of a dismantled picket fence to take cover on the street.

The clashes with police came several hours after a 30-year-old man from Sudan appeared in a Belfast court charged with attempted murder in a stabbing attack that left a man seriously injured and triggered anti-immigrant violence.

Hadi Alodid, 30, was ordered held in jail after appearing by video in Belfast Magistrates' Court, where a detective said he blinded Stephen Ogilvie in the left eye during the knife attack. He was also charged with possessing a knife and threatening to kill a radiographer while being treated for a hand injury after the assault.

When police arrived at the crime scene, they found Alodid on the man, armed with a kitchen knife, the detective said. Alodid later told hospital staff: "I've killed someone, I don't know if they are dead," and said, "I will kill you."

He refused legal representation through an Arabic interpreter and did not enter a plea.

Police were prepared for more violence after masked men on Tuesday set fire to several homes they believed to house immigrants, burned trash bins, torched a Belfast bus and pelted police with objects.

Firefighters rescued several people from burning houses and more than two dozen people were left homeless.

Anselme Shima, a Belfast resident originally from Congo, said he saw smoke from burning vehicles near his home.

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"I've lived on my street for almost 10 years, I have a good relationship with my neighbors, but last night was a horrific one," he said. "We don't know what to do. I'm scared. Seeing this, I'm wondering if I'm next."

Families, one with a baby, were rescued and taken to police stations for safety, Police Service of Northern Ireland Chief Constable Jon Boutcher said.

"These weren't just families from ethnic minority communities, these were families from across communities that were caught up in this vile behavior last night," Boutcher told the BBC. "There is absolutely no excuse for it."

Boutcher said 200 more officers would be on the streets Wednesday and the PSNI was calling in support from other forces. Bus and train operators in Belfast said they would stop services early because of expected protests.

Ogilvie's family appealed for an end to the violence and said migrants "make a deeply valuable contribution to our country."

"We do not want this terrible tragedy to be used to divide people or fuel hostility," the family said in a statement.

Politicians from both parts of Northern Ireland's power-sharing government condemned the violence. First Minister Michelle O'Neill of Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein said it was "thuggery."

"Groups of masked men burning families out of their homes is nothing less than disgusting cowardice," she said.

Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly, of the pro-British Democratic Unionist Party, said that "taking frustration at the evil actions of a person out on those who had no part in it is utterly wrong."

The attack was caught on video

Monday's attack, caught in video footage that quickly spread on social media, was seized on by anti-immigration activists. Ogilvie, a man in his 40s, was hospitalized with deep cuts to his head, face and back.

Police said Alodid entered Northern Ireland from the neighboring Republic of Ireland in 2023, applied for asylum and was given a five-year permit to remain.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland said there is no information to suggest the attack was terrorism-related.

Protests were encouraged online by far-right activists, and the street violence erupted despite politicians' calls for calm.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer condemned the stabbing attack as "sickening," but said violence against people based on their background would not be tolerated.

"The scenes in Belfast last night were shocking and completely unacceptable," Starmer said on X. "There is no justification for the violence and disorder that we saw threatening our communities, nor for those who encouraged it, online or elsewhere."

Northern Ireland Justice Minister Naomi Long said social media agitators who "yesterday would have struggled to find Belfast on a map" were "weaponizing" the fears of local people.

"If you're driving people from their homes based on nothing but the color of their skin, you can't dress that up any other way, it's racism, and those bad faith actors need to take a step back," she told the BBC.

Some raise questions about the Irish border

Some politicians said the stabbing should spark a review of the open border between Northern Ireland, which is part of the U.K., and the Republic of Ireland.

The border is a highly sensitive issue. Allowing the free flow of people is a major pillar of the peace process that largely ended decades of violence known as "The Troubles." The conflict involving Irish Republican and British Loyalist militants and U.K. security forces left almost 3,600 people dead before a 1998 peace accord.

Much of Tuesday's violence took place in working-class areas where former paramilitary groups still hold considerable sway over the streets.

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, an idea rejected by Starmer and other British politicians.

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 and sentenced last week to life in prison with a minimum 21-year term. A protest over Nowak's death turned violent, with some attacking police with chairs and rocks. Several people were charged with violent disorder.

Pope honors Barcelona's Sagrada Familia as masterpiece of stone, color and light on Gaudí centenary

By JOSEPH WILSON and NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Pope Leo XIV celebrated the Sagrada Familia Basilica as a masterpiece of "stones, colors and light," as he marked the centenary of the death of its architect, Antoni Gaudí, with a Mass on Wednesday to inaugurate its final soaring sandcastle spire.

Leo called Gaudí's unfinished temple, one of the world's most visited monuments, a "sign of unity and harmony for all of Spain," an ongoing building project like the lifelong journey all Christians make to find God.

"We are all the living stones of this edifice," Leo said from the altar of the basilica, with Spanish King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia sitting to his side and a hundreds-strong choir filling the basilica with song.

The service was the highlight of Leo's weeklong visit to Spain, the first by a pope in 15 years to the once-staunchly Catholic European country that, like many others, has experienced secularizing trends.

The trip, though, has underscored how the country of 50 million people, which experienced a religious crisis after its 20th century dictatorship ended, still has plenty of faithful Catholics who have turned out in droves to welcome the American pope.

An estimated 120,000 people lined the streets around Sagrada Familia for the event, with streets closed to traffic and a heavy police presence, given the attendance of the royal couple and Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez. The crowds remained after Mass to watch as Leo inaugurated the basilica's final Tower of Jesus Christ that has made it the world's tallest church.

Speaking in Catalan and Spanish, Leo blessed the tower and its illuminated ceramic cross from outside the basilica, surrounded by bishops craning their mitre-capped heads to look up. An angelic boy's choir sang as a spectacular light show lit up the basilica's stained glass windows from the inside and fireworks shot off its facade.

Honoring Catalonia's Christian traditions

Earlier Wednesday, Leo celebrated a more ancient sacred monument, traveling to Montserrat, a mountain complex outside the city that is dear to many Catalans. The complex, which includes an 11th-century Benedictine abbey and a 16th-century basilica, is revered for its Black Madonna statue and is home to a boy's choir that has existed since the 13th century and is Europe's oldest.

Thousands of faithful arrived early at the monastery, with groups of nuns and schoolchildren singing and waving signs and photographs of the pope outside the basilica. Bells rang out over the spire-like rock formations that top Montserrat and the valley below as Leo arrived in a golf cart.

In recent years, the Montserrat abbey has faced numerous accusations from survivors of clergy sexual abuse and was included in the Spanish ombudsman's 800-page report on the crisis in 2023. The report found 15 victims and three alleged perpetrators linked to the abbey.

"It's very painful because there are members of the church who committed errors," said the Rev. Cesario Escarda, a Toledo priest, as he waited for Leo at the abbey. "What the pope wants to do is shine a light on the truth and ask forgiveness and bring in the victims and listen to them and accompany them."

The Bible carved in stone

The highlight of Leo's visit, though, was his Mass at Sagrada Familia to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the death of its famed Catalan designer, Gaudí, who died at age 73, three days after he was hit by a tram.

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A century after construction began during the pontificate of Leo's namesake, Pope Leo XIII, the basilica has become one of the world's most visited but unfinished monuments, annually drawing upward of 5 million visitors a year.

Commemorating Gaudí's death, Leo said he wanted to give thanks to all the supporters, artists and workers who "cooperated in the construction of an architectural masterpiece, which is also an eloquent catechesis made of stones, colors and light."

Gaudí, who is on the path to possible sainthood, spent four decades designing and building the temple as the summary of the Christian faith carved in stone. The most important stories of Jesus' life, the Nativity and Passion, are etched into the basilica's east and west facades. A third facade facing south, the Glory, will serve as the basilica's main entrance when finished.

The temple is an architectural and geometrical masterpiece inside and out, an art nouveau celebration in form and symbol of Christianity and God's creation through stone and light.

"Much more than a monument, the Basilica of the Sagrada Familia remains a work in progress today, reminding us that the Christian life is always a journey, because it is a project that God is carrying out," Leo said in his homily.

A total of 18 sandcastle spires rise up from the top and pierce Barcelona's skyline: 12 to symbolize Christ's 12 apostles, four for each of the four Evangelists who recorded Christ's life in the Gospels, one topped with a star over the apse honoring the Virgin Mary and, tallest among them, the Tower of Jesus Christ.

When the final Christ tower was finished at a height of 172½ meters (564 feet) last year, it made Sagrada Familia the world's tallest church. Construction is expected to be fully complete within a decade.

"The entire structure of the Sagrada Familia is striking," said Laura Rincón, who was on hand outside along with two friends for the Mass, after she finished work in a nearby shop. She said that she was sure the pope would be impressed by the church she marvels at every time she passes by.

"If you look at it just for its architecture, it is amazing," she said. "Inside, its columns make you feel like you are inside a forest."

An interior that looks like a forest

The cross-shaped interior, with the altar at the apse, is an homage to light and nature. Treelike columns soar to the sky, colored by constantly changing light filtered through stained glass windows like the sun poking through leaves in a forest.

"Nature is my teacher," Gaudí once said. "Everything comes from the great book of nature, always open that we must read."

The colors of the window glass have meaning: The blues and greens of the eastern portal windows, where the facade depicts Christ's birth, look more joyful and are most brilliant when the sun rises and light passes through. The coarser shades of red and orange, illuminated by the setting sun on the western portals, color the side of the basilica that depicts Christ's Passion. Behind the altar and above the cross are yellows and gold that glimmer in the noonday sun.

Historian Mònica Santín, who leads tours of the basilica, said that in designing Sagrada Familia, Gaudí was guided by two books: the Gospels and nature.

"The way he lets in the natural light is also an invitation to the Christian mystery," she said, citing the three facades depicting Christ's birth, death and glory.

"And when you enter inside, it is all light," Santín said. "What is that the symbol of? We can't see God, but we perceive his light all around us. I think that is how you can read this message, and it is fascinating."

Knicks complete record rally from 29 points down and beat Spurs 107-106 for 3-1 NBA Finals lead

By BRIAN MAHONEY AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A record-breaking comeback, capped off by what could go down as a legendary play. The long road back to the top of the NBA is almost complete for the New York Knicks, and the step they took Wednesday night was unforgettable.

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The Knicks came from 29 points down and moved to the brink of their first championship since 1973 by beating the San Antonio Spurs 107-106 in Game 4 of the finals on OG Anunoby's tip-in with 1.2 seconds remaining.

"That has to be the most iconic shot in the history of New York basketball," Knicks coach Mike Brown said.

It's certainly high on the list — as high as Anunoby leaped when Jalen Brunson's long 3-point shot bounced off the front of the rim, with his right hand stretching high to softly flick it in.

"Right hand from God," Knicks center Karl-Anthony Towns said.

The Knicks, who have just two titles in their 80-year history and hadn't even been to the NBA Finals since 1999, have a 3-1 lead and three chances to win the best-of-seven series — starting with Game 5 on Saturday night in San Antonio.

It looked impossible early, when the Spurs rolled to a 27-point halftime lead. But Brunson helped bring the Knicks back with 36 points and Anunoby finished with 33.

The Knicks weathered a playoff storm

No team had come from more than 24 points down in a finals game, when Boston did it against the Lakers in 2008, since the NBA began keeping detailed play-by-play for all four quarters in 1997. The Spurs led 81-52 in the third quarter.

"We're a resilient group. We've been through a lot," Anunoby said. "We've come back plenty of times when we're behind. Just staying with it, weathering the storm, not being too down or angry or frustrated."

The only bigger comeback on record in any playoff game was 31 points by the Los Angeles Clippers against Golden State in Game 2 of a first-round series in 2019.

"You look at it when you're down 29 of, 'OK, let's get it to 20.' There's three minutes left in the third quarter, we're down 18, you're thinking, 'Let's get it to 10,'" forward Josh Hart said.

"In the fourth quarter, you're like, this is winning time. Anything can happen."

And it did.

The Spurs started out awesome but then were awful

The Knicks had their 13-game winning streak snapped in Game 3 and seemed headed for a second straight defeat throughout the first half, when Victor Wembanyama and the Spurs opened the biggest halftime lead by a visiting team in the finals.

But the young Spurs, who made 11 of their first 16 3-pointers, went cold in the second half, going 3 for 17 behind the arc as the Knicks outscored them 58-30.

"We got on our heels — we missed some shots," Spurs coach Mitch Johnson said. "It's disappointing, to say the least."

Delirious fans inside Madison Square Garden sang along to Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'" a few minutes after watching something that seemed almost impossible.

Wembanyama had 24 points and 13 rebounds but shot just 9 for 25 from the field.

Road teams had won the first three games, only the second time that had happened in the finals. San Antonio was well on its way to making it 4 for 4.

Knicks scrap watch party and fans have nothing to cheer early

President Donald Trump wasn't at this game — Taylor Swift was — but the same restrictions remained around Madison Square Garden as when he attended Game 3. That angered the Knicks, who decided not to go forward with plans to hold an outdoor watch party outside the arena.

Inside the building in the first half, there wasn't much for the hosts to be happy about, either.

But the Knicks gave themselves a chance by limiting the Spurs to 14 points on 4-for-20 shooting in the third quarter, using a 13-0 run to get back in it and cutting it to 90-75 heading to the fourth.

These Knicks, who erased a 22-point deficit in the fourth quarter against Cleveland in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference finals, just don't quit. Even when the comeback seemed for naught when Stephon Castle was fouled after the Knicks had taken the lead and made two free throws to put San Antonio back ahead with 30 seconds left, the Knicks had one more rally in them.

Dylan Harper scored 21 points and De'Aaron Fox and Devin Vassell each had 18 for the Spurs, who will

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try to regroup and send the series back to New York for Game 6 next Tuesday. Only one team — Cleveland in 2016 — has recovered from a 3-1 deficit in the finals.

"I think it began before (the fourth quarter)," Wembanyama said of the Spurs' collapse. "I can't really explain it right now. I don't know. ... We clearly weren't the most hungry in the second half."

Fans booed Wembanyama when he came on to the floor to warm up about an hour before the game and the Knicks tried to get rough with him, with Mitchell Robinson called for a flagrant foul for hitting him above the shoulders and Jose Alvarado reviewed for one after going below the belt.

Wembanyama — who was also called for a flagrant — stood up OK against the Knicks but will regret the two free throws he missed with 1:47 left and San Antonio leading 104-103.

The Spurs broke to a 12-2 lead, giving them a double-digit advantage in the first quarter of all four games. They kept pouring it on and led 41-22 after one, then extended it to 57-32 when Julian Champagnie's 3-pointer made them 11 for 16 behind the arc.

Storms knock out power in the Midwest and disrupt Chicago flights

By Hallie Golden Associated Press

Damaging storms swept through the Midwest on Wednesday, knocking out power to hundreds of thousands of customers and causing more than a thousand flight delays or cancellations at Chicago airports.

The National Weather Service issued tornado warnings across Illinois, Kansas, northern Missouri and southern Iowa, while severe thunderstorm watches were in place for parts of the Great Lakes.

The Chicago area was in store for a one-two punch of weather. Storms that moved in Wednesday afternoon, downing trees and damaging some buildings, were expected to be followed by more wild weather in the evening. The National Weather Service warned of storms moving eastward across northern Illinois and potentially bringing "damaging winds, a brief tornado or two, and localized torrential rainfall increasing the risk for flash flooding."

The two major Chicago airports, Chicago O'Hare International Airport and Chicago Midway International Airport, temporarily put all flights on hold in the evening due to thunderstorms. A similar ground stop was issued at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York due to thunderstorms.

By Wednesday evening, more than 1,000 flights going into and out of Chicago had been delayed or canceled, according to FlightAware, a flight tracking website.

Strong winds blew part of the roof off an apartment building in the Chicago area, forcing residents to leave, according to NBC 5 Chicago. Elsewhere, barns collapsed in Wisconsin, buildings were crushed in rural northern Missouri and some large trees and power lines were downed in other areas across the Midwest, photos and video online showed.

More than 264,000 customers had no electricity in Illinois, the majority in Cook County, and nearly 140,000 were without power in Michigan, according to poweroutage.com. There were also outages in Kansas, Wisconsin, Iowa, Indiana and Ohio.

Commonwealth Edison Company, which provides electric service across northern Illinois, said the storms had downed poles and wires.

"We know this is challenging and will restore service as safely and quickly as conditions allow," the company said in a post on X.

Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson warned residents Wednesday afternoon that conditions were expected to intensify and could bring tornadoes, severe thunderstorms, damaging winds, and flash flooding.

"Ensure you have access to a safe place to take shelter, stay tuned to weather updates, and check on your neighbors," he said on X.

The man accused of killing a top Minnesota Democratic lawmaker and her husband is due to change plea

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The man charged in the political assassinations of the top Democrat in the Minnesota House and her husband, as well as the attempted murders of a state senator and his wife, is due to appear in federal court Thursday to change his not-guilty plea, after federal prosecutors said they would not seek the death penalty against him.

The U.S. attorney's office in Minneapolis notified the court Wednesday that the Justice Department would not seek the death penalty against Vance Boelter in accordance with a proposed plea agreement. Boelter's attorneys did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment. The court filing did not detail the terms of the plea agreement.

Former Minnesota House Speaker Melissa Hortman and her husband, Mark Hortman, and state Sen. John Hoffman and his wife, Yvette Hoffman, were shot by a man who came to their doors in the early hours of June 14, 2025, disguised as a police officer and driving a fake squad car. The Hortmans' golden retriever was so gravely injured that he had to be euthanized.

Boelter, 58, was captured near his home in rural Green Isle late the next day after what prosecutors have called the largest search for a suspect in Minnesota history. He faces federal and state murder, attempted murder and other charges. His state case has been on hold pending the resolution of his federal charges.

Minnesota abolished capital punishment in 1911 and has never had a federal death penalty case. Daniel Borgertpoeping, a spokesperson for the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, said the federal plea deal would not affect Boelter's state charges.

While the Trump administration has pushed for greater use of capital punishment, there were questions about whether Boelter's case would qualify for the death penalty under federal law.

Prosecutors have called the shootings political. When they announced the federal indictment in July, they released a rambling handwritten letter they say Boelter wrote to FBI Director Kash Patel in which he confessed to the attacks. However, the letter didn't make clear why he targeted the Hortmans or the Hoffmans.

In some messages to media, Boelter referenced a vague and cryptic "investigation" he had been carrying out, sometimes suggesting it was about the COVID-19 vaccine.

Friends described Boelter as an evangelical Christian and occasional preacher and missionary, who held politically conservative views and had been struggling to find work.

John Hoffman said in a lawsuit filed against Boelter in April that his left arm and hand likely would never fully recover, and that he also had permanent injuries to his digestive and urinary systems.

Yvette Hoffman was left with permanent physical weakness, the lawsuit said, while their adult daughter, Hope Hoffman, who was there and called 911 but was not shot, suffered severe psychological trauma.

Judge considers arguments in challenge to New Mexico's universal childcare program

By SAVANNAH PETERS Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — A New Mexico judge is scheduled Thursday to consider arguments in a challenge to the state's fledgling universal childcare program, an ambitious and closely watched effort to eliminate daycare costs for all working families.

A lawsuit brought by former Republican gubernatorial candidate Duke Rodriguez and other plaintiffs challenges the process used by Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's administration to eliminate an income cap and co-pays for childcare assistance before the Legislature had a chance to weigh in or approve funding.

"This is executive overreach. The program was launched unlawfully," said Rodriguez, who lost his party's nomination in New Mexico's recent primary.

The state's childcare agency disputes that, arguing in court filings that lawmakers have since "expressly

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authorized" and funded the expansion, rendering the lawsuit moot. Lujan Grisham signed legislation in February enshrining the program into law provided state finances remain healthy.

District Judge Elaine Lujan could issue a ruling Thursday on whether the lawsuit can proceed. A potential pause to the program would put thousands of New Mexican families back on the hook for daycare payments and create a headache for businesses.

Ilene Harding, who runs seven daycare centers in the Albuquerque area, said the expansion has boosted enrollment and streamlined billing.

"We've always been financially solvent, but it's given us stability," Harding said.

The challenge comes as New Mexico looks to cement its place as the first U.S. state to cover all working families' daycare bills regardless of income. But the stakes extend nationwide as policymakers from New York to California look for models to reduce costs for families and expand public investment in childcare.

New Mexico's program, which is financed in large part on revenue from oil and gas production in the state, was among the nation's most generous before November's expansion, waiving costs for families making up to 400% of the federal poverty rate or roughly \$132,000 per year for a family of four.

Legislative analysts already have raised questions about the sustainability of New Mexico's expanded program, noting earlier this year that the state Early Childhood Education and Care Department started overspending just weeks into the November launch.

The state agency acknowledged at the time that enrollment grew faster than expected, leading to higher costs, but disputed that it was over budget.

FISA spy program at risk over Trump's pick of Pulte for director of national intelligence

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, LISA MASCARO and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A rare lapse in a law that allows the U.S. to gather intelligence abroad is growing more likely after President Donald Trump resisted calls from Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill to immediately name a permanent head of the nation's intelligence agencies.

Trump has doubled down on his temporary pick for director of national intelligence, federal housing finance regulator Bill Pulte, even though he has little experience for the job. Democrats say they won't support the renewal of Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, known as FISA, unless the president withdraws Pulte's appointment and nominates a permanent replacement.

The House will try early Thursday to approve a short-term FISA extension, but passage is unlikely. The Senate may follow suit, hoping to prevent what could be an unprecedented lapse in the surveillance tool.

The impasse could soon result in limitations on what intelligence the U.S. government can collect abroad just as World Cup games begin in cities around the country and ahead of celebrations for the nation's 250th anniversary. The law expires on Friday at midnight.

"We can't let them extort us," Trump said of Democrats.

Trump has stuck with Pulte as the acting head, rebuffing demands from lawmakers for a more qualified nominee. He asked Congress for a short-term extension of the law to "provide time for the selection and confirmation" of a permanent director. He said he wants Pulte to begin downsizing intelligence agencies.

The parties leveled blame for the potential interruption in what has been seen as an essential, if long-debated, surveillance program for keeping the country safe.

"We're going to ask every member here to do the right thing," said House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La. "We cannot allow that to go dark."

House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries said if Trump wants a shot at a short-term extension, he needs to pull the Pulte appointment. Pulte is a "disgraceful individual" and a "partisan political hack" who is deeply unqualified for the job, Jeffries said.

GOP leaders lobby the White House, to no avail

Congressional Republicans have lobbied Trump all week to quickly nominate a permanent replacement. But he said he needs more time to do so.

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Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said Republican leaders have "made our views known" to the White House.

Trump has said that he is interviewing five candidates for his pick to lead the agency permanently, after the resignation of Tulsi Gabbard.

And Johnson said the president has made it very clear that Pulte will serve a "very short term — a sort of renovation role" to help the Office of the Director of National Intelligence be "renovated and downsized."

But Democrats on the House Intelligence Committee led by Rep. Jim Himes of Connecticut said in a letter to the president that Pulte is a "uniquely poor choice" to serve even in the acting capacity.

Both Republican and Democratic lawmakers skeptical of Pulte have pointed to his lack of intelligence experience and also his record at the Federal Housing Finance Agency. In the position, he has been linked with criminal referrals over allegations of mortgage fraud by public officials Trump sought to punish, including New York Attorney General Letitia James, a Democrat; Sen. Adam Schiff, D-Calif.; and Lisa Cook, a board member of the Federal Reserve.

"He has distinguished himself only as someone who will do or say anything to stay in your good graces," Himes and the other lawmakers wrote, "qualities that are precisely the opposite of what our nation needs."

FISA will lapse at midnight Friday

Section 702 of FISA allows agencies such as the CIA, National Security Agency and FBI to collect communications from foreign targets overseas without a warrant.

While members of both parties who cite privacy issues have long wanted to limit the authority, there was broad bipartisan support to renew it, especially after Republicans and Democrats recently worked out a compromise bill.

Virginia Sen. Mark Warner, the top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, has worked with Republicans on the compromise legislation to renew the authority. But he called Pulte's appointment to replace Gabbard "a live hand grenade" disrupting the process.

Warner said the only way he'll support a short-term extension of the surveillance law is if the principal deputy director of national intelligence, Aaron Lukas, is the acting leader during the duration of that extension.

Sen. Tom Cotton, the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and Sen. Chuck Grassley, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, have warned the administration that the spy tool is likely to lapse.

The administration should prepare "for a potential significant gap in foreign intelligence collection," they wrote in a letter.

Trump doesn't back down on Pulte

After bipartisan pushback to Pulte's temporary appointment, Trump said last week that he would not permanently nominate him to the position. But Democrats, and some Republicans, want his appointment pulled immediately and for Trump to nominate a replacement that can be confirmed by the Senate.

On Tuesday, though, Trump announced that Pulte would not only take over as acting director — he'd also start earlier than expected, on June 19.

One of several possible replacements could be Pete Hoekstra, Trump's ambassador to Canada and a former chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. The White House has reached out to Hoekstra about the job and conversations are ongoing, according to a person familiar with the outreach who requested anonymity to discuss the private conversations.

US launches new strikes on Iran, which fires back at Gulf states and Jordan

By JON GAMBRELL, MICHELLE L. PRICE and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The United States launched a second round of airstrikes on Iran into Thursday morning after President Donald Trump warned that Tehran would "pay the price" for stalled negotiations, and Iran responded with strikes targeting Bahrain, Kuwait and Jordan.

The new U.S. assault across multiple Iranian cities came as efforts to negotiate an end the war again

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appeared stuck, with Iran insisting it would maintain its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, which has disrupted global energy supplies and sent oil prices higher.

It was the third time this week that back-and-forth strikes have tested a two-month shaky ceasefire.

Trump has urged Iran to sign a deal to end the war and suggested earlier this week that an agreement could be reached in days.

But Iran has proved resilient despite weeks of heavy bombing. It is betting that its ability to effectively close the Strait of Hormuz — a crucial passageway for oil and natural gas — gives it a strong bargaining chip.

Iran's United Nations envoy said the U.S. should refrain from threats of force if it wants a deal.

Still, 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.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appears intent on pursuing goals that make compromise harder: 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. On Monday, Iran and Israel targeted each other.

US strikes Iran and Iran fires back at Gulf States

The U.S. Central Command said it had "completed" its latest round of airstrikes just before sunrise in Iran. The military command said the strikes came "in response to Iran's unwarranted and continued aggression" and targeted "Iranian military surveillance capabilities, communication systems and air defense sites." It did not elaborate on the damage done by the strikes, which it said were carried out by the U.S. Air Force, Marines and Navy.

Explosions from the strikes echoed around Iran's capital, Tehran, as well as the port city of Bandar Abbas and other southern areas along the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran responded by launching strikes on Bahrain, Kuwait and Jordan, and Kuwait closed its airspace as its air defenses fought off the attack. Kuwait's Directorate General of Civil Aviation said flights were being diverted to other airports, without elaborating.

"This measure comes in light of the state of Kuwait being subjected to sinful Iranian aggressions and the potential risks that may result from this on civil aviation traffic in the region," Kuwait said.

Kuwait International Airport took a direct Iranian hit in recent days, killing one person and wounding dozens. On Wednesday, Iran responded to U.S. strikes with attacks on Bahrain, Kuwait and Jordan, all of which host U.S. troops.

Israel early Thursday also warned residents in the north to seek shelter after the detection of suspected incoming fire from Lebanon, while the U.S. Embassy in Jordan issued a warning that "reports indicate missiles, drones or rockets are in Jordanian airspace."

There was no immediate acknowledgment from Jordanian state media about the reports of missile fire, but Iran said it again targeted Jordan's Muwaffaq Salti Air Base on Thursday.

Trump says US is sneaking oil past the Strait of Hormuz

Since the U.S. and Israel started the war with Feb. 28 attacks on Iran, the conflict has shaken the global economy, driven up energy prices worldwide, and made food and other basics more expensive.

The international benchmark for crude oil traded above \$93 a barrel on Wednesday, up more than 25% since the start of the war.

Trump said the U.S. military has since last month undertaken a "secret mission" to sneak oil shipments past Iran's forces in the Strait of Hormuz. He said ships were slipping through at night, aided by the destruction of Iranian radar equipment.

Trump said as a result more than 100 million barrels of oil have evaded Iran's chokehold on the strait. There was no immediate confirmation of that figure, which roughly equals five days of oil shipments through the waterway before the war began.

The military's role was not immediately clear. Capt. Tim Hawkins, a Central Command spokesman, said U.S. forces "communicate and coordinate" with commercial ships in the area, but gave no details on military support being offered.

The U.S. Central Command on Wednesday refuted Iran's claims that the Strait of Hormuz is closed, say-

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ing commercial ships are continuing to transit in and out.

US and Iranian strikes shake the Mideast

Earlier Wednesday, the U.S. military said an American aircraft fired "precision munitions" into the engine room of the Palau-flagged vessel M/T Settebello as it attempted to breach the naval blockade with a shipment of Iranian oil. It was the eighth merchant vessel disabled by U.S. forces in waters off Iran.

India's foreign ministry said three Indian sailors were missing after the Settebello was struck, while 21 others were rescued. Its statement did not mention the U.S. military or the blockade.

Hawkins of the U.S. Central Command said American forces warned the crew before firing on the ship.

The U.S. military said strikes earlier Wednesday targeted "air defense, ground control stations, and surveillance radar sites."

Iran said U.S. strikes hit two water reservoirs in the southern city of Sirik, temporarily cutting off water to thousands of people. U.S. Central Command had no immediate comment. Tehran later claimed attacks in Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi condemned the American attacks as a violation of Iranian sovereignty.

Still, efforts to mediate a deal continued. Following consultations with the U.S., a delegation from Qatar arrived in Tehran for talks earlier Wednesday, according to an official with knowledge of the visit who requested anonymity due to the sensitivity of the talks.

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

A drone boat rescued the helicopter's two crew. Trump said they were uninjured.

Big disagreements stand in the way of a quick peace deal

Wary of high gas prices in the run-up to congressional elections in November, Trump seems to be looking for a quick win. But 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 Trump rejected.

Iran has insisted that any deal to end the war must also end fighting between its ally Hezbollah and Israel. Israel has instead intensified its military campaign against the Lebanon-based militant group.

Amnesty accuses Israel's government of 'ethnic cleansing' of Palestinians from the West Bank

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Amnesty International accused Israel on Wednesday of carrying out a campaign of "ethnic cleansing" of Palestinians from the occupied West Bank with the intention to annex the Palestinian territory.

The accusation came in a new, 149-page report alleging that the forced displacement of West Bank Palestinians resulted from a concerted state policy, and not just the actions of violent settlers. While much of the displacement is driven by settlers who build outposts on Palestinian land, the report asserts that the process could not occur without the support of the government.

The international community overwhelmingly considers the settlements illegal. Israel, meanwhile, views the West Bank as disputed territory and says its final status is subject to negotiations.

U.N. data says that over 100 West Bank villages have been fully or partially emptied out between January 2023 and April 2026. At the same time, the United Nations has tracked more than 7,280 instances of individual Palestinian displacement because of demolition of homes and structures by Israeli forces, a figure that includes people who were displaced more than once.

Israel has in the past denounced such accusations — including allegations of "ethnic cleansing," a term

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referring to forced expulsions of population by violence — as reflecting longtime unfair bias. It did not immediately respond to the report.

Amnesty says settler violence is sanctioned by the state

"These abuses are not the result of a few 'bad apples.' Settler violence is a core component of a state-sanctioned campaign of ethnic cleansing," said Agnès Callamard, the head of Amnesty. "What we are witnessing is deliberate, state-led annexation, in complete violation of international law unfolding before the eyes of the entire world."

Israeli leaders have condemned particularly grave violence by Jewish settlers but tend to denounce them as exceptions. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition government is dominated by settler leaders and supporters, and key Cabinet ministers are pushing for a formal annexation of the territory.

The government has come under heavy criticism from Palestinians and rights groups for accelerating settlement expansion, which they say is aimed at preventing the establishment of a future Palestinian state there. Over 700,000 Israelis now live in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, areas captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war and claimed by the Palestinians as parts of a future state.

Amnesty says it has identified dozens of bills in Israel's parliament, the Knesset, to extend Israeli civil law and jurisdiction over settlement blocs, as well as over courts that try Palestinians. Recently, the parliament approved a measure making the death penalty the default punishment for West Bank Palestinians convicted of killing Israelis.

Last year, U.S. President Donald Trump said he would not allow Israel to annex the West Bank. The U.S.-brokered ceasefire between Israel and the Hamas militant group that aimed to stop the war in Gaza also acknowledged Palestinian aspirations for statehood.

Villages in remote areas are most vulnerable, rights groups say

Amnesty says the large-scale displacement of Palestinian Bedouin communities in the territory is caused by settler violence, advancement of new settlements and the Israeli takeover of large swaths of unregistered land. Rights groups have raised the alarm about this form of displacement before 2023, but say it dramatically intensified after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel that year that triggered the war.

Rights groups say Bedouin herding communities in remote areas of the West Bank are most vulnerable to displacement. Unlike Palestinians in cities and towns across the West Bank, the villagers are less able to withstand the pressure from often-armed settlers as they establish new outposts around Palestinian villages.

The anti-settlement monitoring group Peace Now says that 212 of at least 363 existing outposts in the West Bank were created since 2023. The outposts are built without permission from Israeli authorities, who sometimes dismantle them but often turn a blind eye or even legalize them retroactively.

Amnesty said its report looked into 27 hamlets and villages in the West Bank where Palestinians were displaced between 2023 and 2025. Researchers interviewed dozens of Palestinians and lawyers, spoke with witnesses of settler violence, watched over 420 videos and analyzed government statements and other reports.

The group also said the international community has failed to act to stop the displacement.

Dror Etkes, who runs the settlement watchdog group Kerem Navot, said that since the October 2023 attack, settlers have taken about 12.5% of West Bank territory — land that Palestinians can no longer access or cross safely.

An ancient whale graveyard in the Indian Ocean teems with life

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Scientists have unearthed communities of marine life — including jellyfish, tubeworms and brittle stars — thriving on a millions-year-old whale graveyard.

These graveyards form when whale carcasses fall to the sea floor, becoming a sustaining snack for nearby critters. This one, located up to 23,000 feet (7 kilometers) below the surface of the southeastern Indian Ocean, spans the largest area and is so far the deepest and oldest found.

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A whale's sheer size and the unique chemistry of its bones are the keys to forming these unique underwater neighborhoods, said Xikun Song, a biologist with the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Deep-sea Science and Engineering.

"At the same time, the very nature of the deep ocean makes these sites exceptionally difficult for scientists to locate," Song, who was involved with the latest find, wrote in an email.

Researchers explored the remains during multiple deep-sea submersible trips in 2023, collecting samples and mapping the extent of the necropolis. They found five carcass sites and fossils, including skulls belonging to beaked and baleen whales. The oldest bones date back 5.3 million years.

Feeding and living on the carcasses were myriad creatures, large and small, including sea cucumbers, squat lobsters and saltwater clams. Many of them are likely species that have never been documented, according to findings published Wednesday in the journal Nature.

"The potential number of specimens is just astounding," said paleontologist Stephen Godfrey with the Calvert Marine Museum in Maryland, who wasn't involved in the research.

Many factors likely conspired to preserve the bones for millions of years, according to the study authors. They're dense enough to outlast attacks from bone-eating worms, and located deep enough in the ocean to avoid getting buried by dust and loose particles. The bones also were coated with a light layer of minerals from the surrounding seawater, which may have prevented them from degrading.

Why did so many whales die here? Maybe they were already living in the area and died of natural causes. A few could have perished from exhaustion or illness caused by deep-sea diving. The area's shape, akin to the letter V, could also have funneled the remains to their resting spot, the authors wrote.

Such discoveries are important because they clue scientists into the vibrant communities that find a way even in remote, hard-to-reach environments.

Studying the whale graveyards "is important for understanding how life can adapt to such extreme conditions, not only due to the lack of light and oxygen but also to the incredibly high pressure," said study co-author and paleontologist Giovanni Bianucci with the University of Pisa in Italy in an email.

Feds won't seek death penalty in plea deal with man accused of killing top Minnesota Democrat

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

U.S. prosecutors said Wednesday they will not seek the death penalty as part of a plea agreement with the man charged in the political assassinations of the top Democrat in the Minnesota House along with her husband, as well as the attempted murders of a state senator and his wife.

The defendant, Vance Boelter, was scheduled for a change-of-plea hearing Thursday morning in federal court in Minneapolis.

"The Attorney General has authorized and directed the government not to seek the death penalty against Defendant Vance Luther Boelter in accordance with the terms delineated in a proposed plea agreement," assistant U.S. attorneys Bradley M. Endicott and Matthew D. Forbes wrote in a letter to the court Wednesday.

The Justice Department had said earlier in the week that it decided not to pursue the death penalty. While the Trump administration has pushed for greater use of capital punishment, there were questions about whether Boelter's case would qualify for it.

Boelter's attorneys did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment. The court filing did not detail the terms of the plea agreement.

Former Minnesota House Speaker Melissa Hortman and her husband, Mark Hortman, and state Sen. John Hoffman and his wife, Yvette Hoffman, were shot by a man who came to their doors in the early hours of June 14, 2025, disguised as a police officer and driving a fake squad car. The Hortmans' golden retriever was so gravely injured that he had to be euthanized.

Boelter, 58, was captured near his home in rural Green Isle late the next day after what prosecutors have called the largest search for a suspect in Minnesota history. He faces federal and state murder, attempted murder and other charges. His state case has been on hold pending the resolution of his federal charges.

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Minnesota abolished capital punishment in 1911 and has never had a federal death penalty case.

Daniel Borgertpoepping, a spokesperson for the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, said the federal plea deal would not affect Boelter's state charges.

Under federal law, to obtain the death penalty against Boelter, prosecutors would have to show he committed the killings during another "crime of violence." Boelter's underlying charge was that he stalked the victims.

A federal judge in New York earlier this year barred prosecutors from seeking the death penalty against Luigi Mangione in the killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, ruling that stalking doesn't count as a violent crime.

Prosecutors have called the attacks on the Minnesota politicians political. When they announced the federal indictment in July, they released a rambling handwritten letter they say Boelter wrote to FBI Director Kash Patel in which he confessed to the shootings. However, the letter didn't make clear why he targeted the Hortmans or the Hoffmans.

In some messages to media, Boelter referenced a vague and cryptic "investigation" he had been carrying out, sometimes suggesting it was about the COVID-19 vaccine.

Friends described Boelter as an evangelical Christian and occasional preacher and missionary, who held politically conservative views and had been struggling to find work.

When Minnesota's legislative session convened in February, Hoffman got a warm welcome as he walked up the stairs into the Senate chamber. He said in a lawsuit filed against Boelter in April that his left arm and hand likely would never fully recover, and that he also had permanent injuries to his digestive and urinary systems.

Yvette Hoffman was left with permanent physical weakness, the lawsuit said, while their adult daughter, Hope Hoffman, who was there and called 911 but was not shot, suffered severe psychological trauma.

Bill Gates testifies about his ties to Epstein, calls meeting him a 'grave error in judgment'

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bill Gates said Wednesday that he made a "grave error in judgment" by meeting with Jeffrey Epstein but denied any wrongdoing as the Microsoft co-founder faced hours of questioning from lawmakers about his relationship with the disgraced financier.

In an opening statement provided to The Associated Press, Gates said he "should never have met with Epstein in the first place," but that he "never witnessed nor had any indication that Epstein was engaged in ongoing criminal conduct."

The tech billionaire became the latest powerful figure linked to Epstein to testify before the House Oversight Committee in a closed-door deposition. The committee chairman, Republican Rep. James Comer, 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.

As Gates arrived at the Capitol, he noted that his appearance was voluntary and said he hoped his testimony would help lawmakers "find justice for the victims." Gates did not take questions from reporters at the conclusion of the interview late Wednesday afternoon.

Gates, who chairs the Gates Foundation, has not been accused in connection with Epstein's crimes and has repeatedly denied any knowledge of Epstein's abuse of girls. He has said the two met only to discuss philanthropy and previously described the relationship as "a huge mistake."

Most Democratic members who participated in Wednesday's questioning described Gates as cooperative. They said some of the most useful information he provided involved other influential people in Epstein's orbit. Lawmakers also said they pressed Gates on why he continued interacting with Epstein after he pleaded guilty in 2008 to soliciting prostitution from a minor.

Gates was aware that Epstein had been convicted of "a horrific crime and continued to interact with him to seek money for his foundation," said Rep. Robert Garcia, the top-ranking Democrat on the committee,

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who described Gates' actions as "a horrific judgment call."

Before the interview began, Comer told reporters that the committee's effort was "about trying to figure out how the government failed."

Lawmakers scrutinize Gates' relationship with Epstein

Gates said he was introduced to Epstein through people involved in his professional and philanthropic work and was drawn in by Epstein's claims that he could help raise billions of dollars for global health initiatives.

Their relationship began in 2011, three years after Epstein's guilty plea in Florida, according to the Justice Department files. Gates said he cut ties in 2014 after concluding Epstein could not deliver on those promises.

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.

Gates added that he never went to Epstein's island or his other infamous properties.

"I have never victimized anyone. While he may have sought to foster a personal relationship, I was never interested in that and never reciprocated," Gates said.

Lawmakers offered differing accounts of the interview as they exited the room throughout the day.

GOP Rep. Tim Burchett described the questioning as "intense," while Democratic Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi said Gates was "combative" and "not terribly forthcoming or candid." Garcia, by contrast, said that while Gates pushed back on some inquiries, "he's answering the questions."

Democratic Rep. Melanie Stansbury said Gates acknowledged maintaining contact with Epstein because he believed the "narrow relationship" was "an acceptable means to access wealthy donors."

The Gates Foundation said 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.

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

Broader Epstein investigation continues

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 girls, some as young as 14, for him to sexually abuse between 2002 and 2005. He died by suicide in a New York jail cell in 2019 while awaiting trial.

The files released by the Justice Department 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.

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 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 saw 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.

Comer said Wednesday that he's planning to ask attorney Alan Dershowitz to appear and that he's been in communication with the Justice Department about acting Attorney General Todd Blanche coming in for questioning as well.

World Cup what to know:

Mexico kicks off a supersized, 48-team tournament

By DAVID BRANDT AP Sports Writer

After years of preparation, a supersized World Cup has finally arrived.

This year's tournament — which is hosted by the U.S., Canada and Mexico — was expanded to 48 teams that will play in 16 stadiums in a record 104 matches over the 39-day tournament.

Mexico gets the World Cup started Thursday and will be a heavy favorite when it hosts South Africa in Mexico City. The second game of the day will be between South Korea and the Czech Republic in Guadalajara, Mexico. All four teams are part of Group A.

Canada and the United States will host their first games Friday. The Canadians will play Bosnia-Herzegovina in Toronto while the Americans face Paraguay in Inglewood, California.

What to watch June 11

Fox is the exclusive U.S. broadcaster of the World Cup with all 104 matches in English on Fox or FS1. All matches are also available on the Fox One app. Telemundo and Universo will broadcast all of the matches in Spanish. Peacock is the streaming home for Spanish language broadcasts while Telemundo also has an app that includes all the matches.

1. Mexico's opening ceremony, 1:30 p.m. ET in Mexico City (FOX/Telemundo/Peacock)
2. Mexico vs. South Africa, 3 p.m. ET in Mexico City (FOX/Telemundo/Peacock)
3. South Korea vs. Czechia, 10 p.m. ET in Guadalajara, Mexico (FS1/Telemundo/Peacock)

Mexico is a heavy favorite against South Africa

Boosted by a home crowd and a star-studded opening ceremony with performances that include Andrea Bocelli and homegrown talent like Alejandro Fernández and Maná, Mexico hopes to play better in this World Cup than in 2022, when it failed to advance out of the group stage for the first time since 1978. El Tri will be led by veteran Raúl Jiménez and 17-year-old midfielder Gilberto Mora. Goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa will be competing in the World Cup for a record sixth time. South Africa is playing in its fourth World Cup and first since it hosted the tournament in 2010.

The games in Mexico will be played at high elevation. The Azteca stadium in Mexico City is at roughly 7,300 feet while Guadalajara sits at 5,138 feet, meaning visiting teams will have to make a significant adjustment to the altitude.

South Korea hopes to build on '22 World Cup success vs. Czechia

South Korea is one of the best teams in Asia and has qualified for 11 tournaments in a row since 1986. The Koreans made it to the round of 16 in 2022 before losing to Brazil. Son Hueng-min, 33, is the captain and might be playing in his last World Cup. The Czech Republic is back in soccer's biggest showcase for the first time in 20 years.

World Cup sticker shock with sky-high prices

FIFA has faced pressure for sky-high World Cup ticket prices and sales tactics that fans say left them with worse deals than they wanted.

The attorneys general in New York and New Jersey, which is hosting eight World Cup matches including the final, announced last month that they are investigating whether FIFA's ticketing practices violated consumer protection laws.

Some seats for the July 19 final are going for nearly \$33,000.

In the U.S., bipartisan skepticism of Infantino, FIFA

In the deeply polarized U.S., few things unite elected leaders outside the White House quite like skepticism of Gianni Infantino and FIFA, the governing body for the world's most popular sport.

It's a sentiment that cuts across the divide and spans from Washington to state capitals and city halls.

There are mayors like Zohran Mamdani of New York and Karen Bass of Los Angeles, Democrats who've balked at ticket prices. Republican Sen. Todd Young of Indiana, who played Division 1 soccer at the U.S. Naval Academy, said FIFA has been "detached from regular people around the world."

More World Cup news

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4. World Cup by the numbers: 104 matches, 48 teams and 3 countries make this the largest ever
 5. Iran's World Cup players wear pins for victims of deadly strike on school as they arrive in Mexico
 6. Somali soccer referee denied entry to US for World Cup is welcomed home as a hero
 7. Celebrations clash with social tensions in Mexico on the eve of the World Cup
 8. Bettors taking a chance on the longshot US in World Cup, though France and Spain remain favorites
 9. Pochettino says no Americans among top 100 players yet US can win World Cup
- Stats of the day
10. Only eight countries have won the World Cup, with six of those teams winning multiple titles led by Brazil's five. The only first-time winners in the last 11 Cups came in 1998 when France won the first of its two titles and in 2010 with Spain.
 11. There have been six defending champions who failed to make it out of the group stage, including in three of the last four editions. France made it back to the final in 2022 but Italy (2010), Spain (2014) and Germany (2018) all get eliminated before the knockout rounds.
 12. South Korea's Son is one of the most accomplished players in the national team's history. His 144 caps rank first while he needs just two goals to match Cha Bum-kun's career record of 58.
 13. At just 17 years old, Mexico's Gilberto Mora is the youngest player among the rosters of the 48 teams playing at the tournament. He could become the second-youngest player to score a goal in World Cup history behind Brazil legend Pelé, who was 17 years, 239 days old when he scored in 1958. Here's a look at some of the up-and-coming teenagers in this year's tournament.

A burning cross in a Chicago park shocks residents and has police searching for who did it

By HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

A large burning cross — a historic symbol of hate and intimidation against Black Americans — was discovered in a Chicago park where former President Barack Obama famously delivered his acceptance speech when he was elected the nation's first Black president.

Tuesday afternoon's act sent shock waves through a city where more than one in four people are Black. Some people drove or walked by, staring, and a video of the cross-burning gained traction online.

The video, taken by a motorist, shows the wooden cross engulfed in bright orange flames as it leans against a tree in Grant Park, located in the core of the city's downtown and near Lake Michigan.

Mayor Brandon Johnson said he was "deeply disturbed" by the images.

"Hate has no place in our city. Every Chicagoan deserves to feel safe, protected, and respected while going about their day or enjoying our public spaces," Johnson, who is Black, said on a post on X Wednesday. "We will continue working across city government to uphold that standard and ensure Chicago remains a welcoming, inclusive, and safe place for all."

Chicago police urged the public to come forward with any information. A community alert issued by police included an image of a person walking away from the area.

Police said the person was seen "fleeing from the scene" where an object was constructed and burned in the park. The alert provided no update on the arson investigation.

The Chicago Fire Department confirmed the flaming object was a cross and said officials put out the fire.

Officials with a local Catholic church, The Faith Community of Saint Sabina, posted on social media a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone who was involved. The Rev. Michael Pfleger, senior pastor, called the cross burning an act of hate.

"It cannot be tolerated," Pfleger told TV station FOX 32. "I really believe it should be treated as a hate crime just like a swastika is."

Cross burnings have historically been symbols of hate

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 and 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

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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 (1.8 meters) tall. As they slowed down to shoot a video of the flames, she saw other cars also 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.”

Some attribute the act to divisive political times

Gina Miranda Samuels, faculty director of the Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture at the University of Chicago, said the burning of crosses may no longer create the degree of fear it did decades ago — but there’s sadness at the reminder of the level of hate that still exists.

“The burning a cross in Grant Park, personally, does not instill terror,” she said. “If it was on my personal lawn, that would concern me. This doesn’t cause me to want to flee Chicago.”

Miranda Samuels laid some of the blame on the current political climate.

“I do think we’re living in a time when we have a president that stokes this kind of thing and invites this type of stuff,” she said. “People feel emboldened and are invited to see how far they can go.”

Frank Chapman, executive director of the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression and a Chicago resident, agreed. He pointed to how people who stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, were ultimately not punished. President Donald Trump pardoned, commuted prison sentences or ordered the dismissal of cases for all of the nearly 1,600 people charged in the attack.

“The same kind of people got the same white supremacist mentality as a cross-burning,” Chapman said. “So, they figured like they got a license now ... with people pardoned and more or less shaking hands with the devil.”

Next week, Obama will be joined by other former presidents and dignitaries to dedicate his presidential library, named the Obama Center, on a sprawling complex less than 10 miles (16 kilometers) south of Grant Park. The center opens to the public on Juneteenth, the federal holiday marking the end of slavery in the U.S.

Florida court allows use of new US House districts drawn by Republicans for midterm elections

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

The Florida Supreme Court on Wednesday allowed new U.S. House districts drawn by Republicans to be used in the midterm elections, marking another victory for the GOP in a nationwide redistricting effort aimed at helping the party retain its slim House majority.

Attorneys for voters who sued had argued that the new congressional districts violate a state constitutional prohibition on partisan gerrymandering, and that the court should order the state to continue using the same districts as in the previous election. The Supreme Court, in a 6-1 decision, denied their request for a temporary injunction without ruling on the merits of the case. The judges said they lacked jurisdiction to intervene while the lawsuit gradually plays out in the lower courts.

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

The court’s decision provides some certainty for prospective congressional candidates, who face a Friday deadline to qualify for the state’s Aug. 18 primaries.

Republican Attorney General James Uthmeier, who defended the new districts in court, declared “com-

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plete and total victory" in a social media post.

Opponents expressed outrage while vowing to continue the court fight, even though it may stretch into the 2028 election cycle.

"The Florida Supreme Court's failure to stop this brazen partisan power grab is not only an assault on democracy, but an abdication of its duty to the people of Florida," said Genesis Robinson, executive director of Equal Ground, a community organizing group that sued.

The new districts are "a pretty clear partisan gerrymander," said Amy Keith, executive director of Common Cause Florida. "We're going to do everything we can to prevent this map from impacting further, future elections."

Florida's map is part of a national GOP effort

Voting districts typically are redrawn after a census near the beginning of each decade. Florida is one of several Republican-led states that have undertaken mid-decade redistricting as part of President Donald Trump's plan to try to hold on to a slim House majority in November by reshaping district boundaries to the GOP's advantage.

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

DeSantis had called lawmakers into a special session before the high court's ruling, but he had anticipated the eventual outcome. DeSantis' office asserted that no racial data was used for the map he presented to the Legislature. The new map, among other things, redraws a southeastern Florida district that DeSantis' office said was created to help elect a Black representative in an attempt to comply with the federal Voting Rights Act.

In addition to barring partisan gerrymandering, a constitutional amendment approved by Florida voters in 2010 also prohibits districts from being drawn to deny or diminish the ability of racial or language minorities to elect the representatives of their choice. It further requires districts to be compact and, where feasible, use existing political and geographic boundaries.

Republicans assert that redistricting restrictions are invalid

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

Attorneys representing state officials made similar arguments to the Florida Supreme Court, after a lower court judge last month declined to issue a preliminary injunction against the new map. They also argued it was too late in the election season to revert to the previous maps.

In a filing with the Florida Supreme Court, attorneys representing state officials said the new map was "cause for celebration" during America's 250th anniversary. "Perhaps for the first time in Florida's history, the State has a truly colorblind map; a map that refuses to assault the dignity of men and women by color-coding them," their court filing said.

Attorneys who sued on behalf of voters argued the new districts were crafted with political favoritism. They argued in documents filed with the state Supreme Court that the new congressional districts are "among the most extreme partisan gerrymanders enacted in any state over the past half-century."

Under the new House map, 82% of voters in districts represented by Republicans remain in the same districts as under the previous map, said attorney Chris Shenton, who represented Common Cause and other groups challenging the map. Just 41% of voters in districts represented by Democrats are kept in their same districts, he said.

Justices differed on urgency of Florida case

The Supreme Court's majority issued only a brief written opinion, but two of its members elaborated about the importance of the case. In a concurring opinion, Justice Adam Tanenbaum said the judicial system follows a deliberative process, and "there is no need for special treatment in this case."

In a dissent, Justice Jorge Labarga expressed frustration that an appellate court hadn't sent the case straight to the Supreme Court. He said the state constitution "anticipates that some matters may be so urgent as to require an expedited path to this Court."

"Surely, the upcoming 2026 congressional elections affecting the representation of millions of Floridians meet that threshold," Labarga wrote.

Administration plans intensive, year-round construction schedule for Trump's triumphal arch

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Construction of the 250-foot-high triumphal arch that President Donald Trump wants built near the Lincoln Memorial could occur 20 hours per day, year-round, as officials push to complete the project within three years, according to a preliminary assessment by the National Park Service.

Tower cranes up to 320 feet tall, forklifts, concrete pump systems and other equipment would be needed to build the arch, which would be more than twice as high as the Lincoln Memorial. Work would occur year-round in two 10-hour shifts per day, the Park Service report said.

The 24-page assessment by NPS staff was released last week as a part of a fast-tracked historic preservation review that began Friday. The park service oversees the land where the administration wants to build the arch.

The National Capital Planning Commission voted last week to seek more information from the Interior Department, which oversees the park service. The vote essentially kept the project alive as officials study how the arch could potentially impact air travel, as well as other specifics on construction and traffic in the area.

The June 4 vote came after nearly three hours of public comment from about 20 members of the public, some representing historic and architectural organizations, and most of whom expressed concerns about the arch that is one of several projects the Republican president is pursuing to leave his imprint on Washington.

Preliminary surveys and testing of the arch site began last month, and other approvals are underway. The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts — which only oversees designs and has no role in the actual construction or funding of the arch or any other project it considers — has approved the arch's design.

Concerns over arch's height

The capital planning commission is seeking more information justifying the proposed height of the towering arch, as well as additional details about lighting, management of storm water and how traffic and parking would be regulated for visitors.

The planned site for the arch, across the Potomac River from the memorial, is on a flight path near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. The Federal Aviation Administration said Wednesday it is reviewing whether the project's planned height poses a risk to airplane travel in the area. An American Airlines jet and an Army Black Hawk helicopter collided a year ago in crowded skies near the airport, killing 67 people.

The FAA review "found no adverse impacts to operations" at Reagan Airport from the proposed arch, but determined that the top of the structure would need to be lit with red obstruction lights -- a common safety tool, spokesman Donnell Evans said. The FAA will conduct a full aeronautical study in coordination with the National Park Service, he said.

The park service, in its report, said aviation-required safety lighting would be incorporated into the arch design "using the least intrusive technology available, ensuring compliance with aircraft visibility requirements while limiting unnecessary light emission."

Will Scharf, who has served as Trump's White House staff secretary, heads the commission and has said he believes a federal law limiting building heights for new construction in Washington should not apply to the arch. The law restricts most construction in Washington to a maximum height of 130 feet.

The arch faces a legal challenge

Critics have argued that the arch would dominate the skyline and disrupt carefully designed views be-

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

Trump has pushed for the 250-foot-tall arch to mark America's 250th anniversary, and has said the project could be paid for with private donations left over from the project to build a new White House ballroom. The White House East Wing was demolished to make way for a large ballroom.

A cost estimate for the arch is still being calculated, but a mix of taxpayer and private funds is expected to pay for it. A group of veterans and a historian have sued the Trump administration in federal court to block the project over concerns about disruptions to the sightline.

Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut criticized the administration about what he called its "persistent lack of transparency" in its efforts to advance Trump's Washington-area construction projects. Besides the planned ballroom, Trump also is renovating the Lincoln Memorial's Reflecting Pool and rebuilding a public golf course along the Potomac River. None of projects have gone through usual legal reviews or Congress.

"Your disregard for legal process and public interest has been apparent in projects ranging from the construction of a White House Ballroom and triumphal arch to the resealing of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool," Blumenthal wrote in a letter Tuesday to Interior Secretary Doug Burgum and acting park service director Jessica Bowron.

Trump accuses Democrats of hypocrisy on Platner, despite questions about his own conduct

By WILL WEISSERT and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump laced into Graham Platner on Wednesday, calling the Senate candidate from Maine a "thug" and a "pig" and suggesting that the Democratic Party was hypocritical for lining up behind someone with so many questions about his past personal conduct and treatment of women.

That line of political attack was striking coming from a president who himself has been accused of misconduct with women, was once caught on audio bragging about grabbing women by the genitals and was found liable by a New York jury for sexual abuse.

Trump also has endorsed a parade of Republicans with their own personal baggage — but that didn't stop him from faulting the other side for doing the same.

"He's a thug, and they're trying to make excuses for him," Trump said of top Democrats. "I mean, he's worse than any human being that's ever run for office, probably."

The criticism follows Platner's decisive primary victory

Platner, who clinched the Democratic nomination on Tuesday night, has faced criticism over numerous issues, including past inflammatory online posts, a tattoo he had covered up that is widely recognized as a Nazi symbol and sexually explicit texts he sent to women after getting married. He will face five-term Republican Sen. Susan Collins in the November election.

Asked about Trump's comments, Platner's campaign said the candidate remained focused on issues facing Maine.

The Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, in response, issued a statement focused on Collins, who is considered one of the most vulnerable senators up for reelection this year.

"Susan Collins is facing backlash in Maine after voting with Trump 96 percent of the time, being the decisive vote for the justices who overturned Roe v. Wade, and selling out to the special interests that fund her campaigns after three decades in the Senate, and that's why Trump praised her today in the Oval Office," spokesperson Josh Marcus-Blank said in a statement.

The White House defended Trump's comments by noting Platner's past social media posts.

"Graham Platner proudly referred to himself as a 'communist,' called all police 'bastards,' and said rural White Americans 'actually are' racist and stupid. President Trump is absolutely correct that Platner is both

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a thug and a pig. Attempting to compare President Trump to Graham Platner is exactly why trust in legacy media outlets like the failing Associated Press is at an all-time low," White House spokesperson Kush Desai said in a statement.

'Can you imagine if the Republicans had him?'

Trump, when speaking about Platner to reporters at the White House during an event to sign an immigration and deportation funding bill, said, "Nobody's ever had a record like that."

"He's like a pig," the president said, adding that perhaps "pigs would be very upset" to be associated with Platner, drawing laughter from assorted Republican lawmakers in the Oval Office with him.

Trump then brought up another scandal that has swirled around him dating back to his first term as president: his former friendship with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Trump sought to paint Democratic Senate leader Chuck Schumer as a hypocrite, saying he "goes crazy over this or that or Epstein, Epstein, Epstein" but instead should be concerned about Platner.

Later, Trump offered, "Can you imagine if the Republicans had him?"

Setting aside the allegations Trump has faced over the years, Republicans have had candidates who were accused of serious misconduct who nonetheless won Trump's backing.

The president this year endorsed Republican Texas Senate candidate Ken Paxton over incumbent GOP Sen. John Cornyn, though Paxton had faced state and federal corruption investigations and a 2023 state impeachment trial in which he was acquitted but publicly exposed his extramarital affair. Paxton has said allegations of wrongdoing were politically motivated.

Trump also didn't back away from endorsing 2017 Alabama Senate candidate Roy Moore, who was accused of sexual misconduct involving teenage girls decades earlier. Trump, at the time, noted Moore's denials and said his vote was needed for Republican priorities. Moore's eventual loss gave way to the first Alabama Democratic senator in a quarter-century.

He endorsed 2024 North Carolina gubernatorial candidate Mark Robinson and declined to rescind the backing after CNN reported that the candidate had made lewd and racist comments on a pornography website — though he did try to distance himself. Robinson, who later acknowledged making the posts, handily lost the general election in the swing state.

He similarly decided not to revoke his support for Texas Rep. Tony Gonzales this year after the congressman acknowledged an affair with a staff member who later died by suicide. Gonzales ended his reelection bid, and Trump later endorsed someone else.

Trump also picked officials for his second-term Cabinet and other key offices who had been accused of some form of sexual misconduct.

That includes Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who was accused of sexual assault and denied it, and Trump's initial choice for attorney general, former Rep. Matt Gaetz, who faced a Justice Department sex trafficking investigation and a House Ethics Committee investigation into sexual misconduct.

Gaetz denied wrongdoing and withdrew his name from consideration. The DOJ investigation ended without federal charges against him.

Trump sticks with Pulte for intel job as risk grows of lapse in spy powers

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, LISA MASCARO and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A lapse in a law that allows the U.S. to gather intelligence abroad grew more likely on Wednesday as President Donald Trump resisted calls from Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill to immediately name a permanent head of the nation's intelligence agencies.

Trump has doubled down on his temporary pick for director of national intelligence, federal housing finance regulator Bill Pulte, even though he has little experience for the job. Democrats say they won't support the renewal of Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, known as FISA, unless he withdraws Pulte's appointment and nominates a permanent replacement.

The impasse could soon result in limitations on what intelligence the U.S. government can collect abroad

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just as World Cup games begin in cities around the country and ahead of celebrations for the nation's 250th anniversary. The law expires on Friday at midnight.

Trump on Wednesday asked Congress for a short-term extension of the law to "provide time for the selection and confirmation" of a permanent director." But he stuck with Pulte as the acting head and said he wants to begin downsizing intelligence agencies.

"We can't let them extort us," Trump said of Democrats.

Senate Republicans floated an short-term extension of the law after Trump's request, but it was immediately rejected by Democrats who argued that it's up to the president to replace Pulte.

As the bill stalled in the Senate, Speaker Mike Johnson announced the House would hold a vote Thursday on a stopgap to keep the program running through July 2 even as the chances of passage appeared slim.

"We're going to ask every member here to do the right thing," Johnson said. "We cannot allow that to go dark."

House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries said if Trump wants a shot at a short-term extension, he needs to pull the Pulte appointment. Pulte is a "disgraceful individual" and a "partisan political hack" who is deeply unqualified for the job, Jeffries said.

GOP leaders lobby the White House, to no avail

Congressional Republicans have lobbied Trump all week to quickly nominate a permanent replacement. But he said he needs more time to do so.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said Wednesday that Republican leaders have "made our views known" to the White House about the easiest way to get the bill passed, and "we're just doing what we can here to ensure that the White House understands what will be necessary in order to make that happen."

Trump said on Friday that he is interviewing five candidates for his pick to lead the agency permanently and that all have a national security background.

"It's an important position and one that I think will be filled by a highly qualified person," said Johnson, who met with Trump twice this week to talk about the FISA impasse.

Trump made it very clear, Johnson said, that Pulte will serve a "very short term — a sort of renovation role" to help the Office of the Director of National Intelligence be "renovated and downsized."

To unlock votes for FISA, the pick would have to be soon — and Trump's choice would have to satisfy both Republicans and Democrats.

One of several possible replacements could be Pete Hoekstra, Trump's ambassador to Canada and a former chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. The White House has reached out to Hoekstra about the job and conversations are ongoing, according to a person familiar with the outreach who requested anonymity to discuss the private conversations.

FISA will lapse at midnight Friday

Section 702 of FISA allows agencies such as the CIA, National Security Agency and FBI to collect communications from foreign targets overseas without a warrant.

While members of both parties who cite privacy issues have long wanted to limit the authority, there was broad bipartisan support to renew it, especially after Republicans and Democrats recently worked out a compromise bill.

Virginia Sen. Mark Warner, the top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, has worked with Republicans on the compromise legislation to renew the authority. But he called Pulte's appointment to replace outgoing DNI Tulsi Gabbard "a live hand grenade" as they were trying to pass it. Republican leaders tried to start the process last week, but seven Republicans joined nearly all Democrats in blocking a long-term extension after Pulte was appointed. (

Warner said Wednesday that the only way he'll support a short-term extension of the surveillance law is if the principal deputy director of national intelligence, Aaron Lukas, is the acting leader during the duration of that extension.

Sen. Tom Cotton, the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and Sen. Chuck Grassley, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, have warned the administration that the spy tool is likely to lapse.

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The administration should prepare “for a potential significant gap in foreign intelligence collection,” they wrote in a letter.

Trump doesn’t back down on Pulte

After bipartisan pushback to Pulte’s temporary appointment, Trump said last week that he would not permanently nominate him to the position. But Democrats, and some Republicans, want his appointment pulled immediately and for Trump to nominate a replacement that can be confirmed by the Senate.

On Tuesday, though, Trump announced that Pulte would not only take over as acting director — he’d also start earlier than expected, on June 19.

And he stuck with Pulte on Wednesday, posting that he needed more time to find a permanent replacement and telling reporters that the agencies need to be downsized.

Both Republican and Democratic senators skeptical of Pulte have pointed to his lack of intelligence experience and also his record at the Federal Housing Finance Agency. In the position, the Trump loyalist has been linked with criminal referrals over allegations of mortgage fraud by public officials Trump sought to punish, including New York Attorney General Letitia James, a Democrat; Sen. Adam Schiff, D-Calif.; and Lisa Cook, a board member of the Federal Reserve.

Trump has a new, surprising take on the higher cost of living: ‘I love the inflation’

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Wednesday showed how he had learned to stop worrying about inflation and simply, in his own words, “love” it.

Asked about the new report that the consumer price index in May had jumped 4.2% over the last year, the president took a surprisingly optimistic tack with the challenging news. Trump didn’t dismiss the affordability issue as a “hoax” that was started by Democrats, as he has done previously. Nor did he claim that he was bringing down the cost of living.

Instead, after the government said that inflation spiked to the highest level since April 2023, Trump praised the numbers.

“You know what I really love?” Trump said. “I love the inflation.”

It was an unexpected take given that voters ahead of the November midterm elections have ranked the economy as a top concern — and have given Trump low marks on that issue. Within minutes of his on-camera comment, Democrats quickly rushed to promote it on social media.

Trump had pledged in his 2024 campaign to quickly vanquish inflation, but his argument now is that higher prices are solely a function of the Iran war raising energy costs. On Wednesday, he claimed that relief is already on its way because of a secret military operation that had ferried what he said was 100 million barrels of oil through the Strait of Hormuz, the primary shipping channel for 20% of the world’s global oil supply that has been effectively closed by the war since late February.

“Trump really said, ‘I love the inflation.’ On camera. For all of America to hear,” Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer quickly posted on X. “His contempt for you knows no bounds.”

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said on X that with Trump’s stated love of inflation, “We finally found something that Donald Trump loves as much as he loves himself.”

Rep. Emilia Sykes, D-Ohio, quickly pressed Energy Secretary Chris Wright at a hearing about whether he, too, loved inflation.

“Do you love inflation?” Sykes asked.

“I love ending Iran’s ability to have a nuclear weapon,” Wright answered. He only conceded after being pressed: “No, I would prefer lower inflation.”

When asked about Trump’s specific comments, Wright said, “He’s an entertaining, hyperbolic guy who’s done tremendous leadership.”

Trump claimed the secretive shipments were why oil prices had fallen below \$90 a barrel, after surpass-

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ing \$110 at the start of April.

"I'm just announcing today for the first time, but we've been taking out millions of barrels of oil, millions of barrels every night," Trump said.

On social media, the president said the mission began last month and had "resulted in more than 100 MILLION Barrels of Oil making its way through the Strait, and into the Open Market. More than 200 Commercial Ships have safely traveled through the Strait." There was no immediate data available to back up that total, and it was not immediately clear what role the U.S. military had played.

To put that figure into context, a daily average of 20 million barrels of oil had gone through the strait before the war, which would mean that Trump's mission had resulted in the equivalent of five days' worth of normal oil shipments.

Responding to the new inflation report, the White House pointed out that some expenses had dropped in May relative to the previous month: the price of new vehicles, prescription drugs and auto insurance, for example. But when the overall inflation number is paired with the change in hourly wages, there is a bleak sign that people's spending power relative to their earnings has declined.

"President Trump has consistently maintained that oil and gas prices — and thus overall inflation — will plummet once the Iran situation is resolved, and the administration will continue pushing our affordability agenda to enable Americans to keep more of their hard-earned money," White House spokesman Kush Desai said in an email.

But the financial markets were cautious about Trump's claims that he was lowering prices by getting oil tankers through the strait — claims that came as the United States also launched airstrikes against Iran, and as Tehran fired back at countries in the region.

U.S. crude oil futures climbed roughly 4% on Wednesday, closing at nearly \$92 a barrel.

FIFA's Infantino defends World Cup ticket prices, says fans 'should chill' about ref denied US entry

By CARLOS RODRIGUEZ AP Sports Writer

MEXICO CITY (AP) — FIFA President Gianni Infantino defended World Cup ticket prices on Wednesday, saying "if we do something wrong, then probably everyone selling tickets in North America is doing something wrong."

Infantino spoke with reporters during a rare question-and-answer session on the eve of the opening match of an expanded 48-nation, 104-game World Cup tournament. He defended record ticket prices, said FIFA was powerless to get the U.S. government to admit a Somali referee, and praised his ability to get Iran's national soccer team into the United States.

FIFA priced tickets starting at \$140 for group-stage games, but regular seats for the July 19 final outside New York were listed at up to \$8,680 and hospitality seats at up to \$73,200. It raised prices for the final to \$10,990 and then \$32,970.

After much criticism, FIFA offered \$60 tickets to national federations for their regular supporters. Infantino said 130,000 tickets were offered in that category.

Four years ago at the tournament in Qatar, prices ranged from \$69 to \$1,607.

"If you sell it at a lower price point," he said, "in this particular market it would have gone — which is perfectly legal in this country ... in secondary markets at much, much, much higher prices and where would the money go then? Well, to those who organize secondary markets or black market activities and not to football."

Infantino said the average ticket price was below \$500 for the tournament and was comparable to other U.S. sports during their playoffs, a claim that while true for resale prices does not appear to be accurate for list prices. Major League Baseball's average World Series ticket price has been \$350 to \$400 in recent years and NFL prices last season averaged \$230 for the wild-card round, \$320 for divisional games, \$450 for conference championships and \$3,300 for the Super Bowl.

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Infantino said he was unconcerned about ticket probes by attorneys general in California, New Jersey, New York and Texas.

"When it comes to these legal investigations or complaints that were made in some states in the U.S.," he said, "we are very relaxed about it because before starting to sell 6 and a half or 7 million tickets we check what we do with the best lawyers, with the best experts. If we do something wrong, then probably everyone selling tickets in North America is doing something wrong, as well."

Infantino pointed to the NBA Finals between the New York Knicks and San Antonio Spurs as an example of how other major American sporting events are experiencing a similar surge in prices.

The get-in price on FIFA's resale site for the World Cup final is \$9,805. The NBA Finals have had wildly varied get-in prices, ranging from a minimum of about \$500 for the first two games in San Antonio to about \$10,000 for Game 3 in New York. Game 4 in New York was much less, dropping to about \$4,000 on Wednesday.

The Stanley Cup Final this year between teams in Las Vegas and Raleigh, North Carolina, has included a get-in price of at least \$600 for each of the first four games of the best-of-seven series.

"We welcome every investigation," Infantino said. "We are happy to present everything, and we are happy to make our case."

Infantino says FIFA is powerless to get US entry for denied Somali referee

Infantino said it was unfortunate Somali referee Omar Artan was denied entry to the U.S.

"We don't control everything. We try. We'll discuss, we will speak, we'll see. Maybe sometimes it's good as well to just chill, relax," he said. "We try to solve everything. Sometimes to immediately start screaming and shouting has the opposite effect of finding a solution. Believe me when I tell you, or don't believe me if you don't want, but we try always to find solutions, always. But then we need to respect that we are not the kings of the world who can rule over governments and police forces."

Set to become the first Somali referee at a World Cup, Artan was denied entry to the U.S. at Miami International Airport on Saturday over unspecified "vetting concerns," U.S. Customs and Border Protection said in a statement, without giving details of the concerns.

"Our world is a very aggressive world and security goes above everything and you need to respect the decisions which are taken," Infantino said. "We are working behind the scenes."

Infantino thinks FIFA deserves credit for ensuring Iran's participation

Infantino praised FIFA for working through details that allow Iran to play in the tournament at a time the U.S. is at war with that country. The Iranian team moved its training camp from the U.S. to Mexico and will fly to the United States just before matches.

"I think it has already been successful to bring Iran to play in America," he said. "I don't know who would have managed to do that. And of course everyone here believes it's the right thing to do. But, again, we don't live on the moon. We live on planet Earth and you have to deal with different situations."

Infantino claimed the tournament will be "the biggest event probably in the history of mankind."

Infantino claims tournament could not have taken place without Donald Trump

"Without his engagement and his involvement I think it would have been impossible — as simple as that, it would've been impossible to organize a World Cup in the United States," Infantino said. "He understood immediately the magnitude of the World Cup, the impact of the World Cup."

Infantino says FIFA could make far more money with more broadcast sales to pay services

FIFA is projecting \$11 billion in revenue for the tournament, and Infantino said the governing body could have generated far more.

"We could put everything on pay. We would generate \$30 billion revenues, probably," he said. "But then you have billions of people in the world who would not be able to watch the World Cup."

This news conference went smoother than Infantino's opening comments in Qatar

Four years ago, Infantino scolded critics during a news conference ahead of the opening match in Qatar. He lectured Europeans for criticizing Qatar's human rights record during a bizarre appearance in which he claimed to feel gay, like a woman and a migrant worker, among other odd claims.

Now 56, Infantino has been FIFA president since 2016 and intends to seek another term next year that

runs through 2031.

Infantino kept an empty seat at the news conference for Christophe Gleizes, a French freelance reporter given a seven-year prison sentence in Algeria last year over an interview with a soccer official accused of ties to a banned separatist movement.

US households, businesses stung by higher energy prices that have pushed inflation above 4%

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rising gas prices pushed inflation to its highest level in three years last month, a headache for the Federal Reserve and a potential political challenge for the Trump administration as midterm elections near.

Consumer prices rose 4.2% in May from a year earlier, the Labor Department said Wednesday, up from 3.8% in April and the third straight monthly increase. On a monthly basis, prices rose 0.5% last month, after big gains of 0.6% in April and 0.9% in March.

Prices have now risen faster than wages for several months, pressuring many Americans' finances and causing consumers to take a decidedly dim view of the economy. Families are dipping into savings to maintain their spending, and more people are falling behind on their credit card bills. Large retailers say they have also noticed changes in customer behavior, like buying smaller amounts of gas during visits to the pump.

Inflation is now well above the Federal Reserve's 2% target, which it has surpassed for more than five years. New Fed chair Kevin Warsh will preside over his first policy meeting next week, when the central bank is expected to keep its key interest rate unchanged. But the Fed is also likely to change the statement it issues after each meeting to remove a suggestion that its next move could be to lower rates. With inflation proving stubborn, financial markets expect the Fed could instead raise rates by the end of the year.

When the Fed lifts rates, over time it can make mortgages, auto loans, and business borrowing more expensive.

Outside energy costs, price increases last month were not as dramatic, a sign that sharply higher inflation hasn't yet spread throughout the economy. Should the Iran war end and oil and gas prices decline, headline inflation could begin to cool. Gas prices have fallen this month, though they remain elevated.

Excluding the volatile food and energy categories, core prices rose at a more modest pace. On a monthly basis, they climbed just 0.2%, down from a 0.4% gain in April. Compared with a year ago, they have risen 2.9%, up from 2.8% in April.

President Donald Trump praised the inflation report in comments to reporters Wednesday, saying, "the numbers were great" and "I love it."

He said the inflation data was good because it showed energy prices were a huge driver of rising costs — the government said they accounted for more than 60% of the monthly increase — and he suggested inflation would ease "as soon as this war is over."

However, the U.S. launched more airstrikes against Iran on Wednesday, and Trump said more were coming, as Tehran fired back at countries in the region.

Crude prices shot back above \$90 a barrel on the violent exchange of fire.

Still, many goods and services rose in price last month: Clothing costs increased 0.3% and are 4.8% more expensive than a year ago. Airline fares, pushed higher by pricier jet fuel, jumped 2.7% just in May and are nearly 27% higher than a year ago. Electricity prices rose 0.6% in May and are up 5.9% in the past year.

Grocery prices were tamer in May compared with previous months, rising just 0.1% from April. Still, they are up 2.7% from a year ago and have risen sharply since the pandemic.

"I don't think we're anywhere near out of the woods yet," Omair Sharif, chief economist at Inflation Insights, said. Price increases "were stronger under the hood."

Sharif and other economists point out that the cost of services, including child care, home health care,

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and dental services are still rising much more quickly than is consistent with the Fed's 2% inflation target.

Bill Adams, chief U.S. economist at Fifth Third Commercial Bank, attributed some of the gain to a crack-down on immigration, which has likely forced many employers in those industries to raise wages.

Inflation had been cooling before 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.

Small businesses are struggling with higher costs, some of which they are passing on in the form of higher prices. Others have slowed hiring or even cut jobs.

Beth Benike, the founder of Oronoco, Minnesota-based Busy Baby, said her small company was hit hard by tariffs last year and is now struggling with higher shipping costs stemming from more expensive fuel. The company sells silicon placemats and toys that attach to high chairs and strollers.

Sales have declined as inflation has worsened, and Benike recently reduced one full-time employee to part-time hours. She said that more of her customers are now grandparents of newborns, rather than the parents.

"Grandparents have a little more disposable income than the generation that's having babies," she said.

Gas prices 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.

They have since fallen back to \$4.16 on average nationwide, according to AAA, which could lead to a cooler inflation reading in June. That doesn't mean gas prices are not prominent in the minds of most Americans. A gallon of gas has hovered above \$4 a gallon since March.

Major retail chains have discounted prices to accommodate customers who are watching their spending more closely.

Dollar General is expanding the number of items that cost \$1 or less, including frozen food. The shift has come with shoppers swapping out favored retailers for dollar stores.

"When that (gas) price hits that \$4 mark and then crosses it and then sustains for a while, you start to see that trade-in come in and you start to see that our core customer needs us most," Dollar General CEO Todd Vasos said this month.

Amber Greenwell, executive director of the America First Credit Union's charitable foundation, based in Ogden, Utah, says the cost of gas, housing and groceries have risen sharply in her state and much of the west in the past year. Her organization organizes food and diaper drives in the six states where the credit union operates.

"There is substantial growth in families who need more food resources as well as diaper resources," she said.

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.

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.

Another sell-off for AI stocks knocks Wall Street back to where it was 5 weeks ago

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Another sell-off for artificial-intelligence stocks helped drag the U.S. market sharply lower Wednesday, as Wall Street's former superstars continue to face heavy scrutiny for their success.

The S&P 500 dropped 1.6% for its first back-to-back drop in three weeks and is back to where it was in early May. The Dow Jones Industrial Average tumbled 953 points, or 1.9%, and the Nasdaq composite

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led the market lower with a 2% slide.

Wall Street has been shaky since last week, when AI stocks went from roaring to records to suddenly turning lower. Among the worries is that their prices have simply shot too high, too fast because of AI mania. The question now is whether the break lower has cleared out excessive optimism that may have built into their stock prices, or if it's the start of a longer downturn.

Super Micro Computer, which sells AI servers, tumbled 28% after saying late Tuesday that it plans to raise \$7 billion in cash by selling shares of stock and convertible preferred stock. Such moves raise the most money for companies when their stock prices are high, and they can dilute the ownership stakes of existing shareholders.

Micron Technology swung from an early loss of nearly 4% to a modest gain and back to a loss of 4.7%. It's coming off a wild stretch where it sank 7.7% last Thursday, then plunged another 13.3% Friday and rallied 9.9% Monday. Despite all the swings, the computer memory maker's stock is still up 212.5% for the year so far.

Nvidia, the chip company that's grown into a nearly \$4.9 trillion behemoth because of the AI boom, was the heaviest weight on the S&P 500 after falling 3.7%. The second-heaviest was another AI winner, Broadcom, which fell 5.1%.

Some of the pressure on AI stocks could also be coming from investors pulling cash out to prepare for high-profile debuts on the U.S. stock market for several AI giants. SpaceX's initial public offering could come later this week, for example.

Weakening stocks for companies with big fuel bills also pulled the market lower. United Airlines sank 6.2%, and cruise-operator Carnival fell 6.3% after oil prices rose due to the latest fighting in the war with Iran.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude oil rose 1.8% to \$93.10 after President Donald Trump warned Iran would "pay the price" for stalled negotiations between the two on their war. The war has been keeping the Strait of Hormuz effectively shut to oil tankers, which has prevented the delivery of crude from the Persian Gulf to customers worldwide.

High oil prices have sent inflation higher, and a report on Wednesday showed that prices for U.S. consumers jumped in May at the highest speed in three years.

But Treasury yields nonetheless held relatively steady in the bond market because the figures were pretty much exactly what economists had forecast. The rise in an important underlying measure of inflation, meanwhile, was not as bad from April through May as economists expected.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury edged up to 4.54% from 4.53% late Tuesday. The two-year Treasury yield, which more closely tracks expectations for what the Federal Reserve will do with its overnight interest rates, held at 4.13%.

Traders have been building bets recently that the Fed will have to hike its main interest rate at least once this year, given how high inflation is and how strong the U.S. job market remains. Wednesday's inflation update didn't sway them much, according to data from CME Group.

High yields can slow entire economies and undercut prices for all kinds of investments, including stocks and cryptocurrencies. They hit investments seen as the most expensive in particular, and some critics are calling AI a bubble where investment inflated too far.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 119.66 points to 7,266.99. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 953.33 to 49,918.78, and the Nasdaq composite sank 509.32 to 25,169.50.

In stock markets abroad, indexes in Europe were mixed following sharper drops in Asia.

South Korea's Kospi tumbled 4.5%, hurt by losses for tech giants Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 sank 1.9% after data showed Japan's producer price index, a measure for prices at the wholesale level, rose in May at the fastest pace in more than three years. Shares of technology and telecommunications giant SoftBank Group, which has a strong AI focus, lost 8.3%.

FBI seizing evidence at California plant where chemical tank overheated and forced evacuations

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER and MARTHA BELLISLE Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Federal authorities served a search warrant on Wednesday at a Southern California aerospace facility where a chemical tank overheated last month, forcing 50,000 residents to evacuate because authorities feared a catastrophic explosion.

The warrant signed by a federal judge last week approved the seizure of documents and records related to the "storage, use, or disposal" of methyl methacrylate, the chemical inside the affected tank.

"Samples of the substance within any tank, tote, drum, vat, vessel, or container suspected of containing or having previously contained methyl methacrylate and/or any hazardous substance" were also sought, according to the warrant.

The warrant also orders agents to seize records related to "any cooling equipment or other equipment used to control or regulate the temperature of methyl methacrylate."

The FBI confirmed its agents were searching GKN Aerospace Transparency Systems in the Orange County city of Garden Grove. Multiple vehicles and several federal agents were seen outside the facility Wednesday morning.

Company says it's cooperating with authorities

GKN Aerospace makes cockpit windows, canopies and windshields. The tank that overheated contained 6,000 to 7,000 gallons (22,700 to 26,500 liters) of methyl methacrylate, which is highly flammable. The liquid is used in the manufacturing of plastics and coatings, such as Plexiglas and dental prosthetics.

Exposure to the chemical can cause serious respiratory problems, neurological issues and irritation to the skin, eyes and throat, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

The chemical that overheated is still in the holding tank, according to the Orange County Health Care Agency, which is leading the site cleanup and waste removal efforts.

The agency had planned to pump the neutralized methyl methacrylate from the storage tanks into sealed trucks for transport and disposal starting at the end of last week, according to a press release on the agency's website. But on Friday, they said the removal didn't happen "due to unavailable resources."

Once a new date is confirmed, they will provide advance notice to the community.

Responding to a request for comment on the FBI investigation, a GKN spokesperson told the AP on Wednesday morning: "We are cooperating with authorities at our Garden Grove facility and will continue to do so."

GKN Aerospace's Steve Carlin spoke at a community meeting Tuesday evening. He thanked the firefighters and local leaders who responded to the incident at the plant that employs more than 500 people, and apologized to the community.

"On behalf of GKN and the Garden Grove plant I want to say that I'm sorry that this event and this incident occurred. I understand and I realized sitting here tonight what a disruptive event it was and how unsettling it is to the greater community. Particularly unsettling to us at GKN because of the long history that we have with Garden Grove and how connected we are to this community."

Garden Grove city leaders and residents urged GKN Aerospace to consider moving these tanks of methyl methacrylate off of the Garden Grove plant, so the chemical would be far away from residents and businesses. But Carlin said it is very early in the investigation into what happened, so it is too soon to decide what the company might do in response to the incident. He promised to be transparent with the community about the investigation.

Overheating tank risked a catastrophic explosion

The incident was reported on May 21 and evacuations began the next day. The tank overheated because a valve on the cooling system that kept it at 50 degrees Fahrenheit (10 degrees Celsius) failed, officials said.

Crews sprayed water on the tank until the interior temperature stabilized to 92 F (33.3 C), down from 100 F (37.7 C). A sprinkler system was used to douse the tank, and the company said its technical specialists and firefighters removed insulation from the tank to help cool it.

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A crack that formed by chance on the tank relieved pressure and helped avert a catastrophic explosion, allowing most evacuees to return home over the Memorial Day weekend. Authorities announced they were lifting the final orders after the temperature on the tank remained stable for four hours without intervention from sprinklers.

Separately, the Orange County District Attorney's Office also is conducting a criminal investigation into the GKN Aerospace plant, according to DA spokesperson Kimberly Edds.

"We have sent a preservation letter to GKN directing them not to modify or destroy any evidence, which the company's outside counsel confirmed receipt," Edds told The Associated Press in an email.

Lawyers in federal lawsuits welcome the FBI's involvement

About a dozen people and businesses that were among the 50,000 evacuated during the chemical emergency have filed lawsuits against the company. Some residents reported strong odors, respiratory irritation, headaches and dizziness. They question why the chemical plant was allowed to operate so close to homes.

Lawyer Rickard McCune represents Big Rob's Pizzeria and Fruit Caboose Concessions in a federal lawsuit claiming GKN Aerospace and parent company Melrose Industries were negligent and put the surrounding communities at risk. He said they're pleased the federal government is investigating. The FBI's involvement will help bring justice to those who were harmed, he said.

Another lawyer, Alex Wheeler, represents Dinh Tran and Drippys Gourmet Ice Cream Sandwiches and said they're relieved that the FBI is using its resources to investigate potential criminal acts.

"As more information becomes public, it's becoming clearer and clearer that the risk to our community posed by GKN's operation of the Garden Grove facility may require a long term and lasting solution," Wheeler said.

GKN did not immediately respond to the allegations in the lawsuits.

Orange County health officials assured residents that no contamination or fumes were released, and that they would keep monitoring the air for several months and checking the sewer and storm drains.

The California incident was the first of two major hazardous chemical emergencies on the West Coast within a week of each other. Five days after the GKN Aerospace situation began, a large tank containing a corrosive chemical at a Longview, Washington paper mill ruptured and imploded, killing 11 people.

UFC fighters say they're honored to compete in front of President Trump on card at the White House

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — UFC fighter Josh Hoke was decked out in an American flag bandana and American eagle gloves as he unleashed vigorous trash talk ahead of the company's White House debut.

Sean O'Malley earned American style points for dressing in red — his hair and suit — and blue — dress shirt, tie and, well, hair again — and Michael Chandler visualized accessorizing his fight night walk-out before he dished out a patriotic pounding draped in an American flag.

"For me to walk from the White House to the octagon to represent America, to represent myself, to represent just who I am and what this country means to me," Chandler said, "it's just a dream come true."

The usual foul-mouthed fight hype from UFC's American fighters ahead of their prime-time debut Sunday on the White House grounds largely yielded to bursts of national pride Wednesday.

O'Malley, known as much for his cornucopia of colors that turn his locks into rainbows or cotton candy tops as his fight skills, tried to downplay the week and called it business as usual. In the next breath, O'Malley confessed fighting on a UFC card on the South Lawn was indeed "epic."

Hoke, meanwhile, wasn't about to modify his style on the microphone just because he will fight in the mixed martial arts show timed to coincide with President Donald Trump's 80th birthday and the celebration of the nation's 250th anniversary.

"You'll never see me apologize for anything I do," Hoke said.

Well, the heavyweight is in the right city for that declaration. He was one of several fighters who added a dash of brashness and boldness in the nation's capital just four days before the surreal juxtaposition of

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pummeling and patriotism set for Trump and UFC boss Dana White's big-fight vision of UFC Freedom 250. Forget the Washington Monument. The claw, the temporary arena structure that houses the eight-sided cage, is the buzziest landmark this week in DC.

Weather is a slight concern for fight night

Umbrellas were a necessary accessory around Washington early Wednesday and the threat of heavier rain later in the week, which could dampen both a scheduled press conference at the Lincoln Memorial as well as fight night, was the only true concern ahead of the fight card.

White, who helped launch UFC into a global sports empire, insisted inclement weather will not keep the spectacle from proceeding as scheduled.

"We're going to be good on Sunday," White said this week. "I don't care if it snows, rains, we're going. Even lightning. You guys all played sports when you were growing up. Whenever there was lightning, you'd sit the lightning out. When it was over, you played. That's what we'll do."

Two titles at stake on the South Lawn

While the South Lawn setting normally reserved for low-contact events like the annual Easter Egg Roll is the real star of the show, there are two championship fights set for the Paramount+ show.

In a card that has been panned by fans online as underwhelming, Brazil's Alex Pereira will meet France's Ciryl Gane for the interim UFC heavyweight title. Then Spanish-Georgian lightweight champion Ilia Topuria takes on interim champ Justin Gaethje, one of just two Americans who currently hold even a share of the UFC's 11 championship belts.

Middleweight Bo Nickal was a three-time NCAA Division I wrestling champion at Penn State who was awed when he met Trump in 2019 at the White House during a ceremony for collegiate national champions.

"The president said hello to all the teams," Nickal said Wednesday. "When he got to us, he was all excited because he likes wrestlers. He talked to us for maybe 10, 15 minutes because he likes chatting."

Nickal is set to fight on the main card Sunday against Philadelphia fighter Kyle Daukaus. Nickal called fighting on the show a "massive opportunity," and one he may have manifested back in that 2019 meeting.

"I told him at that time in 2019 that I was going to fight at UFC," Nickal said. "He asked if I needed an agent. He's put in a good word for me, obviously, getting on this card."

The bulk of UFC's roster seemingly threw their names on the ballot and hoped to get the call they would fight in front of the president.

Chandler, the 40-year-old Missouri native, laughed when he said he would feel "as high as kite in the best way possible" on his way to the cage. He was thrilled when he earned a lightweight bout against Mauricio Ruffy.

"Even if you're not watching, you've heard about this card, whether you like to admit it or not," Chandler said.

White not fazed by federal lawsuit

Not everyone is on board with fighters commandeering the same South Lawn where Dwight D. Eisenhower once put in a putting green.

A federal lawsuit filed Saturday by the Public Integrity Project on behalf of two Virginia residents contends the Trump administration's authorization of the event was unlawful. The lawsuit says such approval violated National Park Service regulations prohibiting sporting events on federal parklands, Congress did not consent to the towering arch overlooking the event space and no environmental review was conducted before the construction.

White, a long-time friend and former business associate of Trump's from the days when Boardwalk cards at Trump Taj Mahal lifted UFC into relevancy, brushed off the idea the lawsuit could halt the fight card.

"We were expecting a lawsuit," White said. "We expected everything coming into this event. We thought it would be sooner. We knew it was going to come. We didn't know who or how, but we knew it was going to come."

Nancy Mace's unpredictable career is up in the air after finishing last in South Carolina primary

By JEFFREY COLLINS and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — After a decade of roiling South Carolina and national politics, Rep. Nancy Mace finished a distant fifth in her state's Republican primary for governor, leaving an uncertain future for one of the nation's unabashed politicians.

Her campaign mirrored her whipsaw career. Mace courted the support of President Donald Trump after harshly criticizing him over the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. She emphasized her fights with other Republicans to release files from the Jeffrey Epstein investigation.

In the final days before Tuesday's primary, she called for a law to prevent anyone not born in the U.S. from holding political office or serving as a judge. She suggested that Rom Reddy, another candidate for governor, wasn't qualified because he was a naturalized citizen whose mother was from India and father from Italy.

"I didn't come out of a slum in India," Mace said during an appearance in Greenville County this month. "I am born and made here in America."

By the end of her campaign, she was only making sporadic public appearances. She struggled to raise money and had no presence on television. Mace mostly communicated through social media — a place she has used to her advantage since first being elected to the South Carolina House in 2017.

Mace didn't give an indication of her next plans in her concession speech Tuesday night, although she posted Wednesday on social media that she was "headed back to the private sector" at the end of her current House term. She is backing Alan Wilson in the runoff for governor, even though just last year she accused Wilson of protecting child sex abuse defendants.

"When children needed him to act, Wilson looked the other way," she said.

Wilson will face Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette in the runoff on June 23. Evette received Trump's endorsement, spurring Mace to lash out on social media.

"Pamela Evette is NOT ENDORSED by DONALD TRUMP," Mace wrote, incorrectly. "Do not believe her LIES." Mace posted an AI-generated image of herself posing with Trump.

Where does Mace stand with Trump?

Mace's history with Trump goes back a decade, and, like many Republicans, it's had its ups and downs. She worked as a field director on Trump's 2016 campaign, and he endorsed her first congressional run in 2020, albeit after she won the Republican nomination.

But their rapport fractured as soon as Mace got to Washington. After the freshman House member sought to hold Trump accountable for Jan. 6 and said his "entire legacy" had been "wiped out," he labeled Mace as "crazy" and solicited primary challengers to take her on. Trump endorsed and campaigned for one of them, but Mace — with future Trump co-campaign manager Chris LaCivita as her media consultant — won anyway, and Trump went on to support her general election bid.

As Trump sought to return to the White House in 2024, Mace didn't endorse him over former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley until a day before the New Hampshire primary.

Mace lauded Trump during a primetime Republican National Convention speech and, after winning her own reelection, branded herself as "Trump in high heels" during the early days of her gubernatorial campaign.

But another fracture was on the horizon. This spring, while angling for Trump's endorsement, Mace was among several Republicans who joined congressional Democrats to force the Justice Department to release files related to Jeffrey Epstein.

Trump went on to back Evette, saying she had "never wavered" in her support of him. Evette had endorsed Trump early in the 2024 campaign.

Four congressional Republicans were part of the initial group pushing for a discharge petition forcing the files' release. Mace and Rep. Thomas Massie lost their races, and Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene resigned in January.

In a lengthy statement posted after her Tuesday loss, Mace said she had "taken on the rich and powerful in both parties" and "voted to release the Epstein files and lost some support for that."

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From Waffle House to The Citadel to Congress

Mace dropped out of high school and worked as a server at the Waffle House before getting her diploma. She later attended The Citadel and became the first woman to graduate from the state's military academy. And in recent years, she talked about the importance of defending victims of sexual assault and shared stories of being raped as a teen.

After her political career began in the South Carolina House, Mace got wide praise from Republicans in 2020 for winning back a U.S. House seat around Charleston that had flipped to Democrats for one term.

"For those folks that are out there today that maybe weren't with us yesterday, I'm asking for a chance — a chance to prove to you that I will be a compassionate leader, a good listener, an independent thinker," Mace said then.

At World Cup stadiums, there will be zero tolerance for drones because of the threat they pose

By JOSH FUNK AP Transportation Writer

Fans who hear the whirring sound of a drone over a stadium might see it as a nuisance but law enforcement has long viewed those aircraft as a potential weapon of mass destruction.

With the World Cup about to kick off, security is heightened and there's a zero-tolerance policy for drones over or near stadiums during the 78 matches in 11 U.S. cities.

Authorities have ratcheted up counter-drone measures used at the Super Bowl and other major events, while Congress has given law enforcement broader authority to electronically disable drones or shoot them down.

"The war in Ukraine has become a real-world testing ground for drone technology, and if there is one threat that keeps me up at night, it is from drones," New York Police Department Commissioner Jessica Tisch said.

Taking the threat seriously

Congress just gave state and local law enforcement the green light to take control of a threatening drone or even shoot them down if needed in December, though the first option will be to disable them electronically and land them safely. Key federal agencies already had that power.

The Federal Aviation Administration will restrict the airspace around and over crowded stadiums for World Cup games and fan events — much like it has done for years around NFL and Major League Baseball games. Violators can face fines up to \$100,000, see their drones confiscated and even face criminal charges for flying within three miles of one of the games. But those penalties likely wouldn't deter a determined terrorist.

The FBI has spent the last seven years building up its capability to deal with drones by investing in the technology needed to quickly identify drones and take control of them, and authorities have been using that already at major events. The bureau also provided counter drone technology training this year to law enforcement in all World Cup host cities that taught them how to recognize dangerous drones and respond.

The military has also developed counter drone lasers like the ones used along the Mexican border earlier this year and other systems to shoot down drones, but the FBI is not planning to do that during the World Cup because of the dangers involved with the wreckage of a drone falling over a major city.

"If the drone is intercepted and it no longer flies, it's going to fall. And as we say, no matter what you do, you can't change the law of gravity," said national security expert Hal Kempfer, who estimates that he has trained more than 30,000 law enforcement officers on counter-terrorism techniques.

'Everybody's a little behind'

The government has invested heavily in systems that should allow officers to take control of suspicious drones and land them safely or jam their signals, including handing out \$250 million to help states prepare to protect World Cup matches and the big public events planned this summer to honor America's 250th birthday.

Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin told Congress at a recent hearing that federal officers

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have successfully dealt with drones over several recent events, including bringing down eight drones over a Formula 1 race in Miami and 12 that entered the no fly zone over the Masters golf tournament, but "everybody's a little behind" the rapidly evolving technology.

"Biggest concern I have is honestly with drones," Mullin said. "I wouldn't say a vulnerability, but it is, it is one of the areas that we are struggling with every single day."

Drones are scary in the wrong hands

The FBI is taking a "zero-tolerance" approach to protecting the airspace around World Cup events. Devin Kowalski, an FBI assistant director in charge of the bureau's Critical Incident Response Group, said the agency plans to treat all drones "like they could be a real-deal threat." Other federal agencies, including Customs and Border Protection and the U.S. Coast Guard, will take the lead at several stadiums while the FBI protects three of them.

"When that drone comes into the TFR (Temporary Flight Restricted area), we're handling it as if it's something that could hurt people, and we're aggressively locating its operator and conducting the logical investigation to determine the nature of the situation as well as to hold that person accountable," Kowalski said in an interview with The Associated Press.

ATF Director Rob Cekada said in an interview that the focus now is on protecting the World Cup, but the America 250 events, World Series, Super Bowl and the 2028 Olympics aren't far behind. "Then think about all the events in every community in the country — high school and college games — that are a concern for our state and local partners. So we want to do what we can to help them as best as possible," he said.

Derek Reisfield, who is the former president of one of the companies providing counter-drone technology to the host cities, said "this technology in the wrong hands is very scary," and there are many around the globe who want to harm America.

"We have to assume that there's somebody in Iran who's spending every day thinking about how they can attack the United States on our home turf," said Reisfield, who used to lead Ondas and now serves on the board of a Ukrainian company called Swarmer that makes software that allows one person to control hundreds of drones.

Early detection could be key to stopping drones

Some of the technology could allow authorities to detect drones up to 25 miles (40 kilometers) out, which would provide more time to mitigate the threat, according to Matt Sloane, the co-founder of SkyfireAI. But it's possible that someone could sneak a drone up close to a stadium and launch it from less than a mile away (less than 1.6 kilometers), which would leave little time to act.

And the systems designed to jam the signal from an operator or take control of a drone might not be effective if it is preprogrammed to crash into a stadium full of fans while carrying an explosive payload or if it is controlled over a fiber optic line.

The battlefield tactic that might pose the greatest threat would be sending a swarm of multiple drones to attack at the same time. Even with the best defenses, a few drones might sneak through to the target as Iran has been able to do with large numbers of its Shaheed drones. The U.S. military has an assortment of weapons to knock drones out of the sky, but Iran has still be able to hit targets across the Middle East.

But Sloane he feels like the government is doing what it can to be ready.

"The threat is real, certainly. But I do think that there's a lot being done to prepare for it. To educate about it," said Sloane, whose company has helped protect Super Bowls in the past. "And then we just need to tell everybody who's just trying to take pretty pictures 'Hey this is not the time. Keep your drone in the box.'"

Deadly Pakistani airstrikes in Afghanistan end a month of calm

By ABDUL QAHAR AFGHAN and MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Pakistan launched deadly new airstrikes on Afghanistan early Wednesday, ending a month of calm following what Islamabad previously described as "open war" between the neighbors that has defied international efforts to bring a lasting peace.

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Afghanistan said the strikes hit the eastern provinces of Khost, Kunar and Paktika, and government spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said 13 people were killed — 11 children, one woman and an older man — with 14 other civilians wounded.

Pakistan confirmed it 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.

Hundreds of people have been killed in the fighting between Pakistan and Afghanistan since February, when Afghanistan attacked 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 who 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.

Seven children killed in the strikes are buried

In Khost, hundreds of mourners attended the funerals of nine people killed — seven children ranging in age from 3 to 15, a woman and a man. All were from the same family, killed when their house collapsed from the airstrike, relatives said.

Residents knelt to mourn at the open casket of a small child.

One mourner, Talib Gul, said those killed were his uncle and aunt along with their four daughters and three sons.

"In my uncle's family, only two of his daughters survived. The rest of his entire family was martyred," Gul said.

He said a second strike hit his brother's house, causing significant damage and killing many livestock that are central to livelihoods there.

Afghanistan's foreign ministry summoned Pakistan's chargé d'affaires in Kabul to protest "the violation of Afghan airspace and the bombing of the homes of innocent civilians," deputy spokesperson and public relations director Zia Ahmad Takal said in a statement, adding that Pakistan should "find a fundamental solution to its internal problems."

Pakistan says it targeted militant hideouts

In a post on X, Pakistan's information minister, Attaullah Tarar, said strikes were carried out in 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.

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

Pakistan'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 on X dismissed Afghanistan's reports of civilian casualties, asserting that "Afghan Taliban accounts are peddling propaganda."

Wednesday's strikes came a day after suspected Pakistani Taliban militants attacked a security post in Pakistan's Hasan Khel area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, triggering a 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.

The situation along the border was calm hours after Wednesday's strikes. Kabul has previously responded to strikes by targeting Pakistani posts along the frontier hours or days later.

Fighting has closed the border since October

Pakistan in February declared it was in open war with Afghanistan, following a surge in militant attacks on its civilians and security forces.

Afghanistan has said a Pakistani airstrike in March hit a drug treatment center in Kabul, killing more than 400 people. Pakistan has disputed the toll and denied targeting civilians, saying it struck an ammunition

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depot.

Wednesday's strikes come months after China hosted peace talks between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Beijing later said they had agreed not to escalate their conflict and to explore a solution.

Authorities in Pakistan have said China 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 the solution to the tensions 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," Khan said.

The border has been closed since October, disrupting trade and transportation and stranding thousands of people.

Trump signs bill giving nearly \$70B to his immigration enforcement agenda through end of his term

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE and COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump signed a bill into law on Wednesday that gives his immigration and deportation agenda a nearly \$70 billion boost for the rest of his time in the White House.

The bill provides \$38 billion for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and \$26 billion for the Border Patrol. An additional \$5 billion would cover unforeseen costs, according to the White House.

Trump signed the legislation in the Oval Office a day after House Republicans pushed the measure through by a 214-212 vote over the objections of Democrats. His signature ended a nearly six-month fight over Department of Homeland Security funding that began with shooting deaths of two U.S. citizens, Alex Pretti and Renee Good, in January during federal immigration enforcement operations in Minneapolis.

Democrats began demanding changes to immigration enforcement after the shootings, creating an impasse — and resulting in the longest agency in history — that ultimately led Republicans to go it alone on the funding.

The agencies will be funded through the next three years. The new law front-loads routine annual funding, ensuring a virtually uninterrupted flow of money as the Trump administration seeks to deport some 1 million people per year.

The legislation had become 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 to be victims of political prosecution. Both proposals became politically toxic and were scrapped.

The bill as passed focused exclusively on immigration enforcement, a topic that Republicans have treated as a defining issue between the two major political parties and one the GOP hopes will carry it to victory in November's midterm elections.

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.

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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 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.

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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 defeated former state Sen. James Settelmeyer. Republican Rep. Mark Amodei, who announced his retirement from the seat, had endorsed Settelmeyer, as had 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 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.

Ukraine launches long-range strikes on military and energy sites in Russia

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A series of long-range Ukrainian attacks hit targets deep inside Russia on Wednesday, part of Kyiv's efforts to raise the costs of the war for the Kremlin by striking energy facilities and military industries.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his country's forces struck several military and energy infrastructure sites, including a military factory that he said supplied components for Russian drones and missiles.

In a post on social media, Zelenskyy said Ukrainian FP-5 Flamingo long-range missiles had hit the facility in Cheboksary, located in the Chuvashiya region more than 900 kilometers (over 560 miles) from the

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front line.

Russia's Defense Ministry said that air defenses downed 326 Ukrainian drones overnight.

Oleg Nikolayev, the head of Chuvashiya, confirmed the missile attack but didn't give details. The Astra online news outlet reported that the Ukrainian strike hit the VNIIR-Progress plant that produces antennas for drones.

Zelenskyy also said Ukrainian forces struck a refinery in Russia's Samara region, where Gov. Vyacheslav Fedorishchev said that several industrial plants were damaged by drone strikes and three people were injured.

Fedorishchev didn't name the facilities that were damaged, but Astra carried images of a large fire at the Samara refinery.

Zelenskyy added that Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) had also targeted two oil infrastructure facilities in Russia's Vladimir region, about 700 kilometers (about 440 miles) from the front line.

In Russia-occupied Crimea, a Ukrainian drone hit the building housing a huge panorama painting depicting the defense of the city during the 19th century Crimean War. Mikhail Razvozhayev, the Kremlin-appointed head of Sevastopol, said the painting by artist Franz Rubo was effectively destroyed.

The more than 1,000-kilometer front line in the four-year war has remained largely static as swarms of drones hinder advances, and both sides have increasingly relied on long-range strikes.

The increasingly deep and audacious Ukrainian strikes have defied Russia's President Vladimir Putin's claim that Moscow is winning the war, now in its fifth year.

Last week, Putin vowed to strengthen Russia's air defenses after Ukrainian attacks set ablaze an oil terminal in St. Petersburg and also hit a nearby naval base, casting a cloud over a showcase economic forum in his hometown.

The attacks on St. Petersburg came as another embarrassment for the Russian leader, weeks after he pruned back an annual Victory Day parade in Moscow because of fears of Ukrainian drone attacks.

Ukraine's Air Force says air defenses downed 181 of 207 Russian drones.

A barrage of 26 drones struck Kharkiv early Wednesday, injuring at least four people, according to regional administration head Oleh Syniehubov. He said one person was killed and 15 others were injured in the region over the past 24 hours.

In the Zaporizhzhia region, 10 people were injured overnight in a series of Russian aerial attacks, according to regional head Ivan Fedorov.

In Odesa, a mother and two children, aged 8 and 10, required medical attention after Russian drones damaged two residential buildings, according to regional administration head Oleh Kiper.

Ukraine has secured commitments for additional air defense systems and ammunition following Zelenskyy's recent visits to London and Tallinn, said Foreign Ministry spokesperson Heorhii Tykhyi.

Speaking at a briefing, Tykhyi said Ukraine had "found" a number of additional air defense systems and munitions but declined to identify the countries that had agreed to provide them.

He said Kyiv also was working to secure financing to purchase the equipment and that part of the necessary funding had already been allocated.

Tykhyi added that Ukraine was in talks to obtain interceptor missiles nearing the end of their shelf life, arguing that they could still be provided to Ukraine instead of being disposed of after expiring.

Teens' reading and math scores have stagnated, US test results show

By ANNIE MA and SHARON LURYE AP Education Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Younger students have regained ground academically after the pandemic's disruptions while older students' test scores continue to stagnate, according to the latest testing data released Wednesday by the federal government.

Nine-year-olds rebounded to pre-pandemic reading scores and saw some recovery in math, according to

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data from a test taken regularly in the United States since the 1970s. The same recovery has not emerged for 13-year-olds, whose average scores in math and reading remain below pre-pandemic averages. In fact, the latest reading scores, from teenagers who took the test in 2024, are essentially the same level as they were when the test started in 1971.

Since the pandemic, schools and state policymakers have focused on overhauling instruction for elementary students, especially in implementing the "science of reading," which teaches kids to read by understanding how letters form sounds. But recent test scores show educators should also focus more intensely on adolescent learners and turning around academic outcomes in middle school, said Lesley Muldoon, executive director of the National Assessment Governing Board.

Indeed, the 13-year-olds who took the national test experienced the pandemic's disruption during formative elementary years of schooling. In a few years, they will have graduated — and they may still be behind.

"The 13-year-olds who took this assessment last year are headed to high school now or are already enrolled," she said. "Schools won't have them much longer. We can't hesitate or wait if we're going to turn these trends around."

What the test measures

Typically given every four years, the long-term trends assessment offers a snapshot into the academic skills of American students at ages 9 and 13. Roughly 31,000 students in public and private schools sat for the test in the 2024-2025 school year. Unlike the main Nation's Report Card test for fourth and eighth graders, which is updated regularly with new skills to reflect changing curricula, the long-term test has stayed largely the same since the 1970s.

American students' academic achievement was already declining when the pandemic hit. Test scores peaked around 2012, then started to fall, said Matthew Soldner, acting commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics.

"We can clearly see that this isn't just a pandemic story," Soldner said.

The test results show younger kids are improving foundational skills, such as identifying facts in a simple news article or understanding basic multiplication and division. Seventy-one percent of 9-year-olds reached the benchmark in reading, and 84% reached that level in math, a few percentage points higher than in 2022.

Teenagers are tested on more advanced skills, such as making generalizations from a reading passage and comparing information from charts and graphs. Only 58% met the benchmark skill level in reading and 70% in math, with no statistically significant improvement from 2023.

Fewer students are reading for fun

Compounding the issue of stagnant literacy rates: Fewer students than ever are reading for fun.

Students who took the test also completed a survey. Only 14% of 13-year-olds said they read for fun every day, down from 27% in 2012 and a peak of 37% in 1992. Among 9-year-olds, 37% said they read for fun every day, a significant decline from 53% in 2012. Researchers have noted the decline in time spent reading corresponds with the rise of social media use on cellphones.

Still, younger children have shown an "incredibly encouraging" recovery academically in recent years, Soldner said. "Almost 50 years of progress has been eliminated" for 13-year-olds, he said.

The 13-year-olds who took the most recent test would have been in second or third grade during the first year of the pandemic. They would have returned to in-person learning in fourth or fifth grade and taken this national test in their last year or two of middle school.

In contrast, the 9-year-old group would have been entering kindergarten or first grade as the pandemic's most acute phase ended and schools reopened. Their second and third grade years would have been more reflective of typical in-person teaching.

Those experiences are dramatically different, Soldner said, as the older group would have missed foundational years in building literacy and computational skills in school.

While more recent declines in student outcomes are alarming, decades of test data show it's possible to change children's trajectories over time, said Mark Miller, an eighth grade math teacher and former member of the National Assessment Governing Board.

"We have made progress in the past, from the early '70s to 2012," Miller said. "Can it be done again? Absolutely."

Mysterious disappearance of alleged Israeli spy puts Lebanese state in a tough spot

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 to 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 the 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.

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"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."

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 Mohanad 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.

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 building 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 including money laundering, attempting to pervert the course of public justice and tax evasion.

The two companies charged are consultancy firm Will Power Architects Company, and Prestige Construction & Engineering Co., the main contractor involved in a major renovation project at Wang Fuk Court that was taking place when the blaze happened.

The seven defendants played different roles in the renovation works, authorities said. They included the directors of the two companies and a registered inspector of Will Power.

The defendants told the court they understood the charges, and most appeared calm. Lists of victims' names were read out from the charge sheets in court — the first such disclosure to the public. The hearing will resume in September.

Multiple alleged wrongdoings

Senior police superintendent Basil Tang told reporters that they found the people in charge of the renovation project and the relevant companies were seriously negligent in monitoring the materials used in the project and the procedures involved. Tang pointed to issues such as the use of non-fire-retardant scaffolding netting and foam boards.

"The above work arrangements are suspected of seriously affecting the building's fire safety, causing the fire to spread rapidly, and also obstructing escape routes, resulting in massive casualties," he said.

Hazel Law, principal investigator of the Independent Commission Against Corruption, said they would not rule out further law enforcement operations.

"We suspect that some people, for their own personal gain, not only failed to fulfill their professional responsibilities, but even used suspected corrupt practices, fraud and other illegal acts to achieve their purposes," Law said.

Tang said Will Power directors Ng Yeuk and Wong Hap-yin, Prestige director Ho Kin-yip, alongside the two companies, were charged with manslaughter.

The companies and some of the defendants were also charged with conspiracy to defraud.

Authorities allege the conspiracy goes beyond the fire site

In one of the fraud allegations, authorities alleged that the two companies and some defendants conspired together to defraud the apartment owners of Wang Fuk Court by concealing previous litigation records of Prestige and inflating the score given to the firm in a tender analysis report.

That eventually led to Prestige being awarded the renovation project at a contract worth more than 300 million Hong Kong dollars (over \$38 million), they said.

Their alleged wrongdoings went beyond the Wang Fuk Court. Authorities also alleged some of the accused conspired together to defraud the government by falsely claiming that the registered inspector of Will Power had carried out his duties in inspecting and supervising 86 building maintenance projects.

Tang on Wednesday said police and the Independent Commission Against Corruption arrested 35 people when they looked into the cause of the fire and potential corruption issues involving the renovation project.

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?

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 1970s. 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 after being 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

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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.

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 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.

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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.

Today in History: June 11, University of Alabama desegregated

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, June 11, the 162nd day of 2026. There are 203 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On June 11, 1963, the University of Alabama was desegregated as Vivian Malone and James Hood became the first two Black students allowed to enroll in classes; Alabama segregationist and Gov. George Wallace initially blocked the doorway to the auditorium where course registration was taking place, delivering a speech before deferring to National Guard orders to move.

Also on this date:

In 1509, England's King Henry VIII married his first wife, Catherine of Aragon.

In 1776, the Second Continental Congress appointed the Committee of Five (composed of John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Robert Livingston and Roger Sherman) to draft a declaration of independence from Great Britain, to be completed in the subsequent 17 days.

In 1955, in motor racing's worst disaster, more than 80 people were killed during the 24 Hours of Le Mans in France when two cars collided and crashed into spectators.

In 1962, Frank Morris, Clarence Anglin and John Anglin, prisoners at Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary in San Francisco Bay, staged an escape, leaving the island on a makeshift raft. They were never found or heard from again.

In 1963, Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thích Quảng Đức lit himself on fire on a Saigon street as a protest against the Vietnamese government's persecution of Buddhists.

In 1987, Margaret Thatcher became the first British prime minister in over 160 years to win a third consecutive term of office as her Conservative Party held onto a reduced majority in Parliament.

In 2001, Timothy McVeigh, 33, was executed by lethal injection at the federal prison in Terre Haute, Indiana, for the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing that killed 168 people.

In 2009, with H1N1 swine flu reported in more than 70 nations, the World Health Organization declared the first global flu pandemic in 41 years.

In 2024, Hunter Biden was convicted of three felonies for purchasing a gun in 2018 when, prosecutors

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said, he lied on a federal form by claiming he was not illegally using or addicted to drugs. President Joe Biden in December pardoned his son for the gun and separate tax-related convictions.

Today's Birthdays: Drummer Bernard Purdie is 87. International Motorsports Hall of Famer Jackie Stewart is 87. Actor Roscoe Orman is 82. Actor Adrienne Barbeau is 81. Rock musician Frank Beard (ZZ Top) is 77. Singer Graham Russell (Air Supply) is 76. Football Hall of Famer Joe Montana is 70. Actor Hugh Laurie is 67. TV personality and current Medicare Administrator Mehmet Oz is 66. Actor Peter Dinklage is 57. Actor Joshua Jackson is 48. U.S. Olympic and WNBA basketball star Diana Taurasi is 44. Actor Shia LaBeouf is 40. Basketball Hall of Famer Maya Moore is 37. Actor Saxon Sharbino is 27.