

Groton Daily Independent

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Friday, June 19

JUNETEENTH

SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tourney and Dinner at the Olive Grove Golf Course, 11 a.m.

Sr. Legion at Heritage Tournament, Milbank

Jr. Legion at Volga, 6 p.m.

Saturday, June 20

Groton Triathlon

Sr. Legion at Heritage Tournament, Milbank

U10 Baseball - Groton Tournament (ALL)

U12 Softball at Mobridge Tournament (ALL)

U10 Softball at Mobridge Tournament

Groton Daily Independent

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Every situation in life is temporary. So, when life is good, make sure you enjoy and receive it fully. And when life is not so good, remember that it will not last forever and better days are on me way. ❤️



Sunday, June 21

FATHER'S DAY

FIRST DAY OF SUMMER

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.

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

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

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

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

Sr. Legion at Heritage Tournament, Milbank

U12 Baseball - Groton Tournament

U14 Baseball: Hosts Clark, 4:00

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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.

Obama Center Opens

The Obama Presidential Center opens to the public today, nearly five years after construction began. Former President Barack Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama were joined at a dedication ceremony yesterday by three former presidents and several celebrities.

The 19-acre campus is in Chicago's South Side, where Obama began his political career as a community organizer. The anchor point—a granite tower designed to evoke four hands joining and reaching skyward—houses a museum honoring Obama's legacy with a full-scale replica of his Oval Office. The campus, which also includes a public library, athletic facilities, and gardens, was constructed with \$850M in private donations and will be maintained by the Obama Foundation.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the first presidential library in 1939, setting a precedent that every president since has followed. Obama's is the first with an online-only archive, as roughly 95% of his administration's records are digital-native.

To the Tablet ... and Beyond

"Toy Story 5" premieres in theaters today, as Disney and Pixar revisit one of Hollywood's biggest franchises with a story for the digital age. Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, and Joan Cusack reprise Woody, Buzz, and Jessie, reuniting the gang 31 years after the original.

The film follows now-8-year-old Bonnie, whose new companion Lilypad, a tablet-like device, pulls her attention away from her toys, turning playtime into a battle between imagination and screens. The premise taps into a familiar reality: Nearly 60% of children have a tablet by age 4, and kids under 8 average almost three hours of daily screen time. The franchise, launched in 1995 as the first fully computer-animated feature film, has grossed more than \$3B worldwide and generates over \$1B annually in retail sales. Analysts are projecting a \$145M to \$150M opening weekend, which would top "Toy Story 4" (\$120M).

Did you know Woody and Jessie share the last name Pride? Tom Hanks didn't.

Robin Hood Tree Dies

The 1,200-year-old Major Oak, a tree linked to legendary bandit Robin Hood, appears to have died, a UK conservation group revealed yesterday. The Sherwood Forest tree failed to produce leaves this spring, and the root system appears to be strangled.

According to legend, the medieval-era outlaw used its hollowed-out trunk as a hideout to avoid the sheriff of Nottingham. However, historians largely agree Robin Hood was no single, living person; the story began as an oral tradition in the 12th century, with the first written ballads coming two centuries later. Did he steal from the rich to give to the poor? That narrative has also evolved over the centuries.

The tree may have died due to old age, climate, and efforts to support its branches that counterintuitively backfired. About 350,000 people visit the tree each year, further weakening soil health.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Discovery Channel reveals Shark Week lineup, which kicks off July 26 at 8 pm ET with a K-pop special. Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson to star in Apple TV comedy series created by "The Office" producer; first two episodes air Sept. 23.

"Outer Banks" fifth and final season will premiere Aug. 20.

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Two of the oldest managers at the World Cup meet as South Africa draws Czechia.
The USMNT hosts Australia at 3 pm ET in Seattle; a win would guarantee the US a spot in the Round of 32 in the competition

Science & Technology

Archaeologists find possible Stonehenge prototype about three miles from the iconic structure; two wooden poles, measuring up to about 13 feet high, likely aligned with solstice sunrise and sunset.

Early life adversity can cause molecular changes that accelerate aging, according to a study of primates, with different hardships affecting different body parts.

Beloved "Pink Planet" has salt clouds, according to new observations from the James Webb Space Telescope, confirming a 15-year-old theory.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +1.1%, Dow +0.1%, Nasdaq +2.0%).

US national average gas prices fall below \$4 per gallon for the first time since March, but remain 25% higher than a year ago.

Intel shares close up 10% on reported deal to manufacture chips for Apple.

... comes after Apple said it's planning to raise prices on its products to offset rising costs of memory and storage chips.

Politics & World Affairs

Vice President JD Vance delays trip to Switzerland to begin 60 days of negotiations with Iran, including over the country's nuclear program.

Ukraine strikes an oil refinery in Moscow for the second time this week, part of Ukraine's largest barrage of drones in Russian capital in years.

Supreme Court finds recreational marijuana use is insufficient grounds to bar someone from possessing guns, ruling in favor of Texas man.



A promotional poster for a live music performance. The top half features a photograph of a woman with long, wavy blonde hair, wearing round sunglasses and a black jacket, smiling. In the top left corner, there is a circular logo with a guitar neck and the text "LIVE MUSIC AT THE LEGION!". Below the photo, the name "LIZZY HOFER" is written in large, bold, white capital letters, with a red flame graphic to the left. Below the name, the text "PLAYING FRIDAY JUNE 26" is displayed in green and pink. To the right, the performance time "9 P.M. TO 1 A.M." is shown in orange and white, followed by "GROTON AMERICAN LEGION" in white and pink. At the bottom, the text "GREAT MUSIC ★ COLD DRINKS ★ GOOD TIMES" is written in white, with "EVERYONE WELCOME!" in orange below it, flanked by pink arrow-like symbols.

LIVE MUSIC
AT THE LEGION!

LIZZY
HOFER

PLAYING
FRIDAY
JUNE 26

9 P.M. TO 1 A.M.
GROTON
AMERICAN LEGION

GREAT MUSIC ★ COLD DRINKS ★ GOOD TIMES
EVERYONE WELCOME!

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Groton, South Dakota

Where
Life
Happens
Together.

Parks. Schools. Recreation. Opportunity.
A place to grow, connect, and belong.

Groton
South Dakota
Growing Families & Opportunities

Eat, Shop, Buy Local
57445



**SOUTH DAKOTA
NEWS WATCH**

Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

Real estate, car dealerships, bitcoin and a TIF: A look into Toby Doeden's empire

ABERDEEN, S.D. – Businessman Toby Doeden, whose campaign for governor has hinged largely on the elimination of all property taxes for South Dakotans, has links to real estate investment companies that would save more than half a million dollars every year under that plan, according to public records. That number reflects the sheer size of the candidate's reach and business experience in the state's third-largest city.

Though Doeden has frequently referred to his experience in the business world as his primary qualifier for the office of governor, little was known about the full extent of his ventures and wealth.

In addition to a vast portfolio acquired through multiple real estate investment and development companies, Doeden also owns the Aberdeen Chrysler dealership in Aberdeen and Redfield Ford in Redfield. He also has

ties to land next to the Aberdeen dealership that company Plaza Rentals and his son had rezoned in 2020 to allow for bitcoin mining. And that's only a few of the two dozen LLCs with links to Doeden.

Searches of the Better Business Bureau, court records and the state of South Dakota's consumer protection portal paint a generally positive picture of the empire: Doeden's companies are in good standing and have not had any major outstanding legal or civil issues. All but one of his limited liability companies remain active on the South Dakota Secretary of State's website, Scotty's Diner, LLC, which closed in 2024.

Doeden declined a phone interview with News Watch to clarify his current status at the companies but provided a statement.

"I am extremely proud of the work my team and I have been able to accomplish over the years at Doeden Investment Group. Being able to give back to the people and state that have given me so much has been the honor of a lifetime," Doeden said in the statement.

"We have created thousands of jobs, grown countless businesses, and invested 100% of that money back into our communities right here in South Dakota. I look forward to bringing that much needed business experience directly to Pierre as Governor."

Doeden Investment Group is the mechanism behind much of Doeden's real estate and business portfolio. It describes itself as "a leading investment firm dedicated to identifying and nurturing business opportunities that drive growth and prosperity within communities" and says it has "a diverse portfolio spanning various industries."



A Toby Doeden campaign sign outside 9 East 10th St in Groton, S.D. on June 15, 2026. The building is an apartment complex that Doeden's 5-Star Management company operates. (Photo: Molly Wetsch/South Dakota News Watch)

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Dozens of properties make up real estate portfolio in northeastern SD

Companies Plaza Rentals LLP, Tenth Street Properties LLC and Five-Star Management LLC, all with links to Doeden through years of annual reports filed with the South Dakota Secretary of State's office, own more than \$30 million of property in and around Aberdeen.

That includes single-family homes, commercial buildings and multi-family buildings, according to data from the Brown County Equalization Department.

Doeden told the Aberdeen Insider on June 17, though, that categorizing him as a major property owner in Aberdeen is incorrect because he is no longer deeply involved with the companies' business dealings. Several other individuals are involved in the day-to-day management of those real estate companies, including sons Jonathan and Jackson and daughter Josie.

"But I hear, 'Toby owns all the property...'" Well, Toby doesn't hardly own any property in Aberdeen, and I haven't for a long time. That property was put into a trust many years ago. I don't control it. I don't manage the companies. They're trying to connect me to things that (I'm not even) involved with anymore, that I don't even own anymore. And it's unfortunate," Doeden told the Insider.

But that doesn't jibe with his current Statement of Financial Interest submitted to the South Dakota Secretary of State's Office in April 2026, which lists him as an owner, employee and shareholder, partner or shareholder of 24 companies and funding sources.

Doeden is the registered agent for Tenth Street Properties and was the registered agent for Plaza Rentals until Tuesday, June 16, when the company's annual report removed him and listed Mariah Bloom-McNeece, who serves as general counsel for Doeden Investment Group, as the new registered agent. He is still listed as a partner in the company along with the "Trustees of 4J 2023 Trust." The trust was added to annual reports for Plaza Rentals starting in 2024.

Designating a registered agent is required for the formation of an LLC. The registered agent is the individual who is authorized to receive legal, tax and other government correspondence on behalf of the LLC and is usually a member of the LLC – though not necessarily the owner – or an individual through a professional registered agent service.

Doeden was also identified explicitly as a partner in Plaza Rentals both on his candidate statement of financial interest and in 2023, when the city of Aberdeen implemented a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district for several apartment buildings that the company purchased and redeveloped on North 2nd Street in Aberdeen, now called 4J Commons after Doeden's four children. The TIF's purpose is to "redevelop and repurpose a dilapidat-



The Roosevelt Apartments at 214 S. Kline St. in Aberdeen, S.D., on June 15, 2026. Doeden's Plaza Rentals owns and operates the 32-unit building. The property was originally purchased and renovated in 2013 by Roosevelt Apartments LLC. Brown County Register of Deeds records indicate Plaza Rentals purchased the property in 2021. (Photo: Molly Wetsch/South Dakota News Watch)

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ed apartment complex” and is estimated to mature in 2043.

Doeden also runs a charitable organization called the 4J Foundation.

A copy of the agreement signed by Toby Doeden on behalf of Plaza Rentals to incorporate its land on North 2nd Street in Aberdeen, S.D.,

into a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district in 2023.

At least 75 properties in Aberdeen and Groton are linked to Plaza Rentals, Tenth Street Properties and Five-Star Management, with a current taxable portfolio value of at least \$34,246,283 and a property tax commitment this year of at least \$558,129, according to public records from the Brown County director of equalization’s office.

Tenth Street Properties is the deed holder to the building housing Street Corner Urban Market – another LLC tied to Doeden – in Aberdeen, as well as Legends Liquor and Casino. Mulligan’s Sports Bar and Casino is also located in the complex owned by Tenth Street Properties.

Bitcoin mining

Real estate is not Doeden’s only business venture.

One of his businesses was involved in the zoning of a building for 150 bitcoin mining units near his Aberdeen dealership. That zoning permit, which was issued to son Jackson Doeden and company Plaza Rentals, was initially granted in February 2022 for 70 units and was upgraded to 150 units in June 2022, according to Aberdeen News and minutes from the Aberdeen Board of Zoning meetings.

Aberdeen Community Development planner Eric Miller told News Watch that as far as he knew, the mining operation was still active today. But since no extended licensing is required to continue operation of the facility, he could not confirm whether it is still taking place.

Bitcoin mining units are large, complex computers that generate units of cryptocurrency through computing efforts. A large-scale center like the one in Aberdeen can become a mostly passive income stream after the initial investment of the mining units, which can cost up to several thousand dollars per machine, depending on the model.

Because of the largely-opaque nature of cryptocurrency and how it is produced and sold, it is unclear what the Plaza Rentals facility’s bitcoin output is per year, and therefore how much it earns from the operation.

Doeden did, however, disclose “digital assets” as a source of funding on his April 2026 candidate statement of financial interest. Examples of digital assets, according to the IRS, include convertible virtual currencies and cryptocurrencies like bitcoin, stablecoins and non-fungible tokens (NFTs).

Business experience key to campaign

Doeden has spoken about his experience in business frequently and touts it as his biggest qualification for governor, often calling himself the “outsider” and the “businessman” in the governor’s race.



Aberdeen Chrysler Center, which Toby Doeden took over ownership of in 2020, in Aberdeen, S.D., on June 15, 2026. (Photo: Molly Wetsch/South Dakota News Watch)

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Doeden came out on top in the June 2 Republican primary election with 31%, followed by Gov. Larry Rhoden with 25%. U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson was third with 23% and state House Speaker Jon Hanson fourth with 21%.

Because no one received 35% of the vote, Doeden and Rhoden are headed to a July 28 run-off election for the Republican nomination for governor. The winner will meet Democrat Dan Ahlers in the Nov. 3 general election.

Doeden backed up his promise to largely self-fund his campaign by loaning it another \$2 million this year, in addition to the \$2 million he put up in 2025, according to the latest campaign reports.

Of that latest \$2 million, roughly \$1.4 million has gone to advertisements, while he has also spent \$210,000 on salaries for campaign staff.

Doeden's campaign website says that he is "one of South Dakota's most successful self-made business owners." His campaign ads, too, tout years of business experience and his creation of "thousands of jobs" in South Dakota.

"No one is able to outwork me," he said in one ad.

In 2023, Doeden told the Aberdeen Insider that the growth of other enterprises he is linked to and his success in the business world can be entirely credited to his work at Aberdeen Chrysler.

"Aberdeen Chrysler is a very successful business," Doeden said. "That afforded me the ability to start these other companies. Without Aberdeen Chrysler, none of these things would have happened."

One comment made at an event before Doeden announced his gubernatorial run illustrates just how much the Doeden name means in Aberdeen.

"Here's how to measure Toby's success," Brown County GOP chair Richard Hilgemann joked at the 2025 Brown County Lincoln Day Dinner. "When he buys up enough of Aberdeen that we get to name the town 'Aber-Doeden,' that's when we know he's successful."

Post-pandemic lucrative era for Doeden

Doeden's fast rise to success seems to have started roughly six years ago.

The South Dakota Secretary of State's office shows that he took over Plaza Rentals as its registered agent in 2020. That's also when Doeden took ownership of the Aberdeen Chrysler Center after serving



A building at 605 East Drive in Aberdeen, S.D. on June 15, 2026, which was zoned for 150 bitcoin mining units in 2022 by Plaza Rentals and Doeden's son Jonathan. (Photo: Molly Wetsch/South Dakota News Watch)

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as general manager for nine years and gradually purchasing stock.

Roger Gray was the prior owner of Aberdeen Chrysler and also was the registered agent for Plaza Rentals when it was founded in 2007.

All but two of the 27 companies Doeden is linked to were incorporated in or after 2020. Doeden credits his innovative thinking to his success during the pandemic, citing a risk-taking approach and careful planning.

"You can either suffer or find a way to come out the other end," Doeden said of the pandemic to the Aberdeen Insider in 2023. "We got together, had a plan and had a fantastic three years."

The Aberdeen businessman boosted Republican populist candidates in last year's legislative primaries and is exploring his own run in 2026.

Doeden's business activity during the pandemic, though, has also come under scrutiny on the campaign trail.

During a gubernatorial debate in April, The Dakota Scout's Jonathan Ellis asked Doeden why he thought it was appropriate to "personally benefit from federal PPP (Paycheck Protection Program) funds and leverage those programs to grow your businesses" when the candidate has come out against government-led economic development programs.

Doeden railed against Ellis' questioning.

"I don't appreciate you saying that I used it to further my business interests. That is a flat out lie, and as a moderator, you should apologize to the people here tonight because it's a flat out, utter lie," Doeden said during the debate.

PPP data shows that Aberdeen Auto Center, also known as Aberdeen Chrysler, received \$1.1 million in loans in 2020. Doeden said during the debate that 150 jobs were saved at his company from the program.

PPP loans were sent directly to businesses and were largely intended to cover employee salaries during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

Other loans in Plaza Rentals' holdings include 77 mortgages on properties in and around Aberdeen since 2020, according to information from the Brown County Register of Deeds' office.

But long-term debt certainly is not part of the Plaza Rentals business plan.

Many of those mortgages were taken out on five-year terms – a relatively short lifespan. At least 20 of them have been fully satisfied, with several others partially paid. Notably, records show a \$4 million mortgage for the 4J Commons complex from American Bank & Trust was fully satisfied in just one year, between 2023 and 2024.



Street Corner Urban Market in Aberdeen, S.D., a company for which Doeden is the registered agent, on June 15, 2026. Legends Liquor and Casino also recently opened in the building. (Photo: Molly Wetsch/South Dakota News Watch)

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Mortgages for Plaza Rentals properties have come from regional banks Dacotah Bank, American Bank & Trust, First Interstate Bank and Dakotaland Federal Credit Union.

Doeden has in the past credited strong, trusting relationships with lenders as a reason for his ability to acquire large amounts of property in a short period of time.

What we don't know

Though public records can illustrate a broad picture of how Doeden came to his financial success and status as a top vote-getter in the gubernatorial campaign, there are still some portions of the story that are unclear.

The trust industry is largely a hidden one, especially in South Dakota. The state's privacy statute prevents any trust information from being revealed to the public in court proceedings, and trusts by nature are opaque.

We do not know whether the trust Doeden refers to is revocable (a living trust), which can be altered, or irrevocable, which are established trusts that cannot be altered and essentially cede ownership of property.

Information that is also unavailable to the public is who the beneficiaries of that trust are – though the trust is ostensibly named after Doeden's children – and how many properties are actually in trust.

It is also unclear how much real financial stake and income Doeden maintains in and from the companies he is linked to.

Name of Candidate or Family Member	Name the Source of Funds	Relationship to Funds
Toby Doeden	Aberdeen Auto Center Inc	Employee & Shareholder
	5-Star Management	Employee & Owner
	Bonn River LLC	Owner
	Crystal River LLC	Owner
	Engels Event Co LLC	Owner
	EZ Stop LLC	Owner
	Fire River LLC	Owner
	Legend's Aberdeen LLC	Owner
	Legend's Liquor LLC	Owner
	Mulligans	Owner
	Street Corner Aberdeen	Owner
	Tenth Street Properties LLC	Owner
	Ziggy River LLC	Owner
	Aberdeen Lumber LLC	Member
	Eagle River LLC	Member
	Smokey River LLC	Member
	HDH LLC	Member
	Ipswich Lumber LLC	Member
	Tri Rivers LLC	Member
	Valley River LLC	Member
	Plaza Rentals LLP	Partner
Elizabeth Doeden	Digital Assets	Owner
	McColla Enterprises	Shareholder
	Redfield Auto Center Inc	Shareholder
	Eagle River LLC	Member
	Smokey River LLC	Member

Toby Doeden's Statement of Financial Interest submitted to the South Dakota Secretary of State's Office, which lists him as an owner, employee, partner or shareholder of several companies.

How we reported this story

Details for this story were largely sourced from the public record through offices like the South Dakota Secretary of State's Office, the Brown County Director of Equalization, Aberdeen's Board of Zoning Adjustment and the Brown County Register of Deeds.

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Property values and property tax payments were determined through the most recent tax-assessed data from the Brown County Director of Equalization's BEACON system. Addresses associated with companies Plaza Rentals, Tenth Street Properties and 5-Star Management were included in the calculation.

Reporter Molly Wetsch visited the Brown County Register of Deeds on June 15 and spent hours viewing public documents. The office does not allow computers or phones when accessing public computers, so notes on mortgage and other deed information were taken by hand.

Wetsch also utilized prior reporting about Doeden and his companies from news outlets across the state.



for Ida Hannon's 90th Birthday

Ida will be turning 90 on July 7th! While a party isn't possible this year, we still want to make her day extra memorable. We'd like for her dearest friends and family (that's you!) to send her a card or gift this year. Include a message, old memories, photos, or simply birthday wishes.

Help us make her day one that she won't forget.

We will gather the cards and gifts for her to have on her big day.

please mail your card/gifts to:

Ida hannon (granddaughter
Michelle)

1208 appollo ave
Aberdeen SD, 57401

by July 11th

*thank you
for making this day extra special for my
grandma.*



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Groton Legion Post 39 To Play Parkston Sr. Legion Post 194

Groton Legion Post 39 will play Parkston Sr. Legion Post 194 on Friday.

Last Time Out:

Parkston Sr. Legion Post 194 lost to SMFC Sr. Legion Post 152 79ers 6-2 at Scotland.

Player Highlight:

TC Schuster hits and pitches for Groton Legion Post 39. Schuster primarily plays shortstop on the field. Schuster has hit for power this season with three doubles among Schuster's four hits. Schuster gets ahead in the count fast on the mound. Schuster has thrown first pitch strikes to 14 of the 19 batters they've faced this season.

About Groton Legion Post 39:

Groton Legion Post 39 has three wins against four losses this season. Carter Simon's 1.440 OPS leads Groton Legion Post 39. The first baseman has a 0.583 OBP and a 0.857 slugging percentage this season. Jarrett Erdmann leads Groton Legion Post 39 with 13 innings pitched. The southpaw has a 4.31 ERA this season. Karsten Fliehs leads Groton Legion Post 39 with 34 total fielding chances this season. Fliehs's primary position is catcher.

About Parkston Sr. Legion Post 194:

Parkston Sr. Legion Post 194 has seven wins against three losses this season. Kash Neugebauer's 1.286 OPS leads Parkston Sr. Legion Post 194. The infielder has a 0.619 OBP and a 0.667 slugging percentage this season. Grady Bowar leads Parkston Sr. Legion Post 194 with 15 and two-thirds innings pitched. The starting pitcher has a 4.47 ERA this season. Johnny Weber leads Parkston Sr. Legion Post 194 with 33 total fielding chances this season. Weber's primary position is catcher.

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Groton Post 39 14U splits twinbill with Britton

Groton Post 39 14U and the Britton Lumberjacks split a doubleheader Thursday in Groton, with Britton rallying for a 9-3 victory in the opener before Groton answered with a 9-3 win in the nightcap.

In the first game, Britton used a six-run sixth inning to pull away from a 3-3 tie and hand Groton a 9-3 setback.

Britton struck first in the opening inning when Max S singled home two runs and later added another run in the third on Max's triple to center field. Groton battled back and evened the score at 3-3 in the fourth when Keegan Kucker drew a bases-loaded walk.

The game remained tied until the sixth when Britton erupted for six runs on five hits. Liam P delivered the key blow with a two-run single during the decisive inning.

Easton Larson paced Groton's offense with two hits in four at-bats. Kucker and Bentley Ehresmann each drove in a run, while Mason Locke drew two walks and stole two bases. Groton showed patience at the plate with six walks and swiped eight bases overall. Defensively, Groton played error-free baseball and turned a double play, with Asher Zimmerman recording eight defensive chances.

Zimmerman started on the mound for Groton and allowed three runs on seven hits over 4 1/3 innings while striking out three and walking three.

Britton collected 12 hits in the contest. Max S led the way with three RBIs, while Levi M, Max S, Drew H and Liam P each had two hits.

Groton bounced back in the second game, using a six-run fourth inning to earn a 9-3 victory.

Britton grabbed a 1-0 lead in the first on a sacrifice fly by Max Suther and pushed the advantage to 2-0 in the third on a Brady Heitkamp RBI single.

Groton responded in the bottom of the third. An error, an RBI groundout by Easton Larson and a fielder's choice by Trayce Schelle plated three runs and gave Post 39 a 3-2 lead. Britton tied the game in the fourth after Cullen Peters was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded.

The game turned in the bottom of the fourth when Groton scored six times. Schelle highlighted the rally with a two-run single as Post 39 pulled away for the win.

Schelle and Owen Tewksbury each drove in two runs for Groton. Schelle finished 2-for-3 with a double, two RBIs and a run scored. Tewksbury added a hit and two RBIs, while Easton Larson contributed a hit, an RBI and a run scored. Graham Rose and Gavin Hanten each scored twice and added a hit, while Bentley Ehresmann drove in a run. Groton finished with six hits, drew five walks and played error-free defense for the second straight game.

Hank Hill earned the victory, allowing three runs on three hits over three innings while striking out four. Tewksbury tossed two scoreless innings of relief, allowing two hits and striking out three.

Britton managed five hits in the second game, with Heitkamp, Maverick Strong, Bladen Downs, Jackson Medhaug and Corbin Dawson each collecting one hit. Heitkamp, Peters and Suther each drove in a run for the Lumberjacks.

The split left Groton with a strong offensive showing in the nightcap and another solid defensive effort, as Post 39 committed no errors in either game of the doubleheader.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Q&A: Dusty Johnson analyzes his defeat and future, saying 'I want to lead a life of consequence'

Republican US representative says late-stage ads against him in governor campaign 'cratered our numbers'

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

Republican U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson said Thursday he does not know what's next for him after his failed bid for South Dakota governor, and while he's helping one of the remaining Republican candidates, he does not plan to make a public endorsement unless he's asked.

South Dakota Searchlight sat down with Johnson for an interview in Sioux Falls. He did not say which of the remaining candidates he's assisting.

Johnson said his campaign was affected by a political environment hostile to candidates with experience in Congress.

"It's not a good time to be connected to Washington, D.C.," Johnson said.

He finished third in the four-way June 2 Republican primary behind Aberdeen businessman Toby Doeden and Gov. Larry Rhoden, who will face each other in a July 28 runoff election. Johnson finished ahead of state House Speaker Jon Hansen. The spread between first and last place was 10 percentage points.

Johnson will remain a U.S. representative until January. He has no specific plan for his future after that, other than remaining in Mitchell, where his wife has a business and one of their three sons is still in high school.

He did not rule out a return to politics, but said his "heart isn't set on that," adding that his motivation has always been "to do something" rather than "to be something."

"It's about the impact," he said.

The following interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What happened?

Well, it's not a good time to be connected to Washington, D.C. Nine of my congressional colleagues have lost in the last year. When running for higher office, that's an unusual number.

It used to be thought that being in the U.S. House was a good place to run for the Senate or for governor from. That's really not the case anymore. Clearly, there's a lot of dysfunction in D.C., and particularly if you are a more Reagan-minded Republican, a more establishment-viewed Republican, that can be hard to overcome in a primary.

And I'd note, we were ahead the whole race — three weeks out, four weeks out, we were 16 points up.

It was really the negative ads calling me a "RINO" [Republican in Name Only] or a liberal that, in those last two weeks, just cratered our numbers. And we saw that in our polling. People were increasingly saying, when we were asking them why they were voting for somebody else, "Well, you know, Dusty's a liberal. Dusty's a RINO." And we probably did not do a good enough job of combating those negative ads. They really, really worked.

Why didn't you target Doeden for criticism during the campaign?

Early on, particularly, it showed that there wasn't a lot of overlap between Doeden voters and Johnson voters. If people were thinking about voting for me, they were also thinking about voting for Larry.

Now, that changed as the campaign went on. And indeed, as the negative ads against me in the last two weeks worked and took 10 points off our number, overwhelmingly, those people moved to Doeden.

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And that would have been fine if we would have made the runoff, but we fell just a couple thousand votes short of making the runoff.

I would have felt great about our chances against Toby in the runoff. But in the end, that's not what happened.

Do you regret the votes you took in Congress that your opponents alleged were out of step with President Trump?

Number one, to the extent that they were principled votes, I don't think you can ever regret your principles, right?

I mean, voting to certify the 2020 election was what the Constitution, the plain and clear reading of the Constitution, demanded of me. And so my political life might have been a little easier if I would have ignored the Constitution, but I'm just not capable of doing that.

The interesting thing is the attacks that had the most negative effect on me weren't even the votes where I deviated from the party norms.

I mean, one attack that was really effective was saying Dusty Johnson voted with Ilhan Omar — that's a liberal congresswoman from Minnesota — to defund ICE. It took us the longest time to figure out what they even meant by that. And that was an attack that Larry and Toby were making.

Near as I can tell, I voted against a Joe Biden spending package. I thought the Joe Biden spending package was too liberal. I voted against it. They're, as a result, alleging that I voted to defund ICE. Ilhan Omar voted against that package because it wasn't liberal enough for her.

I voted with the overwhelming majority of Republicans and all conservatives, but that clearly conservative vote was still distorted, and I'm not complaining about it. I mean, I think we all know that goes on in politics. I have no bitterness. I don't have any regret.

I mean, at some point, we know that these primaries are going to be hard-fought. I'm not a sore loser. Toby and Larry won, and I didn't.

And I think one of the reasons that I can handle the loss so well is that my motivator has never been to be something. It's always been to do something. And we still have an opportunity to work together to improve South Dakota education, improve South Dakota public safety.

I don't have to be governor for our state to make great things happen. And we deserve a great state. We deserve a great governor. And I'm committed to those things even if I'm not going to be the guy.

Rhoden and Hansen supported new laws that fund homeowner property tax reductions with higher sales taxes. Your campaign messaging criticized them for the sales tax increases. Was that not effective? What was the feedback?

That messaging was fantastically effective.

I mean, the campaign started with Larry and Dusty in a statistical tie at 29%. And once people understood more about the three sales tax increases, Larry went down to 23. We went up to 33. And Larry never fully recovered from that. Rather, I think he finished at 25.

And so the idea that the sales tax increases weren't an effective differentiator isn't supported by the data.

And indeed, I think that was part of what caused Toby's run-up — the outside advertising, particularly. It was far harsher on Larry and John than anything we had designed or approved.

[The sales tax messaging] put a lid on Larry and John's support. They just couldn't get above 23 or 25 points. And when the negative ads calling me a liberal took 10 points off me, those voters couldn't really go to Larry and John because they didn't trust them on taxes. And so they were willing to go to Toby, who they viewed as a guy talking about big vision in the same way that our campaign was talking about big vision.

I don't think that necessarily means that Toby Doeden's going to be a great governor. I just think the voters in a multi-candidate field were having to figure out who they could vote for, as they were learning things about the other candidates they didn't like.

Who will you vote for in the runoff?

Well, there has been a bit of a controversy this campaign season about people being endorsed by folks

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they didn't want to be endorsed by. And so no candidate has asked me to publicly endorse them.

I've had multiple conversations with both Toby and Larry. When they've asked, I provided them my honest feedback.

One of the campaigns has asked me to help in some other ways, and I'm doing that. But I'm not going to announce that publicly unless they ask. I think it would be unfair to them.

Again, I called and reached out to both Toby and Larry and congratulated them because, again, they're winners and I don't have any intention of being a sore loser.

Listen, this is politics. We've all won in life, and we've all lost. Winning beats the heck out of losing, but I still know South Dakota has got great opportunities in the future.

You and your team worked hard, including using money from your political action committees, to get legislators elected that align with your agenda. That happened, but you lost. Isn't that ironic? How does that happen?

Because the Republican primary electorate is hardwired to view attacks like "career politician" and "RINO" as radioactive. And although we certainly talked a lot about, I think, the unfortunate tax increases that John and Larry put into place, we were trying to make an argument about policy, right?

My differences with them were policy. Those were very different than the insults that the other candidates leveled at me, and just honestly, their negative ads were more effective than anything the outside groups were running on my behalf.

But no, I don't think there's any irony that Larry and Toby will have a more functional Legislature because of my hard work. I want South Dakota to have a good Legislature, regardless of who was governor.

I'm not interested in a functional South Dakota only if Dusty Johnson's governor — I love the state, regardless.

Is there room for bipartisan "workhorses," rather than "show horses," in today's Republican Party?

Certainly, election results from the last year have shown that it is really hard to get elected if you focus on common ground building.

Again, nine of my colleagues in the House have lost their runs for higher office just in the last year. And that's much higher than has historically been normal.

But I still think honest people, principled people, are still going to do the right thing, even if maybe the political marketplace doesn't reward them for it.

Did you seek President Trump's endorsement? Would it have made a difference?

I think we've seen, like in Iowa with Randy Feenstra — also a very hard-working, policy-focused member of the House, a close ally of mine — he received the Trump endorsement and lost his governor's race.

And I think it just goes to show that even with the Trump endorsement, if you're viewed as somebody who's more interested in working together than fighting, the race is going to be a little different. And we knew that going in.

Within the "America First" movement, we're now seeing more influential figures like Tucker Carlson and Candace Owens break with President Trump. What do you think is going to come of the Republican Party?

It does seem like both parties are being led by ever angrier and louder voices. That is not going to make for good outcomes in this country. But the fever will break.

I mean, we have been here before.

You look at the turn of the last century where you couldn't find a newspaper that wasn't a party organ.

I mean, it was the Mitchell Daily Republican — that was the name of the paper, literally. Hundreds of papers had partisan names and thousands of them were party organs, even if not by title.

And frankly, Americans had segregated themselves into ethnic and ideological ghettos — very, very tribal. And then something happened, the fever broke, and Americans decided to have more of a common identity. And they sought out platforms that were more interested in facts than in spin.

And I think the yellow journalism of the early 1900s was every bit as dangerous as the yellow journalism of today's cable news. I think they're both toxic to the healthy functioning of a free society.

But the fever broke then, and the fever will break now.

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The good book says that the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night. And I don't know when that happens, but I'm a believer in American exceptionalism. I don't think these things happen by accident. I don't think this is just another country.

I think if good people continue to stay engaged, the fever will break, and we're going to get back to the kind of country that my kids deserve.

Do you regret any of your positioning in regard to President Trump, either being too aligned or not enough? Well, I supported President Trump when I thought he was right.

There were certainly disagreements he and I had on things like invading Greenland, the Qatari jet, and certifying the 2020 election. But, I mean, at some point, if you're not going to be authentic to your views, then why run, why serve?

Certainly, the president and I agreed far more than we disagreed. And we never had any particular problem. I mean, he knew that I had different views on trade, that we have different views on NATO and on the role of free trade agreements and security agreements. That never bothered him.

This was a guy who invited me to Mar-a-Lago. He had me over to the Oval Office. We had lots of productive meetings because we were both focused on getting things done. And no two people agree on everything.

I think that's one reason that he was reluctant to endorse an incumbent governor in this race. And it is unusual that he did not endorse an incumbent governor, and I think part of that is because he and I had such a good working relationship.

What do you plan to do next?

I don't have any idea. I love this state. My wife's business is in Mitchell. We've got a 14-year-old in Mitchell schools, and our oldest is at South Dakota State University. Our middle child's at the University of South Dakota. And so South Dakota's home.

I want to lead a life of consequence. I want to have an impact. I want to do things to improve this state.

Of course, you can do that in the private sector. You can do that in business. You can do that in nonprofit. You can do that in government.

I don't have any idea what's next, but I know leaders eat last, and we've got a lot of really talented professionals who are on the campaign, who love this state, and they want to find a job here, and I'm working hard to make sure that they can find a job.

And then we've got an incredibly talented and committed team on the official side, who work for the United States House, our office. They'll have jobs through the end of the year, but they are so talented that, I mean, I'll feel duty-bound to try to make sure that some great enterprise is able to hire them so that they can keep making the state great.

Does Dusty Johnson have a political future?

Oh, it's so hard to say.

I think two weeks after an election is the wrong time for me to decide. We don't even have all our highway signs down yet. And so I don't know what the future holds.

Certainly, there are many examples of successful elected officials, such as John Thune and Bill Janklow, coming back after a loss. But my heart isn't set on that.

Again, I'm more focused on doing things rather than being things. It's about the impact. And so I don't know.

If you told me that in my 70s, I was on the school board or in the state Legislature, I wouldn't be shocked at all.

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 as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Western South Dakota legal aid nonprofit faces budget shortfall **Financial difficulties could be exacerbated by Trump administration proposal to eliminate federal funding**

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

A nonprofit providing legal aid to low-income South Dakotans is facing a \$176,000 budget deficit that is affecting its services and staffing, its leader told a state commission Thursday.

William Sulik is the interim director for Dakota Plains Legal Services. The organization depends largely on state and federal grants to operate.

"In response, we have been cautious about filling vacancies and are reviewing operations carefully to preserve services and maintain stability," Sulik told the Commission on Equal Access to Our Courts.

South Dakota's legal aid landscape is split between East River Legal Services on the east side of the state, and Dakota Plains Legal Services covering the western half and serving Native Americans on and off tribal lands across the state. The nonprofits help with civil cases, including housing and evictions, applying for protection orders, and family law. Dakota Plains also takes on criminal cases when appointed by a court.

Dakota Plains received about \$76,000 less this year from the national Legal Services Corporation, while East River received about \$25,000 less — a 3.8% decrease in grants for each. Funding from the Legal Services Corporation accounts for about 73% of Dakota Plains' operating budget.

Sulik told South Dakota Searchlight the Dakota Plains board also overestimated the amount of state grant funding that would be available for the year, contributing \$100,000 to the budget shortfall.

Three staff members left Dakota Plains recently. The organization is not planning to fill those positions and is "scrambling and looking for other funds," Sulik said. Lea Wroblewski, executive director for East River Legal Services, told commissioners her organization is seeking to fill two staff positions, which "limits the number of extended services we're able to provide representation in."

The funding challenge could continue next year.

The Trump administration has recommended eliminating the Legal Services Corporation, while requesting \$21 million from Congress "to conduct an orderly closeout" of the organization "as part of the administration's plans to move the nation towards fiscal responsibility and to redefine the proper role of the federal government."

Congress appropriated \$540 million for the Legal Services Corporation this year, below the \$2.1 billion the organization requested.

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley, who won the Republican primary on June 2 for the state's U.S. House seat but will continue to serve as attorney general until January, issued a press release last week urging Congress to continue funding the Legal Services Corporation.

"Everyone, regardless of their income level, is entitled to equal justice under the law," Jackley said. "Continued federal funding for LSC helps ensure our justice system works for everyone."

According to Law360, legal aid organizations funded by the corporation already turn away nearly half of eligible applicants due to resource constraints — roughly 1.8 million people each year.

"If that goes through, it means some cases won't get handled in South Dakota," Sulik told South Dakota Searchlight after the meeting. "It's going to mean longer wait times to see an attorney. We're trying the best we can."

Dakota Plains launched a mobile legal aid clinic with funding from the commission last year, meant to increase legal aid accessibility in areas of South Dakota considered legal deserts — communities with little to no access to legal services.

Sulik told commissioners the Justice Bus is working toward appearing at recurring locations in rural and tribal areas to ensure community members know "when and where services will be."

But funding and staffing struggles have slowed its outreach, he said.

"I'm not sure that it's fully living up to what was promised," Sulik said. "It is providing access in remote communities that have difficulty reaching services. That's something we really want to do, and it was the outreach that the commission intended."

Dakota Plains Board Chairman Craig Lafferty said initiatives like the Justice Bus are needed in tribal communities.

"They're like, 'When can you bring that bus here?'" said Lafferty, a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe.

Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan who regularly reports on the intersection of politics and policy with health, education, social services and Indigenous affairs. Her work with South Dakota Searchlight earned her the title of South Dakota's Outstanding Young Journalist in 2024, and she was a 2024 finalist for the national Livingston Awards.

Sioux Falls man on parole for manslaughter is charged with providing drugs that killed his niece

Brookings man, also on parole, charged as accomplice amid state's tightening of supervision policies

BY: JOHN HULT

SIOUX CITY, Iowa — A Sioux Falls man on parole has been charged with federal crimes related to the death of his 14-year-old niece amid ongoing debates about parole reform that have led to stricter supervision standards in South Dakota.

A grand jury in the Northern District of Iowa indicted 51-year-old Mark Milk on Wednesday with five felony counts tied to allegations that he provided the cocaine that killed McKenna Wendel on March 14, gave her THC, took her across state lines to engage in illegal sexual activity and acted to conceal evidence.

The grand jury also indicted a Brookings man who was on parole at the time of Wendel's death, 38-year-old Jon Rogness, on two felony counts for allegedly helping Milk conceal evidence.

Rogness was released on parole supervision in 2024 after serving 16 years of a 45-year sentence for manslaughter. He was charged with felony drug possession and felony drug ingestion in January, but was free on bond and awaiting trial on those state-level charges in March, when the alleged crimes took place. Rogness is incarcerated at the South Dakota State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls.

Milk was sentenced to life in prison in 1994 for beating a man to death after a fight in Winner. Then-Gov. Kristi Noem commuted his sentence in 2023, making him eligible for parole. The commutation came after Milk went through a formal application process and earned a unanimous recommendation from the Board of Pardons and Paroles. The board released him the following year after a parole hearing. Wendel was at the hearing and asked the board to support his release.

Milk is in custody at the Minnehaha County Jail in Sioux Falls, and has been since March 17, when he was arrested for allegedly driving drunk and fleeing police.

Federal court records did not list an attorney for Milk or Rogness as of Thursday afternoon.

The state Department of Corrections' Division of Parole Services has tightened its supervision of people on parole since Wendel's death. Gov. Larry Rhoden announced the state's intention to reform parole through what he called a "Smarter Supervision Initiative" on April 7.

Three weeks later, a Sioux Falls police officer was shot and injured, allegedly by a man on parole. By the end of that week, Rhoden announced "additional parole reform solutions" that included the hiring of five new parole agents, swifter sanctions and parole violations for drug users, and the creation of an "enhanced compliance unit" to monitor parolees on nights and weekends.

Few details offered at press conference

U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Iowa, Leif Olson, appeared at a press conference in the Wendel case on Thursday at his office in downtown Sioux City. He and others at the press conference referred to Wendel by name, although she's identified by initials in the indictment.

He lauded the work of the multiple law enforcement agencies involved in the case in both South Dakota and Sioux City, read through the charges, and declined on multiple occasions to provide further details.

When asked if the crimes took place in Iowa's Lyon County, for example, he said "that's something that

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we will prove at trial.”

Olson also declined to comment on the relationship between Rogness and Milk.

Disappearance draws attention

Wendel’s case became a source of public fascination in the three months between her death and her uncle’s indictment. A Facebook group called “Justice for McKenna Wendel,” launched in mid-March and now peppered with posts filled with speculation about Milk and Rogness, has 3,400 members. It linked to a livestream of her funeral at the end of March, and on Thursday linked to livestreams of the Iowa press conference.

Wendel’s name also emerged at public forums, such as a remembrance vigil for missing and murdered Indigenous people in Pierre last month. Wendel was a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe.

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley was on the scene when Wendel’s body was discovered on March 19 near Brookings, and told reporters the following day that he’d spoken to her family to assure them that all the agencies involved were working together to find answers.

Sioux Falls Police Chief Jon Thum was in Sioux City on Thursday for the announcement of charges and addressed the public’s interest and impatience.

“It takes time to get to where these charges were announced today,” Thum said. “Good investigations and good work take time, and they take solid efforts to dot i’s and cross t’s.”

Body found in Brookings County

Wendel lived with her grandparents in Sioux Falls. She left home on March 13 and did not return. Her grandparents reported her missing on the morning of March 15, and Sioux Falls Police Capt. Terrance Matia said in a March press conference that officers began a search that led them to Brookings County, as well as to Rock County, Minnesota, and Lyon County, Iowa.

Her body was discovered just after 9 a.m. March 19 in rural Brookings.

Numerous social media posts had proliferated by then suggesting that Milk might be involved in Wendel’s disappearance and death.

Milk’s brother is listed as a surviving relative in Wendel’s obituary. Milk is not listed.

Milk was arrested mid-morning on March 17, four days after Wendel went missing and two after she was reported missing.

He’d been driving a Toyota Camry near 16th Street and South Summit Avenue in Sioux Falls when an officer tried to pull him over on suspicion of drunken driving, Lt. Nick Butler told South Dakota Searchlight via email in late March.

Milk allegedly sped away instead of pulling over, but the officer who’d attempted the traffic stop did not pursue. Milk only made it a few blocks before allegedly running a stop sign and colliding with another vehicle, driven by a female in her 50s.

Milk was charged with aggravated eluding and driving under the influence. At Milk’s bond hearing on March 19, Minnehaha County Deputy State’s Attorney Zachary Stanton told Judge Sara Pokela that Milk’s vehicle wound up in someone’s yard, that Milk had tried to flee on foot, but that multiple officers were able to run him down.

“At that point, the defendant began yelling at the officers to shoot him,” Stanton said, according to a transcript of the proceedings. “He refused to comply with commands and ultimately had to be tased.”

Stanton noted that Milk is on parole, had refused to take a urine test for drugs and had “been lying about where he was living” and had been “noncompliant with parole.”

Pokela granted Stanton’s request that Milk be held on a \$10,000 cash bond. Milk, who replied it “doesn’t matter” when Pokela asked if he planned to hire a lawyer, did not make any arguments on his own behalf.

He appeared for a pretrial conference earlier this month in that case, but no trial date was set.

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Milk was granted clemency in 2023

Much of the online chatter about Milk zeroed in on the nature of his previous crime and the circumstances surrounding his release.

Milk got a life sentence in 1994 for manslaughter out of Tripp County. Milk and the man he killed, Shawn Peneaux, had "several altercations" on Oct. 3, 1993. During the second fight, Milk stabbed Peneaux and kicked him in the head with steel-toed boots, killing him.

While incarcerated, he spent years working for Metal Craft Industries, a private company where inmates earned market wages. Until early 2024, Metal Craft's operations took place in a shop inside the South Dakota State Penitentiary's Jameson Annex, which houses maximum security inmates and those in administrative segregation.

At his commutation hearing in November 2022, board members heard how Milk had helped lead powwows for inmates and their family members while he was incarcerated, and served as a role model for younger inmates through the Alternatives to Violence program.

The Argus Leader newspaper ran a story about those family events in 2018 that featured and quoted Milk and his parents. The story included a photo of Wendel, then 6, sitting on Milk's lap and laughing during one of the events. Wendel and her grandparents, Milk's parents, visited Milk "on a regular basis," the story said.

At his commutation hearing, both his parents said they'd visited him weekly, often with Wendel, because Mark "likes to see his little niece," according to a video of the hearing obtained by South Dakota Searchlight.

Wendel's mother, Milk's sister, wept as she pleaded with the parole board to offer him a chance to be released from the institution where he'd been held since she was a child.

"The guards, they've seen me grow up here, and I'm 29 years old, almost," Milk's sister said. "I just love him very much. I hope to see good things coming."

The board voted to recommend that the governor commute Milk's sentence from life to 240 years.

Noem issued the commutation on Feb. 2, 2023, making Milk eligible for parole at the board's discretion. In June 2024, Wendel testified on Milk's behalf at his parole hearing.

In an interview with South Dakota Searchlight just under two years later, Milk said the contributions he'd made to his family "was one of the things that really stood out" to the parole board.

Milk spoke to Searchlight shortly after his release on the grounds of the Metal Craft Industries location near Baltic, where the company moved its operations when its partnership with the Department of Corrections ended. Milk worked there a while after his release, but Metal Craft's owner, Terry Van Zanten, fired him several months before the incident that landed Milk back in jail on March 17.

"He was doing really well. But after a couple of months, he got a girlfriend, and we could tell he was going the wrong direction," Van Zanten said.

Milk was married last summer. His wife, when contacted by South Dakota Searchlight on Thursday, declined to comment.

Van Zanten regularly hires inmates, including those who worked for him while the business was still located in the penitentiary. Most do well, in his experience, even those who've served time for serious offenses, as Milk had.

"He was one guy who we thought was going to make it," Van Zanten said.

State Department of Corrections spokesman Michael Winder confirmed Thursday to Searchlight that Milk had been working as a dishwasher in the kitchen at a restaurant.

"Parolees can work in the restaurant or kitchen area of a business that sells alcohol with their agent's approval," Winder said in an email.

Clemency granted under typical procedure

Gov. Larry Rhoden was Noem's lieutenant governor. When asked about the reasons for the Milk commutation, Rhoden's spokeswoman Josie Harms said the governor "cannot provide comments on why decisions were made by previous administrations."

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Harms went on to note that Rhoden only considers positive recommendations from the Board of Pardons and Paroles when considering clemency.

Noem issued commutations to some inmates who hadn't been screened by the parole board around Christmastime, in 2022 and 2023. The family of one victim, Calvin "C.J." Shields, told South Dakota Searchlight in 2022 that they hadn't been consulted before Noem commuted the sentence of his killer, Whitney Turney. The parole board's staff reaches out to victims' family members as a matter of policy before holding commutation hearings.

Milk's commutation went through the typical screening. He sent his application to the parole board, then had a hearing and received a positive recommendation from its members.

After board members review commutation candidates, a recording of their hearing is forwarded to the governor, along with a commutation file containing a person's criminal and correctional record. The files also contain any supporting documentation, such as letters of support or opposition.

The board granted Milk parole more than two years after Noem signed the commutation its members had recommended. By that time, Milk had served three decades in prison.

Noem has not responded to multiple requests for comment on her commutations, including on Thursday.

Supervision terms, violations

The exact terms of Milk's parole supervision are not publicly available. Parolees must adhere to a standard set of rules, but may also have additional requirements based on their circumstances.

When asked about Milk's behavioral expectations on parole, Winder directed South Dakota Searchlight to a copy of the agency's standard parole terms and its policy for violations.

The standard supervision agreement includes prohibitions on parolees' use of alcohol or drugs and on entering bars or casinos, as well as promises not to possess or use weapons, to maintain employment, to be reachable by their parole agent and to tell agents if they leave their home area.

The violation policy was last updated March 15 and signed by Corrections Secretary Nick Lamb.

It says parole officers "will respond to every violation detected in order to hold offenders accountable for their actions."

Enough parole infractions will earn parolees a violation, a term that signals their return to prison. Losing touch with a parole agent is an automatic violation, the policy says, while entering a bar or failure to maintain employment is a low-level infraction that may result in more contact with a parole agent.

In March, Winder did not respond to questions about whether Milk had any parole infractions prior to his arrest that month.

On Thursday, Winder said Rogness returned to prison for failing a drug test and losing contact with his parole agent. Winder would not say if either Rogness or Milk would have been eligible for the enhanced supervision that began rolling out after the announcement of Rhoden's parole reforms.

"The enhanced compliance unit and other parole reforms announced on April 30 are to hold parolees accountable and improve public safety," Winder wrote. "Each parolee is evaluated as part of their reentry plan to determine what level of supervision is appropriate."

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.

US Education Department offers two-year trim on student loan interest rates

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Education will temporarily reduce interest rates for federal student loan borrowers enrolled in auto pay starting July 1, the agency announced Thursday.

Borrowers who enroll in auto pay — the optional feature that allows a borrower to have their monthly loan payment automatically deducted from their checking or savings account — will see a reduction in their interest rate by one full percentage point from July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2028.

The change means a 6% interest rate would drop to 5%, for instance.

Federal student loan borrowers currently enrolled in auto pay already receive an interest rate reduction of 0.25 percentage points from their servicer. Those borrowers do not need to take any additional action and will automatically receive an extra interest rate reduction of 0.75 percentage points, the department said.

"This temporary incentive is designed to help borrowers pay down their balances more quickly, take full advantage of new repayment benefits, remain on track toward loan discharge opportunities and to strengthen the overall health of the federal student loan portfolio," Under Secretary of Education Nicholas Kent said during a Thursday call with reporters.

Kent said the benefit is estimated to cost the agency \$6 billion.

Changes coming

The announcement came ahead of major changes for the federal student loan system — with many provisions slated to also begin July 1 — stemming from congressional Republicans' mega tax and spending cut bill that President Donald Trump signed last year.

The overhaul includes new loan limits for graduate and professional students, a restructured repayment system that gives new borrowers only two plans to choose from and the elimination of a key loan program for graduate and professional students that allowed for unlimited borrowing.

Meanwhile, millions of borrowers under the now defunct Saving on a Valuable Education, or SAVE, plan will receive notices from their federal loan servicers starting July 1 that instruct them to enter into a legal repayment plan within 90 days.

Auto pay enrollment halved

The federal student loan portfolio stands at a "staggering \$1.7 trillion," with about 37% of borrowers currently in repayment, according to Kent.

The under secretary noted that at the end of 2019, nearly 83% of borrowers were enrolled in auto pay but that the figure stood at just 40% by the end of 2025.

There are also 9.16 million borrowers in default as of April, per the latest available department data.

Borrowers have until Sept. 30, 2026, to opt in to auto pay to be eligible for the two-year benefit.

The benefit is open to borrowers whose federal student loans originated after July 1, 2012, the department said.

Kent encouraged borrowers to "take advantage of this opportunity and enroll in auto debit as soon as possible."

Borrowers can enroll by logging in to their loan servicer account and selecting "auto pay" from a navigation bar, he said.

The department clarified that borrowers will need to stay in auto pay to continue receiving the reduced interest rate.

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.

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60-day clock starts for negotiations with Iran over strait, nuclear future

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

Final peace negotiations between the United States and Iran officially began Thursday, Vice President JD Vance said at a late morning press conference in Washington, starting a 60-day countdown for the Islamic Republic to safely open the Strait of Hormuz, the U.S. to lift a blockade on Iranian oil, and for the two nations to hammer out a nuclear deal.

The agreement is "a win-win situation" for the U.S., Vance said.

"If they change their behavior, big things are going to happen for Iran and for the world," Vance said. "If they don't, no skin off our backs" because Iran's nuclear program and military are "still destroyed."

The agreement immediately stops hostilities that began Feb. 28. The war claimed the lives of 13 U.S. service members, thousands of civilians in Iran, Lebanon and across the Gulf region, and disrupted the global economy.

Vance said the "Israelis, just like everybody else, have to respect this process," highlighting that the agreement binds Israel to ceasing its bombing campaign in Lebanon against Iranian-backed Hezbollah fighters.

Without specifying a date, Vance said he expects to brief Congress but is "quite confident" the administration does not need congressional approval on terms of the deal that will lift sanctions on Iran, despite the claims of some U.S. senators.

'Just signed it'

Vance was slated to finalize the 14-point memorandum of understanding in Switzerland Friday, but President Donald Trump unexpectedly announced early Thursday morning that he had signed the deal while attending a state dinner hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron at the Palace of Versailles after the G7 summit among the world's wealthiest nations concluded.

"Just signed it," Trump told journalists after hugging and saying goodbye to France's president and first lady Brigitte Macron just after 1 a.m. local time, according to the traveling press.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian posted images on social media early Thursday of the signed agreement in English and Farsi.

"This text is the reflection of the voice of a nation that did not trade its dignity and independence for any threat or pressure. What was recorded today was the result of national resilience, political rationality, and responsible diplomacy," he wrote, according to a translation on X.

Trump posted a series of messages about the signed memorandum on his own social media site, Truth Social, Thursday morning, including a link to a news article about Pope Leo commending the deal. The Trump administration engaged in a public war of words with Leo in April.

"These fools, who think I haven't been tough enough on Iran, when the Stock Market Just Hit A RECORD HIGH, and Oil prices are 'tumbling' down, are either jealous, bad people, or stupid. MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!!! President DJT" the president posted online early Thursday.

Hours later, in all caps, he wrote: "OIL IS FLOWING, IRAN CAN NEVER HAVE A NUCLEAR WEAPON (THE WORLD WILL BE SAFE!), THE STOCK MARKETS ARE ROARING, JOBS ARE AT RECORDS, AND PRICES ARE DROPPING (AFFORDABILITY!). OUR COUNTRY IS STRONG, SAFE, AND RESPECTED LIKE NEVER BEFORE. 'YOU'RE WELCOME!' President DJT"

'Foreign policy blunder'

Several, including some from the president's own party, have been critical of the agreement.

Sen. Bill Cassidy, a Louisiana Republican who recently lost his primary after Trump endorsed an opponent, said in a statement on social media the deal "is the worst foreign policy blunder in decades."

"Reagan is rolling over in his grave. Iran's nuclear ambitions were not curbed, and they have learned that threatening the Strait of Hormuz works and will undoubtedly leverage it in the future. Now, Iran gets

to build brand-new infrastructure under this deal.

"Before the war, the strait was open, Iran was being crushed by sanctions, and 13 service members were still alive. Now, 13 Americans are dead, families have paid billions at the pump, sanctions will be lifted, and the bombing has stopped."

Sen. John Kennedy, also a Louisiana Republican, said on the Senate floor Thursday morning "We ought to give peace a chance. It's only 60 days and we're going to just have to trust the president on this one."

Jonathan Shorman contributed to this report.

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

Trump couldn't send troops to the polls without approval of Congress under Dem bill

BY: JONATHAN SHORMAN

U.S. Senate Democrats introduced legislation on Thursday to require Congress to sign off on any deployment of federal troops to the polls, as President Donald Trump and his administration refuse to rule out the idea.

Fears of troops or other federal agents at voting sites have long loomed over the approaching midterm elections in November. Democrats and voting rights advocates have grown alarmed in recent months as Trump has publicly entertained the possibility. Other administration officials have mocked or sidestepped questions about possible deployments.

The legislation, the Protect Our Polls Act, would require Congress to pass a resolution approving any deployment beforehand. Federal law prohibits troops and other armed federal personnel from polling places, but contains an exception to "repel armed enemies of the United States" — fueling speculation that Trump could invoke this exception to bypass the ban.

"He is trying to nationalize the elections and he is telling us in his own words what he is trying to do," Sen. Elissa Slotkin, a Michigan Democrat, said at a news conference at the Capitol. "On top of that, Trump's nominees for his Cabinet positions have come up here and refused to rule out uniformed military or federal law enforcement being sent to the polls on Election Day."

White House justification

The bill would require the White House, 48 hours before any deployment, to provide Congress with intelligence, legal justifications, deployment plans and evidence that state and local officials are unable to address the threat themselves.

It also prohibits military personnel from using federal funds to access election records, a provision designed to block troops from seizing ballots.

Slotkin is offering the bill alongside Sens. Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin, Ruben Gallego and Mark Kelly of Arizona, Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota, Alex Padilla of California, Jacky Rosen of Nevada and Raphael Warnock of Georgia.

"One of the things I'm very proud of is that I served to protect the Constitution of the United States and our democracy," said Gallego, a Marine veteran. "I swore that oath, and the last thing any Marine, sailor, Army, Coastie, Air Force, spacemen — whatever they call them nowadays — wants to do is to undermine that. We're here to protect democracy, we're not here to undermine democracy."

White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson said in a statement that if Democrats "really cared about securing our elections," the party would pass the SAVE America Act.

The legislation would require voters to provide documents, such as a birth certificate or passport, proving their citizenship. The measure has stalled in the Senate amid opposition from Democrats and a handful of Republicans.

In May, Trump told reporters that he would "do anything necessary to make sure we have honest elec-

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tions," in response to questions about sending National Guard personnel or federal immigration agents to voting locations in November.

Amendments blocked

At a Senate hearing in April, Slotkin pressed Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on sending troops to the polls. He called the questions "another gotcha hypothetical."

The Democratic legislation comes a week after Slotkin said Republicans on the Senate Armed Services Committee blocked two amendments to ban troops at the polls during work on the National Defense Authorization Act. The committee typically works on the defense spending bill behind closed doors.

The Protect Our Polls Act has virtually no chance of passing the Republican-controlled Congress. Still, its introduction underscores the level of concern among Democrats as Trump's efforts to influence the midterm elections come into focus.

The Department of Justice has spent a year demanding states turn over unredacted copies of their voter rolls, including sensitive personal data on voters. DOJ officials have said in court that the department wants to share the data with the Department of Homeland Security, which operates a powerful computer program that can identify possible noncitizen voters.

The DOJ has sued 30 states and the District of Columbia for the data, but no judge has so far ruled in the administration's favor.

Investigations

The Department of Justice is also engaged in several election-related investigations over past elections.

The FBI raided a Georgia elections warehouse in January and seized ballots from the 2020 election. Election officials have been subpoenaed in Minneapolis and the FBI last week searched the office of an Ohio voting rights group.

And Trump signed an executive order that restricts voting by mail. It would require states to provide lists of voters to the U.S. Postal Service before using the mail to send ballots and directs Homeland Security to share lists of voting-age citizens with every state. The order remains in effect for now, despite a series of lawsuits challenging it.

"There's a common theme here," Padilla said at a Democratic forum on election security on Tuesday. "All of these things are illegal and many unconstitutional."

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

Midwest senators tout new study calling biofuels a 'catalyst' for agriculture

Grassley also calls for year-round E15 sales in Senate speech

BY: KADIN LUHMANN

U.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley and other Midwest senators celebrated the findings of a new biofuels study Tuesday during a Capitol Hill briefing in Washington, D.C.

The new report, published by S&P Global and commissioned by the U.S. Farmers and Ranch Association, says expanded biofuels demand "could transform American agriculture, reignite rural economies and provide global food and energy security," according to an S&P Global news release.

"Nobody needs to twist my arm to celebrate America's homegrown biofuels," Grassley, an Iowa Republican, said. "The report backs up what I've been saying for years. Biofuels are good for the rural economy, good for national security, good for the environment and good for American pocketbooks."

The key findings of the report say that using biofuels as a "catalyst" for the agricultural economy would

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drive corn yields up by 48%, increase U.S. soybean production by 1.4 billion bushels, significantly increase global biofuels output and boost the global food supply by 45%.

Democratic U.S. Sen. Tina Smith of Minnesota described the study as the “biggest opportunity” that the U.S. has had for value-added agriculture.

“I have long been a strong supporter of biofuels and ethanol,” Smith said. “This is a way for us to get cleaner energy, renewable energy, lower cost energy and to create homegrown pathways for cutting costs and keeping economic opportunity here in the United States.”

Smith said she is part of a bipartisan coalition with other Midwest senators, adding that the group recognizes the impact biofuels could have on the farming economy.

“We are in a tough time for agriculture,” Smith said. “Putting a big emphasis on how biofuels and ethanol can be a path forward to a new structure for agriculture is just really exciting.”

Key findings

Kevin Lindemer, an S&P Global executive, presented the key findings of the study, saying that the three factors driving the need for biofuels are decelerating population growth, agricultural production outpacing food demand and the decline in demand for energy and oil.

“We’re not in a world that is supply limited, we are in a world that might actually be demand limited,” Lindemer said. “We have a choice, we can rationalize capacity, which is what every industry, commodity industry does. If we have the opportunity to find new markets and create new markets, that is where we are headed.”

Grassley advocates for year-round E15

In a fiery speech, Grassley reiterated his support for an appropriations bill that would make E15 fuel — a 15% blend of ethanol and gasoline — available year-round in the U.S., saying that the availability of E15 would save Americans “20 to 40 cents at the pump, sometimes even more.”

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has restricted E15 from being sold from June 1 to Sept. 15, citing concerns about air quality. The agency has waived the restriction over the years, but farm-state lawmakers have long sought a permanent solution. A measure to eliminate the restriction passed the House in May but faces an uncertain future in the Senate.

“At my 99 county meetings I hold every year, I hear from farmers facing high input costs and commodity prices below the cost of production that a robust biofuels market enhanced by E15 would answer the prayers of farmers working their tails off to be profitable,” Grassley said. “That’s why I’m fighting for permanent year-round E 15.”

During floor remarks at the U.S. Capitol Tuesday, Grassley said that most of the “jobs and value” created from increased E15 production would benefit rural communities.

Grassley added that he and a bipartisan group of legislators from grain-growing states must collaborate to make E15 available nationwide.

“That’s probably at least 28 senators from grain-growing states in the United States where we grow, at least 14 states, 28 senators,” Grassley said. “We better put our heads together, or we’re going to lose the opportunity of getting E15. It’s through the House of Representatives. It’s further than it’s ever been.”

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

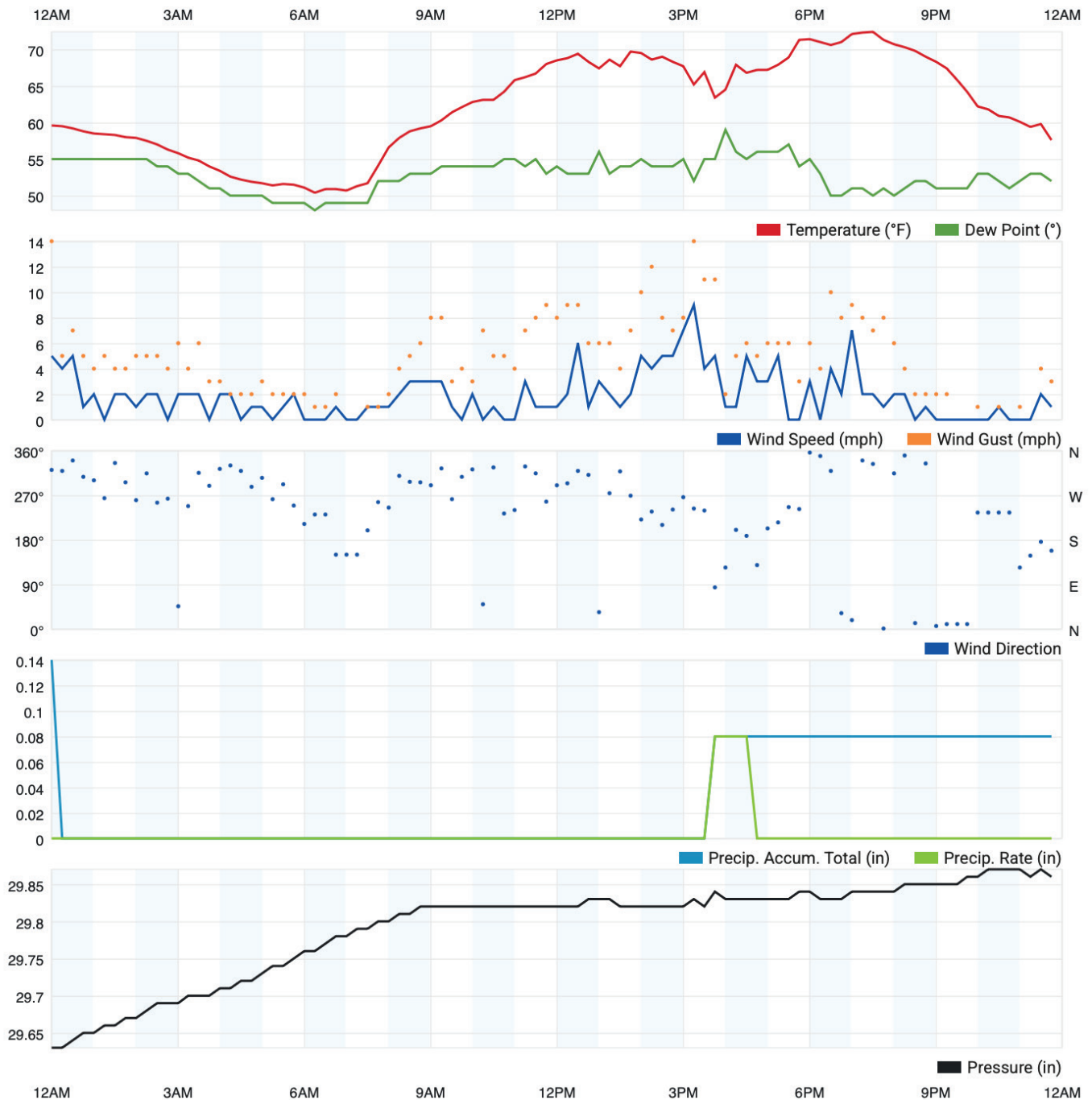
Kadin Luhmann is an Iowa State University student who has reported on transparency in Iowa’s ESA program, student perspectives on global conflicts and candidate profiles featuring Iowa politicians.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

June 18, 2026



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Juneteenth



High: 75 °F

Mostly Sunny
then Sunny
and Breezy

Tonight



Low: 46 °F

Mostly Clear

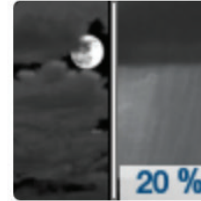
Saturday



High: 77 °F

Increasing
Clouds

Saturday Night



Low: 54 °F

Mostly Cloudy
then Slight
Chance
Showers

Sunday



High: 71 °F

Chance
Showers



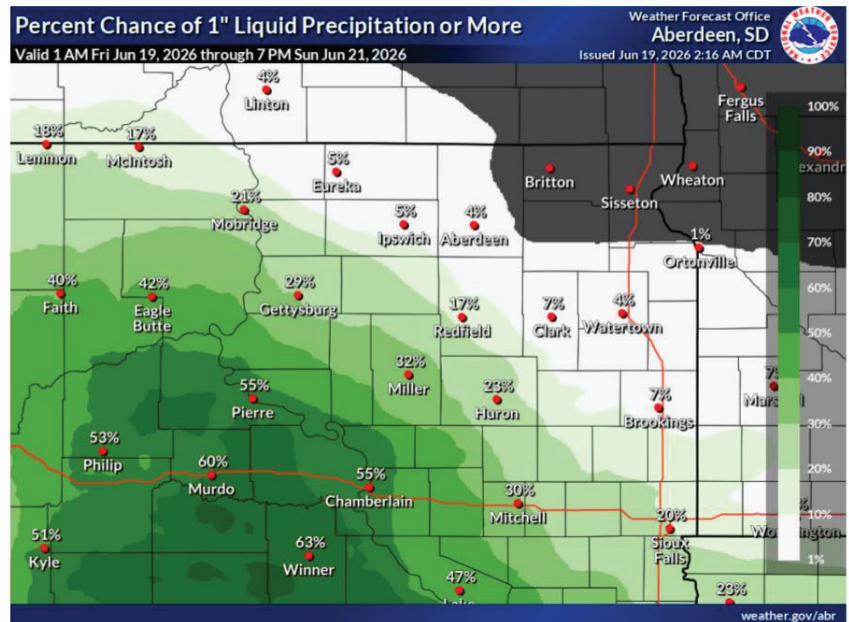
72 Hour Precipitation Probability For 1 Inch

June 19, 2026
2:53 AM CDT

The Image Below Represents a *3-day Cumulative Probability* of 1 or More Inches of Rainfall

Key Messages:

- A couple potential rounds of rain across portions of central and south central South Dakota
- **Round 1** possible across south central South Dakota **Saturday afternoon/evening**
- **Round 2** possible across central South Dakota **Sunday/Sunday night** (continuance or possible redevelopment from Saturday event but placement a bit further north)
- All in, some areas could be looking at over an inch of rainfall by Sunday night



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Mild conditions are forecast to persist through the weekend. By Saturday afternoon, rain chances start ramping up across portions of central and south central South Dakota. These rain chances persist through Saturday night, continuing into Sunday evening. Some areas could see a 2-day total of more than an inch of rainfall.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 72 °F at 5:54 PM

Low Temp: 50 °F at 6:14 AM

Wind: 14 mph at 3:14 PM

Precip: 0.08

Today's Info

Record High: 108 in 1933

Record Low: 38 in 1948

Average High: 81

Average Low: 56

Average Precip in June.: 2.29

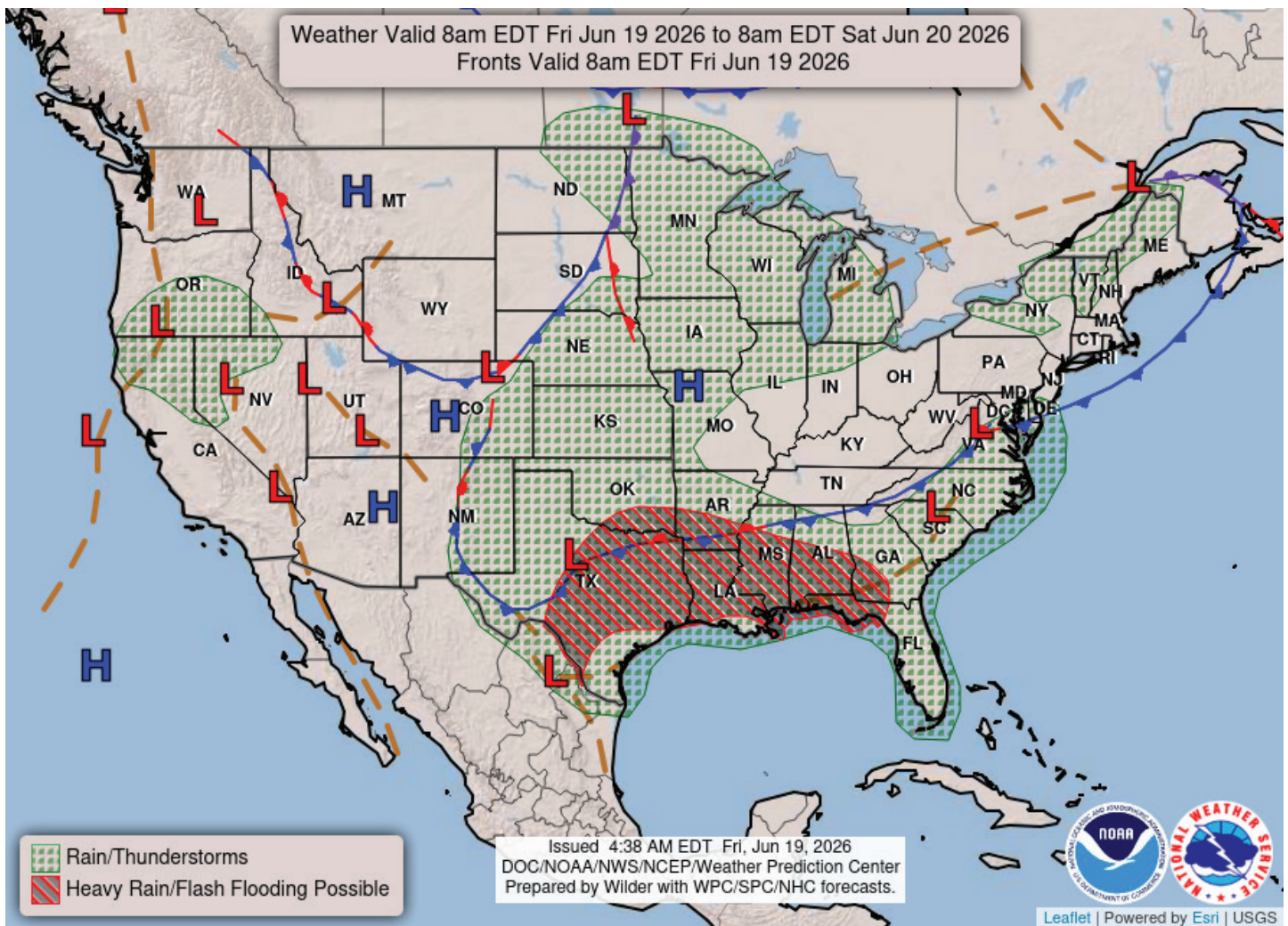
Precip to date in June.: 1.37

Average Precip to date: 9.54

Precip Year to Date: 8.13

Sunset Tonight: 9:23 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:43 am



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Today in Weather History

June 19th, 1894: A tornado moved NNE, passing 12 miles northwest of Bowdle and ending in extreme southeastern Campbell County. A child was killed, and the mother and four other children were severely injured. A man was killed in another home, and his wife was injured. Fourteen homes were damaged or destroyed. Clothes were said to be torn to shreds and scattered for miles. The tornado was estimated to be an F3.

June 19th, 1931: A tornado moved east from just south of St. Lawrence, passing south of Wessington. Buildings were destroyed on eight farms. Two farms were said to be wiped out, house and all. A woman was injured as she tried to rescue chickens. The storm killed cattle, horses, and over 100 hogs. This tornado had an estimated strength of an F3.

June 19th, 2013: Slow-moving thunderstorms brought large hail, heavy rains, and flash flooding to parts of northeast South Dakota. One thunderstorm produced quarter hail and winds over 50 mph, which caused significant damage to a bean field and damaged the house's siding south of Wilmot in Roberts County. Several roads in Wilmot had water running over them for several hours. Over three inches of rain caused water to go over a part of Highway 123 south of Wilmot. The three to four inches of heavy rain brought many flooded roads in and around Veblen in Marshall County.

1835 — A tornado tore through the center of New Brunswick NJ killing five persons and scattering debris as far as Manhattan Island. The tornado provided the first opportunity for scientists to study firsthand the track of such a storm. (David Ludlum)

1938 — A cloudburst near Custer Creek, MT, (near Miles City) caused a train wreck killing forty-eight persons. An estimated four to seven inches of rain deluged the head of the creek that evening, and water flowing through the creek weakened the bridge. As a result, a locomotive and seven passenger cars plunged into the swollen creek. One car, a tourist sleeper, was completely submerged. (David Ludlum)

1972 — Hurricane Agnes moved onshore near Cape San Blas FL with wind gusts to 80 mph, and exited Maine on the 26th. There were 117 deaths, mainly due to flooding from North Carolina to New York State, and total damage was estimated at more than three billion dollars. Up to 19 inches of rain deluged western Schuylkill County PA. The rains of Hurricane Agnes resulted in one of the greatest natural disasters in U.S. history. Agnes caused more damage than all other tropical cyclones in the previous six years combined (which included Celia and Camille). (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 — It was a warm June day, with plenty of thunderstorms east of the Rockies. Lightning knocked out power at Throckmorton, TX, and ignited an oil tank battery. A woman in Knox City TX was struck by lightning while in her car, and a man was struck by lightning near his home in Manatee County FL. Strong thunderstorm winds overturned several outhouses near Bixby OK, but no injuries were reported. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Temperatures soared above 100 degrees in the central U.S. for Father's Day. Fifteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date. Severe thunderstorms in Minnesota and Wisconsin produced softball size hail near River Falls WI, and wind gusts to 80 mph at Menomonie WI. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Fourteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date as searing heat spread from the southwestern deserts into the High Plains Region. Record highs included 98 degrees at Billings, MT, 107 degrees at Valentine, NE, and 112 degrees at Tucson, AZ. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — What would eventually be known as the "Inland Hurricane" stuck south central Kansas. This storm system produced a swath of 65 to 120 mph winds across six counties and caused \$80 million dollars in damage. The peak recorded wind gust was 116 mph, which reaches low-end category 3 on the Saffir-Simpson hurricane wind intensity scale. On the enhanced Fujita Scale the 116mph winds would be rated an EF2. The storm knocked out power to all the Wichita TV stations, and they were off the air for hours. All but one of the Wichita Radio Stations, including the Wichita NOAA Weather Radio Station KEC-59, was knocked off the air. (National Weather Service Wichita)

2006 — Up to 11 inches of rain fell in the Houston, Texas area, causing widespread flash flooding. The Houston Fire Department rescued more than 500 people from flood waters, but no serious injuries or fatalities were reported.



The Testing of Our Commitment

Faith matures when we choose to trust God rather than lean on our own understanding.

Hebrews 11:8-9: 8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;

In situations when God is testing us, He will teach us deeper truths about Himself, His purposes, and His promises. Though we feel stretched in painful seasons, such difficulties are designed to be beneficial. Consider God's command that Abraham sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham could have regarded this order as:

Unreasonable. "I love my son. How could You ask this?"

Untimely. "He is the one through whom my descendants are to come."

Unbearable. "This is too hard for me. I can't take this pain."

Abraham rejected such thinking. Instead, he trusted God. The trial revealed this servant's unshakeable commitment to the Lord's plan (Genesis 22:12).

Knowing which circumstances will help us grow, our Father asks us to exercise faith and choose His way. Recalling His unending love and commitment to His children will help us do this. Be assured that God makes no mistakes.

Imagine Abraham's joy when the Lord provided a ram as a sacrifice in Isaac's place. We, too, will receive a reward of spiritual joy when we remain steadfast. May we respond to times of testing as Abraham did—by trusting and obeying God.

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.18.26

15 17 32 53 58 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 16 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.16.26

12 20 53 67 70 12

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$452,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 1 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.17.26

11 16 18 33 51 9

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$30,230,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 14 Hrs 16 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.17.26

8 11 12 25 26

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$140,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 14 Hrs 31 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.17.26

10 17 44 63 67 24

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.17.26

3 26 49 53 61 12

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$302,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Five years after a Navajo elder vanished, the man who robbed her was released from prison

By SAVANNAH PETERS Associated Press

EDGEWOOD, N.M. (AP) — Five years to the day that Navajo elder Ella Mae Begay disappeared from her home in a remote corner of Arizona, the man who acknowledged beating her, stealing her truck and leaving her on the roadside is free from prison.

Preston Tolth pleaded guilty to robbing Begay and was sentenced on May 8 to five years in prison with credit for three years already served. He was released Monday, according to the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Begay's relatives, who expected Tolth to remain in custody until at least 2028, said they were shocked when they heard Monday. The eldest of her three children, Gerald Begay, learned of Tolth's release while wrapping up his workday on a construction site and reflecting on the somber anniversary of his mother's still-unsolved disappearance.

"This is just another slap in the face," Begay said.

Begay, a prolific weaver of Navajo-style rugs and a grandmother of nine, was 62 when she disappeared from Sweetwater on the Navajo Nation. Family and community members searched for her, pressured law enforcement for action and drew national media attention to the case that's been symbolic of the crisis of violence against Indigenous people.

Shortened sentence

Scott Taylor, a spokesperson for the Federal Bureau of Prisons, said Tolth received credit for good conduct while incarcerated and under a statute that counts time served after the commission of a crime but before sentencing, including on unrelated charges.

"The release was calculated in full accordance with federal sentencing law and Bureau of Prisons policy," Taylor said Thursday.

According to New Mexico court records, Tolth was incarcerated while facing multiple state charges between the time he robbed Begay on June 15, 2021, and his April 2023 arrest. Those separate charges ultimately were dismissed.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Arizona and a public defender who represented Tolth confirmed the conditions of release but otherwise declined comment.

Mark Osler, an expert on sentencing at the University of St. Thomas, said the Federal Bureau of Prisons routinely shortens sentences to reduce overcrowding and recidivism. The bureau has no obligation to notify victims and their families of releases.

"What's unfortunate here is the lack of communication," Osler said. "These are people that have been hurt and society owes more to them."

An elder vanished

On the morning of June 15, 2021, Begay's daughter, who lived next door to her, called 911 to report a break-in at her own home, according to the Navajo Nation Department of Criminal Investigations. By the time officers arrived 90 minutes later, Begay told them the intruder had left and something else that struck her as odd: She had just seen her mother's truck leave the driveway, even though it was well before sunrise.

According to the department, officers "checked on" Begay's house and noted that the doors were locked but did not confirm if Begay was home. Nine hours later, she was declared missing and tribal police began investigating.

Begay's family pointed law enforcement to Tolth, whose father was dating Begay's sister. Investigators twice interrogated him, and Tolth admitted stealing Begay's truck with her in it, repeatedly punching her in the face and leaving her on the road. He acknowledged he may have hit her hard enough to kill her.

But a federal judge later ruled that confession inadmissible, saying the FBI failed to honor Tolth's right to refuse questioning. Federal prosecutors then opted to negotiate an agreement rather than go to trial.

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"A miscarriage of justice"

Court documents outlined an unstable childhood for Tolth, marked by homelessness, early substance abuse and parental neglect. A sentencing memo noted he planned to seek mental health treatment once out of prison. He is required to spend six months in a residential reentry center, better known as a halfway house, and will be supervised for three years, under his conditions of release.

The Associated Press left messages for several of Tolth's relatives on social media platforms this week seeking comment.

Begay's case received more resources and attention than most involving Indigenous people who are missing or have been killed, said Mary Kathryn Nagle, a Cherokee Nation citizen and attorney who has advocated for Begay's family. The timeline, however, is emblematic of widespread failures, she said.

"Most never have their case investigated at all," Nagle said. "It's troubling to see (Begay's) case, even after making it this far, end in a miscarriage of justice."

Begay has never been found. At the May sentencing hearing, Tolth's attorney said he made a good faith effort to lead investigators to where he left Begay when he fled in her truck.

On Monday, Begay's niece, Seraphine Warren, walked over 100 miles (161 kilometers) from Sweetwater to the Navajo Nation capital of Window Rock, Arizona, carrying one of her aunt's weavings to mark the anniversary of her disappearance. The news of Tolth's release "gutted" her after an emotional day, she said.

"That date will haunt us forever," Warren said through tears. "Now it's not just the day my auntie went missing, it's the day we were told, 'You aren't worth anything.'"

This story is published through the Global Indigenous Reporting Network at The Associated Press.

South Dakota man whose life sentence was commuted by Noem now implicated in his niece's death

By MEAD GRUVER and JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

Two men, including one whose life sentence was commuted by then-South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, have been charged in the death of a 14-year-old girl whose body was found in a rural area five days after she went missing in March.

McKenna Wendel was reported missing March 13 and last seen alive in her hometown of Sioux Falls early on March 14. Her body was found outside Brookings, an hour's drive north of Sioux Falls, on March 19.

Wendel's uncle, Mark Milk, 51, also of Sioux Falls, now faces five counts related to her death. Milk was almost three decades into a life term on a manslaughter conviction when Noem commuted his sentence in 2023.

Wendel was raised by her grandparents, loved animals and had a "vibrant personality and a zest for life," according to her obituary. She and her grandparents were Rosebud Sioux Tribe members and attended powwows often.

"She loved the singing and the beautiful sounds of the drums," her obituary read.

Details about Wendel's death remained thin as authorities who announced the charges in a Sioux City, Iowa, news conference Thursday kept close what they knew to protect their investigation.

Authorities have said an autopsy was done, but the findings have not been released. The cause and manner of Wendel's death would not be released yet per Justice Department policy, said Leif Olson, U.S. attorney for northern Iowa.

Milk faces five counts including possession with intent to deliver cocaine that caused Wendel's death. He is also charged with transportation of a minor with the intent to engage in criminal sexual activity, according to court documents.

Jon Rogness, 38, of Brookings faces conspiracy and accessory charges in an alleged attempt to cover up the crimes. The counts against the men were the "most serious, readily provable" charges and all originated in Iowa, Olson said.

"This is a horrific case," FBI special agent Gene Kowel said. "There are no cases that we investigate that

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are more heart-wrenching and more tragic than the ones that involve children or the death of a child.”

Court records showed no lawyers listed for Milk and Rogness, and no relatives could immediately be located through phone records and social media to speak on their behalf.

In February 2023, Noem commuted Milk’s life sentence for a manslaughter conviction in an October 1993 stabbing death. Milk, then 19, had been involved in several altercations in the city of Winner that ended with the death of Shawn Peneaux, according to records.

Milk was in jail on unrelated allegations of driving under the influence and eluding police when Wendel’s body was found. His name came up in public discussion about the case from the start. But prosecutors, who finished their investigation in late May, did not formally link him to Wendel’s death until filing charges Wednesday.

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley said in a late March news conference the decision to commute Milk’s life sentence was strictly Noem’s.

“It is fairly often that you see law enforcement oppose commutations,” Jackley remarked without commenting further on Noem’s decision.

The commutation documents were sealed and even he had not seen them, he noted.

The Associated Press left a message Thursday for Noem on seeking comment through NovaRed Mining, a Canadian firm she recently joined in a “strategic advisory role.”

A Republican, Noem, 54, was South Dakota’s lone congressperson from 2011 to 2019 and governor from 2019 to 2025. She was Homeland Security secretary before being fired in March by President Donald Trump amid criticism of her handling of the administration’s immigration crackdown and disaster response.

Trump praised Noem’s leadership and said he was making her special envoy for “The Shield of the Americas.” The new organization of Western Hemisphere nations is focused on supporting democracy and security in the region.

Talks between the US and Iran are called off because of fighting in Lebanon, officials say

By ERIN CUNNINGHAM, DAVID RISING and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Talks between the U.S. and Iran were called off on Friday after intense fighting between Israel and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, three officials said, raising questions about a nascent agreement to end the war in Iran.

Iranian officials didn’t travel as planned to Switzerland, insisting that the fighting in Lebanon must stop before the talks can take place, according to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the ongoing mediation to try to get the talks rescheduled. U.S. Vice President JD Vance also canceled his trip.

Israel’s military struck targets in southern and eastern Lebanon overnight, and Hezbollah reported intense fighting. Lebanon’s Health Ministry said at least 21 people were killed, and Israel said four soldiers died.

The conflict between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah is the most precarious part of the Iran deal. Neither Israel nor the militant group signed the agreement — but it is supposed to end their fighting, and Iran has signaled its willingness to risk renewed war in the region for the sake of its interests in Lebanon and its most important regional ally.

Mediators are now scrambling to reschedule the meetings, which were supposed to begin addressing how to restrict Iran’s nuclear program — the core issue over which Israel and the U.S. went to war on Feb. 28.

The talks are also supposed to bring about a permanent end to the conflict. The interim deal has already reopened the Strait of Hormuz to international shipping, after Iranian attacks and threats all but stopped the flow of oil and natural gas through the waterway. A new Iranian authority charged with overseeing the strait issued guidance Friday calling on ships to register with it even as transits are currently free — signaling Tehran’s intent to likely start charging.

The fighting in Lebanon could unravel the deal

The Israeli military said strikes were ongoing on Friday after four of its soldiers, including a lieutenant

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colonel, were killed in an attack on a tank in a village near the southern Lebanese city of Nabatiyeh. An explosive drone attack wounded another five, it added.

Israel then launched multiple strikes against "Hezbollah infrastructure sites" in Nabatiyeh and other areas, according to a military statement, which accused the militant group of "blatant ceasefire violations."

Later, the military said it also struck targets in the Beqaa Valley in eastern Lebanon, with Lebanese media saying the village of Douris was hit.

"Israel will not tolerate attacks on our soldiers or on our territory, and it will exact a very heavy price from Hezbollah for these attacks," Netanyahu said in a statement Friday.

Hezbollah acknowledged targeting Israeli tanks and said its attacks were in response to what it called Israel's own violation of the ceasefire. It said the attacks came after Israeli forces attempted to reach the northern side of Ali al-Taher hilltop, a strategic point that overlooks Nabatiyeh and that Israeli troops have been trying to capture.

In southern Lebanon, many were forced to flee their villages due to the Israeli attacks.

"The situation is lawless, we couldn't stay," said Mustafa Zain, who had his six daughters in a pickup truck as he was leaving Akaar through Tyre.

The fighting threatens to unravel the newly signed deal. Beyond ending the hostilities in Lebanon, the agreement calls for ensuring Lebanon's "territorial integrity and sovereignty."

It does not say whether that means Israel would withdraw from the large swaths of southern Lebanon it has occupied since Hezbollah joined the war in its early days by firing rockets and drones at northern Israel.

Iran has insisted Israel pull back, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday that forces would remain in a "security zone" of southern Lebanon as long as "Israel's security needs require it."

Israel's actions in Lebanon have created a rift between Israel and the U.S., with Trump becoming increasingly critical of his close ally Netanyahu. Netanyahu is also facing increasing criticism at home — and from other quarters.

Talks in Switzerland were postponed

Tehran is insisting that Israel's attacks in Lebanon cease before they send a delegation to Switzerland, according to the officials.

The White House, however, blamed logistical issues when Vance put off his trip.

Two other regional officials, similarly speaking on condition of anonymity for the same reason, described Pakistan as being "stunned" by Iran's decision not to go to the talks.

Much remains to be resolved

The discussions in Switzerland are expected to focus on Iran's nuclear program. Tehran maintains it is peaceful, though it has highly enriched uranium that could be used to build multiple atomic bombs, should it choose to do so, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Those talks are expected to be extremely difficult. The 2015 nuclear deal, which Trump scrapped during his first term, took more than 18 months to negotiate.

The interim deal gives negotiators 60 days to come up with a nuclear agreement but that can be extended. It outlines lucrative incentives if Iran does reach a new agreement, including the eventual lifting of all international sanctions and a \$300 billion fund for postwar reconstruction.

Already Iran has won some concessions. Following the signing of the interim deal, the U.S. lifted its blockade of Iran's ports and is allowing it to sell its oil freely. The deal also calls for Iran's assets to be unfrozen — though it's not clear how quickly.

Oil tankers began freely moving through the Strait of Hormuz this week after months of being unable to use the critical channel. More than 12.5 million barrels of oil were shipped through the waterway on Wednesday night, the U.S. said.

Still, it is expected to take weeks or months for the normal flow of oil and gas to resume, even if traffic fully resumes in the strait.

Starmer vows to fight as Burnham's win fuels a Labour leadership showdown

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Labour's Andy Burnham, the popular mayor of Greater Manchester, won a special election for a seat in Parliament and signaled Friday that he will use it to challenge embattled Prime Minister Keir Starmer for leadership of the country.

Burnham decisively won the seat of Makerfield in northwest England over Rob Kenyon of the anti-immigration party Reform UK, and called the victory a chance for Britain "to turn the tide."

The result cements the status of Burnham, a 56-year-old politician nicknamed the King of the North, as the top contender to replace Starmer as leader of the Labour Party and the country. Burnham won almost 55% of the 45,510 votes cast for a field of more than a dozen candidates, over 9,000 more than runner-up Kenyon.

Burnham's acceptance speech left no doubt that he wants to lead the country, and not just be one of the more than 400 Labour lawmakers in the 650-seat House of Commons.

"Everyone knows that politics isn't working," he said. "Everyone can feel that the country isn't where it should be. Tonight could, just could, be the turning point."

Starmer congratulated Burnham, writing on X that voters "chose Labour's campaign of hope and optimism over division and hate."

But the prime minister insisted he would fight any attempt to oust him.

"Yes, I will run, I will stand," if there is a Labour leadership contest, Starmer said. "I've said repeatedly I'm not going to walk away from that."

Burnham says he's the candidate of change

Burnham has led Manchester since 2017, overseeing rapid regeneration for the city where the Industrial Revolution was forged. He is pledging to repeat his signature brand of "Manchesterism" on a national scale.

Burnham said he would work to ensure that "the name Makerfield is forever synonymous with bringing about the change this country needs."

He told supporters and campaign workers on Friday that voters' rejection of Labour in local elections last month was "a clear call for change" and "we are going to lay out a new path for Britain."

"We need an economy that works for everybody, not a few in far-off places from here," he said.

"We have an opportunity to turn the tide, to make the country feel like it's working again, to make people see that politics can make a positive difference, to make people feel hope again."

Earlier, in his victory speech, he said Labour had "a final chance to change" and win back voters' trust.

"But it is a chance now, from this result tonight, to build a new politics based on unity and hope, turning away from the path that takes us to a divided, dark politics of the kind we see in the United States," he said.

Labour is in power but unpopular

Starmer's popularity has cratered since he led the center-left Labour Party to a landslide election victory in July 2024.

He 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 the U.K. ambassador to the United States.

Labour is losing liberal voters to the growing Green Party, and facing a rising Reform UK, which consistently leads in nationwide opinion polls. The Nigel Farage -led party has rapidly gained ground in post-industrial northern England areas like Makerfield, some 200 miles (320 kilometers) northwest of London.

Burnham's resounding victory gives Labour new hope of stopping the Reform tide. Farage acknowledged he was "disappointed, no question about it," with the result of Thursday's vote.

A dismal performance by Labour in May's local elections spurred scores of lawmakers to demand Starmer's resignation. He has refused to budge, but senior colleagues are trying to force a change.

Wes Streeting resigned as health secretary in May, saying that "where we need vision, we have a vacuum." Streeting has said he will run in a leadership contest if there is one.

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Then Josh Simons, the Labour lawmaker for Makerfield, stepped down to trigger a special election and give Burnham the chance to return to Parliament.

Britain's parliamentary system allows governing parties to change leaders midterm, with the winner becoming prime minister without the need for a national election. Under Labour rules, a lawmaker can challenge the leader if they have backing from a fifth of the party's House of Commons lawmakers — a number that stands at 81.

Rob Ford, professor of political science at the University of Manchester, said defeating Reform UK in Makerfield strengthens Burnham's claim to be Labour's biggest asset.

"The narrative he can bring is, 'No one else could have won that seat. I won that. I bring something unique. I bring an ability to renew our appeal,'" Ford said.

Burnham's victory piles pressure on Starmer to quit

Burnham will head to London to be sworn in as a lawmaker as soon as Monday. He's likely to seek a meeting with Starmer to argue that the prime minister should exit gracefully and set a timetable for his departure.

Labour lawmaker Louise Haigh, a Burnham ally, said Starmer should "do what's best for both the country and the Labour Party" and "consider an orderly and managed transition."

"Andy won't be doing anything rash or hasty," she told Sky News. "I'm really hopeful the prime minister and Andy can come to an agreement."

Starmer insisted Friday he was elected on a "mandate for change" and would carry on with it.

Earlier this week he suggested that he could offer Burnham a Cabinet post, an idea rebuffed by Burnham's allies.

Despite his stubborn determination, Starmer could be forced out if several members of the Cabinet tell him the game is up and quit, or threaten to quit, in protest.

There could then be a leadership contest, or a coronation, depending on whether other potential candidates think Burnham has an unassailable lead.

"When things begin to slide away from a prime minister, they begin to slide away very, very quickly," said Tim Bale, professor of politics at Queen Mary University of London.

"Over the weekend there will be all sorts of talks behind closed doors, mainly I suspect people trying to persuade Keir Starmer ... that the game is up."

World shares are mixed and US futures fall after a tech-led rally on Wall St

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — World shares were mixed Friday and U.S. futures declined as optimism over the U.S.-Iran deal to end their war was dimmed by the postponement of high-stakes talks on reopening negotiations over Iran's nuclear program and getting oil moving through the Strait of Hormuz.

U.S. markets will be closed Friday for Juneteenth.

Planned talks in Switzerland between Iran and the United States over their efforts to reach a permanent end to war were delayed, while Israel's military said its forces struck targets throughout southern Lebanon overnight as Hezbollah reported intense fighting in the area.

"Both sides are trying to show some good faith," Bas van Geffen of RaboResearch said in a commentary. "But even if the water appears calmer, there is still a strong undertow. The agreement remains fragile on multiple fronts."

Germany's DAX rose 0.2% to 25,079.30, while the CAC 40 in Paris was nearly unchanged at 8,467.75. Britain's FTSE 100 shed 0.2% to 10,376.64.

The futures for the S&P500 and Dow Jones Industrial Average were down 0.2%.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 wavered between gains and losses but closed 0.3% higher at a new record of 71,250.06. The government reported that consumer prices excluding volatile fresh foods was unchanged, but analysts said it would likely pick up in coming months despite higher fuel costs.

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Higher inflation was a factor driving the Bank of Japan to raise its benchmark interest rate earlier this week to a three-decade high of 1% as it gradually adjusts its policies after years of near-zero or negative rates.

In South Korea, the Kospi lost 0.1% to 9,052.42, just shy of its record set a day earlier. The S&P/ASX 200 in Australia declined 0.9% to 8,828.70, while India's Sensex lost 0.8%.

Markets in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Taiwan were closed for the Dragon Boat festival.

On Thursday, stocks rose on Wall Street, erasing most of their losses from a day earlier to notch weekly gains thanks to big advances for heavyweight technology companies. The decline on Wednesday was driven by anticipation that the Federal Reserve will likely raise interest rates this year in an effort to fight inflation.

The S&P 500 rose 1.1% and the Dow industrials added 0.1%. The Nasdaq composite surged 1.9%.

Technology stocks had some of the biggest gains and the most influence on the broader market's rise. Intel surged 10.6% after U.S. President Donald Trump announced that the semiconductor giant will make chips for Apple in the U.S. Other big semiconductor companies gained ground. Nvidia rose 3% and Micron Technology jumped 8.7%.

On the losing end, SpaceX fell for the second straight day since its big debut on the U.S. stock market last week. The Elon Musk-led rocket maker and AI company was down 3.6% following a 4.9% loss Wednesday.

Oil prices wavered after the United States and Iran signed an agreement to end their war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz to oil tanker traffic. Brent crude, the international standard, spent most of the day lower before settling 0.4% higher at \$79.85 per barrel. U.S. benchmark crude fell 0.2% to \$75.85 per barrel.

Early Friday, Brent crude was down 0.4% at \$79.50 per barrel. U.S. benchmark crude was flat at \$75.85 per barrel.

Prices for crude oil are still above roughly \$70 per barrel from before the war, but are well below the \$100-plus price from a few weeks ago.

Rising energy costs have been putting more pressure on already hot inflation. The average price of gasoline in the U.S. has dipped below \$4 a gallon, but is still 25% higher than a year ago. Prices have been rising for a wide range of goods because of higher shipping costs.

The Federal Reserve kept its key interest rate unchanged this week but hotter inflation means it will likely raise rates by the end of the year. Lower interest rates make borrowing easier for businesses and households, spurring growth, but they also tend to stoke inflation.

In other dealings early Friday, the U.S. dollar fell to 161.31 Japanese yen from 161.38 yen. The euro was unchanged at \$1.1458.

Trump approval on Iran low even as tentative deal to end fighting emerged, new AP-NORC poll finds

By LINLEY SANDERS and AMELIA THOMSON-DEVEAUX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Most Americans continue to disapprove of how President Donald Trump is handling Iran, while his overall presidential approval holds steady, according to a new AP-NORC poll that was conducted as Trump suggested a deal with Iran had been reached.

The poll points to just how unpopular the three-month war with Iran has been with Americans, even as Trump turned abruptly from threatening Iran to reopening negotiations. Support for the president's handling of the war remains lopsidedly partisan. About two-thirds, 65%, of U.S. adults disapprove of how Trump is handling issues with Iran. But while the vast majority of Democrats and independents view Trump's actions negatively, only 28% of Republicans are unhappy.

Americans' views on how the president is handling Iran are roughly in line with his overall job approval, which stands at 37%, unchanged from an AP-NORC poll conducted in May.

The survey was conducted June 11-17, just after Trump called off threats to escalate the war with Iran. The poll was fielded as Trump announced a deal with Iran and authorized an end to the U.S. naval blockade in the Strait of Hormuz, concluding just before the deal was signed Wednesday.

Approval of Trump's actions on Iran has been low over the last few months. But in interviews, some Republicans also weren't pleased with the outcome of this week's agreement, which gives Iran an immediate

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benefit, allowing it to sell its oil freely again.

The deal also reopens the strait without tolls for two months, restarts talks between the U.S. and Iran over Tehran's nuclear program and calls for Tehran to dilute its stockpile of highly enriched uranium.

David Farrington, a 79-year-old Republican-leaning independent in Fort Worth, Texas, "doesn't have any love lost" for Iran, but he's frustrated the agreement focused on the strait and didn't deliver more on the country's nuclear weapons program.

"Any agreement regarding the strait is hardly what I would consider a recognizable concession on the part of Iran," Farrington said. "So, I consider that some fluff that attempts to make this agreement look better when it's not."

Trump's approval on Iran remains flat

Only about one-third of U.S. adults approve of how Trump is handling Iran in the new poll, in line with May.

Donald McBride, a 28-year-old independent in Plano, Texas, is frustrated that Trump has not maintained his campaign promise to keep America out of foreign wars. McBride voted for Trump but he opposed going to war with Iran.

"I would like the war to end," he said. "The original objective of the war was to end the Iranian regime, and that's just not possible. I don't really know why we'd continue fighting."

The poll suggests most Americans want action in Iran to wrap up. Even with an agreement on the horizon, 53% of U.S. adults said American military action against Iran had "gone too far," only a slight decline from 59% in March.

About 4 in 10 Republicans, though, said in the latest poll that action has been "about right," and 37% said it had not gone far enough.

Joan Jones, a 64-year-old independent in northwest Florida, believes the United States' actions in Iran have been necessary to address the threat Iran posed.

"Those attacks are ultimately to protect us from nuclear attacks," Jones said. "I think we have to go through that ... and eliminate that worry so we don't have that hovering over us."

Few approve of Trump's approach on Israel

About one-third, 34%, of U.S. adults approve of how Trump is handling Israel.

Tensions have been rising between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Trump as the president criticizes recent Israeli attacks in Lebanon, which jeopardized negotiations between Washington and Tehran.

James Huffman, a 69-year-old Republican in Medway, Ohio, thinks Trump is taking the wrong strategy when it comes to Netanyahu.

"Netanyahu is not going to do everything Trump wants. He's going to do what he wants," Huffman said. "I just don't think it's effective."

Only about one-third approve on the economy

About one-third of U.S. adults approve of Trump's approach to the economy. That's in line with last month, and continues a challenging stretch for Trump on the issue.

Jones, the Florida independent, is more optimistic than most. She said she can hardly leave the house some hours without getting stuck in the traffic of tourists headed to the beach on vacation. She also spots lines around the block for Starbucks, McDonalds and Chick-fil-A in her community — all signs to her that the economy is doing well overall.

"I think President Trump's policies are contributing to a better economy," Jones said.

Other Republicans are more skeptical, a troubling sign for a president who prides himself on his business acumen. Only 69% of Republicans approve of how he's handling the economy, slightly lower than the 78% who approve of how he's handling the presidency overall.

Patricia Bailey, a 42-year-old Republican in Parkersburg, West Virginia, sees an economy where prices have gotten out of control. "I just said the other night, ordering pizza is for rich people," she said. Bailey voted for Trump but added, "He's kind of let me down a little bit."

Even if high prices preceded Trump, Bailey doesn't think he's lived up to his pledge to improve the economy.

"I think he got so distracted with the war that he forgot some old promises," she said.

Vance's push to get Iran talks started hits an early bump as weekend negotiations are put on hold

By AAMER MADHANI and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

ZURICH (AP) — The U.S. push to quickly begin high-stakes talks with Iran hit a snag just two days after the signing of an agreement that opens a 60-day window for negotiations on Iran's nuclear program and getting oil traffic moving through the Strait of Hormuz back to prewar levels.

Vice President JD Vance had been prepared to make an overnight flight Friday to meet with his Iranian counterparts at a mountainside resort in the tiny Swiss village of Obbürgen and begin the technical talks.

His staff and a small pack of journalists had even gathered at Joint Base Andrews outside Washington in anticipation of the trip. Meanwhile, dozens of White House officials, advance staffers and more media gathered in Switzerland to prepare for Vance's anticipated arrival.

But then abruptly on Thursday evening the trip was called off — at least for the time being.

The White House issued a statement explaining Vance — who has been tapped by President Donald Trump to lead the negotiations — and his delegation were prepared for talks, but they were unable to finalize plans and the vice president would remain in Washington.

"The logistics of these negotiations have never been simple or predictable," the statement noted.

Fighting in southern Lebanon intensifies

The announcement followed a report from Al-Mayadeen, a Pan-Arab satellite channel that is politically allied with the Iranian-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, that Iran was delaying sending its delegation to Switzerland over Israel's ongoing military campaign in Lebanon.

Fighting intensified with at least 18 killed by Israeli airstrikes, while four Israeli soldiers were killed in southern Lebanon.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday that Israel's military will stay in a "security zone" of southern Lebanon as long as "Israel's security needs require it."

Israel and Hezbollah are not parties to the agreement. Iran insists Israel must withdraw from the large swath of southern Lebanon it is occupying, but the wording of the interim deal doesn't explicitly require that and only ensures Lebanon's "territorial integrity."

Hours before postponing his trip, Vance gave some indication of the state of flux when he told reporters at a White House briefing that he was uncertain if the talks were going to happen this weekend.

"Our plan is to go to Switzerland, I don't know exactly when," Vance told reporters. "We think these technical negotiations start sometime this weekend. That's still the plan. But that could change."

Soon after Vance spoke to reporters, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei endorsed direct negotiations with the U.S. in a terse statement read by state media that appeared to signal to the Islamic Republic's leadership that it could move forward with a first round of talks.

"It is obvious that the face-to-face negotiations that will be held in the future will not mean accepting the enemy's opinion," Khamenei said in his statement.

The messaging seemed to give Khamenei, who was badly wounded in the Feb. 28 U.S. strike that killed his father, some maneuverability. Hard-liners in the Iranian government, including Khamenei's father, have long opposed direct talks with the White House, especially after Trump, during his first term, pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal negotiated by Democratic President Barack Obama's administration.

More importantly for the White House, it appeared to create a permission structure for the talks to start.

The meeting was initially supposed to be a signing ceremony

Vance was initially expected to go to Switzerland to sign the agreement at a formal ceremony. Instead, Trump signed the document Wednesday during a glitzy dinner at the Palace of Versailles with French President Emmanuel Macron. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian separately signed the agreement.

The agreement states that Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium, which is believed to be buried under rubble left by U.S. military strikes last year targeting Tehran's key nuclear sites, must at minimum be diluted under international supervision.

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It also states that Iran shall not procure or develop nuclear weapons — a commitment it has made previously. But a range of other commitments remain to be worked out.

Iran believes it's in a strong negotiating position

Iranians would be going into the talks with a measure of confidence after effectively shutting down the Strait of Hormuz, causing global economic reverberations, said Rosemary Kelanic, director of the Middle East Program at Defense Priorities in Washington.

She said the U.S. is now "essentially trying to negotiate our way back to the prewar status quo."

Neil Quilliam, an associate fellow with the Middle East and North Africa Program at Chatham House think tank, said the "buoyant" Iranian leadership feels it has the upper hand. The endorsement of the talks by the Iranian supreme leader "sends a very strong signal domestically: 'We're now on an equal footing with the U.S.'"

"Trump has gone from calling for regime change on Feb. 28 to this: Now they're going to sit down with us directly and talk about these big issues," Quilliam said of the Iranians' thinking. "So it's intended more for the domestic audience, and telling them: 'We are firmly in control of this. There can be no protests, no revolution: We are a new regime and we're staying put.'"

Trump's tone has also taken a notable shift.

For weeks, he's insisted the financial costs to Americans were less important to him than stamping out Iran's nuclear program. He irked some of his fellow Republicans when he indicated its potential impact on November's midterm elections wasn't a concern.

But this week, at the G7 summit in Evian-Les-Bains, France, he acknowledged that continuing the war could have led to "economic catastrophe" and that oil reserves were on track to run out in about four weeks.

"And the one president I did not want to be was the late, great Herbert Hoover," said Trump, referring to the 31st president whose time in office was defined by the Great Depression.

Vance has to negotiate through political division

For Vance, a likely 2028 presidential contender, how the negotiations play out could have enormous ramifications for his political fortunes.

Vance's skepticism of foreign wars was a core part of his political identity during his political rise. But now he finds himself the chief defender of negotiating an endgame to Trump's conflict that Democrats have largely derided as a foolish gambit. Some hawkish Republicans are aghast that Trump is getting behind a settlement that could put billions of dollars into Iran's coffers.

Sen. Roger Wicker, the Republican chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said Thursday that aspects of the deal are "completely out of step" with Trump's goals.

Trump had fiercely criticized Obama for the 2015 nuclear agreement, which Trump argued failed to stop Tehran from advancing toward a weapon and funneled billions of dollars to the Islamic Republic. The Republican exited the U.S. from the deal in 2018.

Trump has pushed back against comparisons to the JCPOA, saying he had "negotiated from strength" after a massive military campaign while asserting that Obama was paying the Iranians off and not receiving acquiescence.

Wicker was particularly concerned about the \$300 billion fund for the reconstruction and economic development of Iran mentioned in the 14-point agreement, saying it "would make Iran's payoff under Obama's 2015 deal look like a pittance by comparison." Trump and Vance have said no U.S. taxpayer money would go to such a fund and it would not come without concessions and reforms by Tehran.

Police charge a third suspect in a Melbourne synagogue arson allegedly directed by Iran

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Police charged a third suspect on Friday with an arson attack on a Melbourne synagogue that was allegedly directed by Iran.

The 20-year-old man was one of three masked offenders who broke into the Adass Israel Synagogue,

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doused the interior with flammable liquid then set it alight in the early hours of Dec. 6, 2024, a police statement alleged.

The fire caused extensive damage to the synagogue and a worshipper sustained minor injuries.

The Victorian Joint Counter Terrorism Team, which brings together federal and state police with a spy agency, charged the man, who has not been named, with offenses including arson.

He was charged in a Melbourne jail where he was already being held in custody on unrelated offenses. Police declined to elaborate on those offenses.

His co-accused Giovanni Lulu, 21, was arrested in July last year and another suspect, Younes Ali Younes, 20, was arrested a month later.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese last year accused Iran's Revolutionary Guard of directing the synagogue fire and an arson attack two months earlier at a Sydney kosher eatery, Lewis' Continental Kitchen.

Mike Burgess, director-general of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, the nation's main domestic spy agency, said the Revolutionary Guard used a "complex web of proxies to hide its involvement" in both antisemitic attacks.

Iran's ambassador to Australia and another three Iranian diplomats were expelled. Tehran has denied Australia's allegations.

Australian Federal Police Assistant Commissioner Peter Crozier told reporters on Friday that investigators were working with international partners in the continuing investigation.

Police were also investigating whether the three alleged arsonists knew who ordered the attack.

"They may not actually be aware of the people who are directing or the principals of these investigations. That remains a key line of inquiry for us," Crozier said.

Victoria Police Acting Assistant Commissioner Paul O'Halloran said police had informed the local Jewish community of the third arrest before the news was made public.

"Our heart goes out to them. Again, this brings back this terrible incident," O'Halloran said.

"People deserve the right to feel safe and be safe in their community and particularly at their place of worship. Today's charges are a strong testament to this," he added.

The latest suspect will make his first court appearance on the new charges next week.

The Australian government has established a public inquiry to investigate a rise in antisemitism across the country, including the killing of 15 people when two gunmen opened fire on a Sydney Hanukkah celebration in December.

US strike on an alleged drug boat kills 3 in the eastern Pacific Ocean

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. military attacked a boat accused of smuggling drugs in the eastern Pacific Ocean on Thursday, killing three people, as the Trump administration wages a monthslong campaign against alleged traffickers in Latin America.

The latest attack brings the number of people who have been killed in boat strikes by the U.S. military to at least 211 since the Trump administration began targeting those it calls "narcoterrorists" in early September.

As with most of the military's statements on strikes in the eastern Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea, U.S. Southern Command said it targeted the alleged drug traffickers along known smuggling routes. The military did not provide evidence that the vessel was ferrying drugs. A video posted on X showed a boat speeding through the water before being struck and bursting into flames.

President Donald Trump has said the U.S. is in "armed conflict" with cartels in Latin America and has justified the attacks as a necessary escalation to stem the flow of drugs into the United States and fatal overdoses claiming American lives. But his administration has offered little evidence to support its claims of killing "narcoterrorists."

Critics have questioned the overall legality of the boat strikes as well as their effectiveness, in part be-

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cause the fentanyl behind many fatal overdoses is typically trafficked to the U.S. over land from Mexico, where it is produced with chemicals imported from China and India.

Senators on Thursday demanded that the Pentagon release "unedited video" of the strikes. They have drawn intense scrutiny from some Democratic lawmakers and military legal scholars. The U.S. military's first strike in early September drew particular concern from some lawmakers and those who study military law.

Two men on the boat initially survived the attack that killed nine others, and they were clinging to the wreckage when the vessel was struck again, killing them. The White House confirmed the follow-up strike, insisting it was done "in self-defense" to ensure the boat was destroyed and in accordance with the laws of armed conflict.

But some legal scholars said a second strike killing survivors would have been illegal under any circumstance, armed conflict or not.

The Pentagon's watchdog said in May that it plans to look into whether the U.S. military followed an established targeting framework when carrying out the strikes. However, the evaluation is focused specifically on what's known as the six-phase Joint Targeting Cycle and not on the legality of the strikes, the inspector general's office said.

Tropical storm remnants drench Gulf states after tornadoes hit the Midwest

By JACK BROOK, DAVE COLLINS and DAVID FISCHER Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The remnants of Tropical Storm Arthur battered parts of the southeastern United States with drenching rains and strong wind on Thursday, tearing through buildings, flooding homes and launching water rescues along the Gulf Coast.

Severe weather also pummeled parts of the Midwest, where a separate line of strong storms knocked down structures and left tens of thousands of residents without power.

Arthur was the first tropical storm of the season in the Atlantic basin, and although it quickly downgraded within a day of forming, the lingering system created dangerous conditions in Louisiana and Mississippi. In one rural Louisiana parish, more than 2 feet of rain fell in 48 hours and most of that soaking came Thursday, said Donald Jones, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Lake Charles.

It flooded at least 200 homes in Avoyelles Parish, about 70 miles (113 kilometers) northwest of the state capital, Louisiana state Rep. Daryl Deshotel said.

"Even by this region's standards, that's catastrophic rain," Jones said.

Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves said in a social media post Thursday night that a worker on a county road crew in the southwestern part of the state had been killed while helping with storm cleanup operations. The cause of the death was not disclosed.

Thirty homes below the Anchor Lake dam in southern Mississippi were being evacuated as a precaution due to concerns that rising waters could overwhelm the spillways and compromise the structure, Reeves said. Residents in the area were being encouraged to seek higher ground.

Coni Dubois said several inches of water flooded her home overnight in Houma, southwest of New Orleans, but others in the community had worse damage. She's lived through many hurricanes and other storms, but never witnessed thunder and lightning like this.

"It was unbelievable, it literally sounded like hell broke open," Dubois said. "I thought for sure we had a tornado on top of us. The lightning and the thunder was so consistent, the whole house was lit up like daylight for about 20 minutes."

The National Guard and state wildlife officials were working with rescue crews, officials said.

One tornado had been confirmed in Avoyelles Parish in central Louisiana, along with three others near New Orleans, the weather service said.

Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry declared a state of emergency for some storm-hit areas, and the town of Cottonport in Avoyelles Parish said it was turning off water service overnight "to manage our resources and allow our system to recover." It urged residents to limit water use and to fill pots and other containers

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before the water was shut off.

Amid relentless rainfall in central Louisiana, Cody Coco said he rescued stranded workers — waist deep in water — at a cypress sawmill operation he runs near his home in Avoyelles Parish. He said the water has continued to rise all throughout the day.

Coco, 40, said he also used a boat to rescue the four pigs he kept in a pen. Video he shared on his Facebook page shows the hogs swimming out of their enclosure in a torrent of murky water. Coco says they are now safe on higher ground.

"If I'd left them in the pen, they'd have drowned," Coco said. "They were happy to see me."

New Orleans Mayor Helena Moreno posted a video on Facebook describing relatively minor damage and cleanup efforts. Ahead of the storm, police prepared boats and set up barricades in flood-prone areas. They also opened sandbag distribution sites across Louisiana.

Just across the Mississippi River in Avondale, a tornado wrecked four homes, Jefferson Parish spokeswoman Rachel Strassel said. Two people were hospitalized with minor injuries and later released.

The Midwest was also dealing with damage after a strong line of storms.

A tornado was reported Wednesday evening near Effingham, Illinois, about 90 miles (145 kilometers) southeast of Springfield. Several people suffered minor injuries, officials said.

Firefighters responded to damaged homes, collapsed structures, car crashes, downed power lines, gas leaks and blocked roads, Effingham Fire Chief Brant Yochum said.

The National Weather Service in Lincoln, Illinois, confirmed two tornadoes, including one Wednesday with maximum winds of 116 mph (186.8 kph) in the Charleston area. The EF2 tornado lifted the roof off a home and flipped a semi-truck, injuring one person.

Marla Washburn and her husband, Todd, hunkered down in their basement as a suspected tornado tore through their neighborhood about 70 miles (110 kilometers) north in Blue Mound. They could hear debris smacking into their house and a school across the street lost its roof, which came crashing onto their home.

"The whole house shook," Washburn said in a phone interview, adding that the neighborhood looks like Armageddon.

"You don't know whether to laugh or cry, but we're OK," she said. "You look at it and you go, 'I don't even know where to start to clean up.'"

Democratic socialists surge in mayoral races across the country as anti-Trump fervor rises

By MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Janeese Lewis George paves a path to the mayor's office in Washington, D.C., she's told voters they could have it all.

Her unapologetically expansive, left-wing agenda includes subsidized or even free childcare, increased down payment assistance for homebuyers and community resources to reduce crime, plus a promise to aggressively confront President Donald Trump's attempts to reshape the nation's capital.

"People are tired of hearing what government can't do. They want to hear what government can do," Lewis George said in an interview before the city's primary, where she defeated her Democratic opponents and positioned herself to win the general election in November in a city dominated by Democrats.

Lewis George's victory signals a break with a quarter-century of centrist governance in Washington, and it puts her in the vanguard of democratic socialists who have ascended in urban politics over the last year. Zohran Mamdani toppled Andrew Cuomo, the scion of a political dynasty, on his way to becoming New York City mayor. Katie Wilson won an upset victory to lead Seattle last fall. And this month, Nithya Raman clinched a spot in the November runoff against Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass.

All of them are members of the Democratic Socialists of America, or DSA. The political organization has seen its membership ranks swell from a few thousand to more than 100,000 nationwide over the last decade after an influx of younger Americans joined following the presidential bids of Vermont Sen. Bernie

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Sanders, also a self-described democratic socialist.

There's little sign of national coordination among the candidates, and it's unclear whether voters are gravitating toward their promises of improved government services, their vows to fight the Trump administration or their critiques of capitalism.

But from coast to coast, confrontational progressives are advancing in mayoral races. City leaders can draw outsized attention for their successes and failures, and democratic socialists will be under pressure from residents to deliver on their vows for a new kind of governance. Whether that translates to national politics is a next test for their movement.

"They are all channeling a displeasure with a status quo and a serious desire for economic populism that the establishment Democratic Party hasn't been preaching," said Eric Stern, a Democratic strategist with Fight Agency, a political consulting firm that strategized Mamdani's mayoral campaign.

Stern added that Democratic voters appeared more willing to support the most progressive candidate in mayoral races rather than in contests for the U.S. House. Candidates like Mamdani and Raman, Stern said, are "daring voters to dream and fall in love not just with the individual candidates but also the political process as a whole."

A rising left navigates America's urban challenges

The trend of progressives surging in urban areas may have limits for its broader impact on Democratic politics. Democratic mayors in cities including Atlanta, Houston, Miami and San Francisco won on relatively moderate platforms in recent years.

Progressives have also faced noteworthy challenges. Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson was endorsed by the city's DSA chapter during his 2023 mayoral run but has since faced criticism from both moderate and liberal local leaders on issues such as immigration, the local budget and public safety. Recalls and public pressure ousted progressives elected to district attorney offices in multiple jurisdictions over the last five years, when criminal justice reform efforts ran into dissatisfaction over public disorder following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trump's hardline immigration and law enforcement tactics have also become a challenge for liberal cities. The president's agenda poses an especially serious threat to Washington, D.C., because of its status as a federal territory.

"Maybe we take back Washington and run it on a federal basis," Trump told reporters this month when asked about the potential election of a democratic socialist as the district's mayor. "We won't put up with it."

But progressives hope the current wave of anti-Trump furor in deep blue cities across the country will help buoy the chances of those on the hard left.

"It's not folks looking for the leftmost option so much as looking for a candidate who's gonna be on their side," said Ravi Mangla, speaking for the left-wing Working Families Party. The party often endorses the same candidates as the DSA and is readying to target more mayoral offices in the country's biggest metropolises this fall and in 2028.

"It's less about whether you are on the right or on the left so much as whether you are willing to punch up at the powerful," he added.

Mamdani and Lewis George are both self-described "sewer socialists" who emphasize the need for responsive government services rather than critiques of market economics. The phrase recalls the socialist Gilded Age mayors whom critics derided as too preoccupied with managing public works projects.

The term's revival is partly a strategic move to align leftist ideas with concerns over affordability and the economy, voters' top concern in the midterm elections, and shift the public perception of democratic socialists from firebrands who support radical policies to independent-minded public servants.

"This is absolutely a change election and I'm excited to bring the change that people want, which is really putting people first in the city and having the moral clarity and courage to stand up to Trump," Lewis George said.

For voters the 'socialist' label did not seem to matter

While conservatives have used the "socialist" label to attack Democrats as extreme or incompetent,

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some D.C. voters appeared ambivalent before Tuesday's primary.

Several lifelong residents said they believed Lewis George was a "fighter" but didn't think she'd have much of an impact on the local economy, given the city's status as a federal district.

"I go back and forth on my own labels and whether I am supportive of that movement or not, but I am supportive of making D.C. more affordable," Owen Fitzgerald, a University of Maryland graduate student, said of his support for democratic socialism.

Fitzgerald voted for Lewis George because she would stand up to Trump and said he'd first learned of her campaign from friends in his neighborhood. But he didn't know she was a democratic socialist until he saw news reports describing her with the label.

"It sends a cultural message to this administration that the people who are surrounding them in the capital are opposed to their platform, opposed to their political agenda, and I think that it will send a message, both nationally and internationally," Fitzgerald said.

Residents return to war-ravaged southern Lebanon with hope and sorrow after the US-Iran deal

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB MALAK HARB and BILAL HUSSEIN Associated Press

TYRE, Lebanon (AP) — Adnan Kaour returned on Thursday to check on his home in southern Lebanon's coastal city of Tyre — once known as an idyllic summer getaway spot — just a week after Israel issued warnings for all of its residents to evacuate.

The warnings were followed by sweeping airstrikes, which Israel said targeted the Lebanese Hezbollah militant group.

What Kaour found back in Tyre shattered his hopes. His dream family apartment overlooking the Mediterranean Sea was a heap of rubble and shattered glass.

His return came after the announcement of an agreement between the United States and Iran to end the war in the Middle East. The deal also calls for an end to the war in Lebanon, where Israel has been fighting Hezbollah, but it's unclear what that means in practice.

Israel and Hezbollah are not parties to the agreement. Iran insists Israel must withdraw from the large swath of southern Lebanon it is occupying, but the wording of the interim deal doesn't explicitly require that and only ensures Lebanon's "territorial integrity."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday that Israel's military will stay in a "security zone" of southern Lebanon as long as "Israel's security needs require it."

Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri — a Hezbollah ally — said Thursday that the group was committed to the ceasefire, "provided that Israel adheres to it fully and comprehensively." Hezbollah has said that it's committed to resisting any occupation by Israel. Fighting between the two sides, which was still underway in some parts of southern Lebanon, could derail the deal.

Many hope the US-Iran deal signals better times

For residents in the south of crisis-battered Lebanon, hopes of better times are mixed with skepticism after many ceasefire announcements previously failed to halt fighting.

Kaour lives in Germany but spends most of the summer in Tyre. Last month, when an Israeli strike hit their street without warning, he was abroad with his family.

When he returned, he saw his building, with a popular sweets shop and an electronics store on the ground floor, was still standing, unlike surrounding structures that were leveled to the ground.

But walls and windows had been blasted out. He was relieved his family had not been there, he said.

"I'm hopeful for peace, and God willing this is the end of the war, and everyone can go back to their homes," he said. "We are living abroad, but our minds are here in our country."

Outside, the street filled with people trying to clear the rubble.

Kaour's neighbor one floor above, Samih Haidar, had also just returned and found his door bolted by wooden boards.

He tried to kick them down but failed, then anxiously waited as two men who had been clearing rubble

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on another floor came and unscrewed the bolts.

Through a gap, Haidar climbed in. He didn't know what to expect. He had rented the apartment out to a family displaced from another area in the south, people who came to him through a friend.

His anxiety turned into shock: broken furniture, shattered glass, rubble and a burned out kitchen that had caught fire after the strike. He slowly walked through each room, quietly filming with his phone. He doesn't know what became of the tenants — displaced from Tyre like scores of others, he presumed.

"We want things to work out and live in safety, so there can be stability for us and everyone else," Haidar said.

An isolated enclave hopes for reprieve

Farther south, the Christian village of Ain Ebel is one of a few enclaves in Lebanon's border area where residents have remained during the war. Christian villages, where Hezbollah has little presence, have been largely spared the destruction of neighboring Shiite villages. But they have their own problems.

The village is cut off from the rest of Lebanon by fighting and Israeli checkpoints, relying on aid convoys that require extensive coordination to get through. One such convoy, organized by the Order of Malta, a Catholic lay religious order, arrived Thursday bearing emergency livestock feed and supplies for farmers.

Cattle farmer Boutros Maroun said people in Ain Ebel are exhausted.

"We don't care about America and Iran, we want the Lebanese people to live comfortably and happily," he said. "Every two years there's a new war, and we can no longer take it."

The convoy was delayed in returning to Beirut because of explosives found on the road, which had to be cleared by U.N. peacekeepers.

Fighting pierces a tenuous ceasefire

The fighting subsided but did not stop Thursday. Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported several Israeli drone strikes, including one on a car in the town of Kfar Tebnit that killed one person and critically wounded another. Hezbollah later said in a statement that its fighters clashed with Israeli troops trying to advance on the town. Israel did not comment.

To the north, some 80 kilometers (50 miles) away, displaced families huddled along the waterfront in Beirut. Most of them have been sleeping in tents for months, living in limbo. For others, it's a bench or a mattress on the ground.

Many said they're not convinced that the U.S.-Iran deal will hold or that they will be able to return to their homes — if they still exist. In the border area close to Israel, many Lebanese villages have been almost completely demolished.

"I haven't felt relieved at all," said Mohammed Ashmar, displaced from the border village of Deir Seryan, holding a cup of coffee and sitting near his tent on the waterfront. "Until I get back to my home ... I won't be convinced of anything."

The Israel-Hezbollah war has displaced more than 1 million people in Lebanon, and killed more than 3,900, according to Lebanese officials. About 30 Israeli soldiers and a defense contractor have been killed in or near southern Lebanon, and two civilians have been killed in northern Israel, according to Netanyahu's office.

Speaking during a visit by foreign dignitaries on Thursday, Lebanon's Social Affairs Minister Haneen Sayed said the country faces urgent humanitarian needs but also the daunting task of planning for the return of displaced families and reconstruction of the destroyed areas.

"The Lebanese people deserve peace," she said. "They deserve to return safely to their homes, rebuild their communities, and look to the future with confidence and hope."

Hegseth attacks NATO allies and announces a review of US forces in Europe

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth lashed out at NATO allies on Thursday as he announced a six-month Pentagon review of American forces in Europe whose outcome will depend on how fast the Europeans take responsibility for their own security.

The review was yet another surprise for European allies and Canada as they learn to deal with an increasingly unpredictable ally. U.S. officials and senior military officers had promised to coordinate closely with the Europeans as America draws down.

In recent months, U.S. President Donald Trump and the Pentagon have sent conflicting signals about whether America is reducing or increasing its military footprint in Europe, as well as threatening to annex Greenland, a semiautonomous island that is part of ally Denmark. Just weeks ago, the Trump administration said that it would no longer provide as much military support should any NATO member come under attack.

"This will be a real review. It will be designed to ensure that NATO is moving fast and irreversibly toward Europe leading, stepping up to take primary responsibility for the defense of Europe," Hegseth told his NATO counterparts. "It's a review that some countries will fail and others will pass with flying colors."

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz later said the allies have long been aware of U.S. plans to pull troops from Europe at some point and that they must take care of their own security.

"We know that we must do more and we are doing it," Merz said.

Public dressing down over bases, gender and migration

In a fiery speech at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Hegseth lambasted European allies for failing to provide U.S. forces access to bases in Europe to launch attacks on Iran, calling it "shameful."

"These allies, they put America's sons and daughters, our sons and daughters, at risk by denying them the predictable access, basing and overflight that never should have been in question at all," he said. The review would also assess whether the U.S. has full access and overflight "when we need it."

While defense ministers and military officers sat in silence, Hegseth railed against migration and gender equality policies in Europe, in remarks reminiscent to those of Vice President JD Vance in February last year that angered many Europeans.

"Instead of tanks and fighters and air defenses, the focus has been on gender equity and climate change and defense austerity. Europe's borders flew wide open, welfare states expanded, defense budgets cratered, along with Europe's belief in itself and its civilization," Hegseth said.

Hegseth's comments largely mischaracterized European policies today. On defense, European allies and Canada have launched an unprecedented effort to boost defense spending and expand their armed forces. NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte noted on Thursday that they spent \$90 billion more on defense last year, a 20% increase over 2024. And while Europe accepted large numbers of migrants and asylum seekers more than a decade ago, most countries have tightened their borders since.

It does not augur well for a summit of NATO leaders in Turkey on July 7-8.

A rare and short visit to NATO

It was a rare visit to NATO by Hegseth, his first this year after skipping a meeting in February. The Pentagon chief did not stay long, leaving well before the gathering was over and hours before Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was due to press allies for more weapons for his country.

Speaking to reporters at Brussels airport before flying home, Hegseth said, "It was great to hear country after country say, 'We're going to meet our target. We're going to meet our target.' There are still a few outliers, and we will be clear with them as we do this review."

NATO's supreme allied commander, an American, is working on backup plans to defend Europe after the U.S. signaled on June 3 that it would no longer supply an aircraft carrier and support ships, aerial refueling planes and dozens of fighter jets, among other military assets, in a crisis.

The Trump administration insists that it needs to be able to plan for two simultaneous conflicts and wants

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more military resources at hand should it clash with China in the Indo-Pacific region.

Under NATO's collective security guarantee – Article 5 of its founding treaty – the 32 allies pledge that an attack on one of them will be considered an attack on all. It does not oblige them to provide military support, although many likely would.

In essence, the United States is scaling back how it might help should an ally trigger Article 5.

US nuclear weapons will stay

The U.S. has by far NATO's biggest armed forces. It does not intend to withdraw its nuclear weapons in Europe, which are key to NATO's deterrence. To underscore that point, NATO's Nuclear Planning Group issued its first statement in 19 years after Thursday's meeting.

In the statement, it "recalled that the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance remain the supreme guarantee of Allied security and underpin NATO's extended deterrence architecture."

The ministers "agreed to continue enhancing NATO's nuclear deterrence mission by modernizing NATO's nuclear capabilities, strengthening its nuclear planning capacity, and adapting to achieve its security interests."

Rutte played down the impact of the U.S. decision, saying that the NATO Force Model – the system for organizing what forces member countries will provide commanders in times of peace, crisis or conflict – is just "a planning tool," and not a reflection of what would actually happen.

"If war breaks out, we will all max out what we need to do to make sure we can fight the war," Rutte told reporters. "In the planning phase, it is important to know what we can count on. What is in theory there."

California labor union offers to scale back billionaire tax proposal after pushback

By SOPHIE AUSTIN Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — A labor union behind a controversial tax on California billionaires significantly scaled back its proposal a day after it qualified for the November ballot, but the offer Thursday wasn't enough to get the governor on board.

The proposal from the Service Employees International Union Healthcare Workers West to impose a one-time, 5% tax on individuals whose net worth exceeds \$1 billion faces staunch pushback from a wide swath of critics, including Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom. The union said Thursday that it would abandon the 5% tax proposal if Newsom would join them in supporting a 2% levy. The updated proposal would instead have to be passed by the Legislature, given a June 25 deadline for the measure to qualify for the ballot.

Tara Gallegos, a spokesperson for Newsom, said scaling it back doesn't change its "fundamental flaws that harm working Californians."

"The Governor supports making the wealthiest Americans pay their fair share, but this poorly designed state-only measure will defund teachers, schools, clinics, and public safety," she said in a statement.

The tax, to be paid by those living in the state as of Jan. 1, 2026, is meant to generate \$100 billion in revenue, mainly to counter federal cuts to healthcare for low-income people with some money going to food assistance and education programs.

"A 2% one-time tax on that accumulated wealth is modest by any objective measure especially if it means keeping emergency rooms open and saving patient lives," backers wrote in a letter to Newsom.

Secretary of State Shirley Weber, a Democrat, said Wednesday night that petitioners collected more than the roughly 875,000 signatures needed to place the original proposal before voters.

States have been debating how to respond to the major tax breaks and spending cuts legislation President Donald Trump signed last year. The proposal has already divided Democrats and major labor unions and triggered an expensive campaign to defeat it. The proposed tax is backed by prominent progressives including Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders.

Silicon Valley tech moguls have spent millions to defeat it, and prominent players in Sacramento have opposed it. They include the California Medical Association and California School Boards Association, which helped launch a committee this week urging voters to reject it if it ends up on the ballot in November.

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Newsom also opposed a ballot measure in 2022 to increase taxes on the wealthy, which would have funded programs that help people buy electric cars or install more chargers. Voters rejected it.

Critics say the original measure would decrease state revenue over time by pushing the ultrawealthy to leave, taking the money they would contribute in income taxes with them. That would deal a huge blow to a state that relies on its top 1% of earners for nearly half its personal income tax revenue.

"This flawed measure is the wrong approach for California's small businesses and working families," said Roger Salazar, a spokesperson for Golden State Promise, a political committee fighting the tax.

The nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office estimates that the 5% tax would generate tens of billions of dollars in the first few years, but that income tax revenues could subsequently decline by hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

Since the proposal was announced in October, Google co-founder Sergey Brin has donated \$82 million to a political committee called Building a Better California that backs a variety of initiatives designed to blunt the billionaire tax proposal. It has raised more than \$118 million, counting Brin's contributions, from fewer than a dozen donors.

State lawmakers passed budget bills this week that aim to raise revenue in other ways, including by extending a tax on healthcare providers. Newsom and legislative leaders agree to this approach, Senate President pro Tempore Monique Limón said.

"The budget, as approved by the Legislature and now being negotiated with the Governor, does not include the billionaire's tax," the Democrat said in a statement. "Instead, it reflects additional revenues to address our long-term structural deficit."

Vance delays trip to Switzerland to lead new US talks with Iran on its nuclear program

By WILL WEISSERT, SEUNG MIN KIM, MICHELLE L. PRICE and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House said Thursday night that Vice President JD Vance was delaying a trip to Switzerland, where he'd been set to lead a new round of negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program — raising questions about what's next for the tentative agreement to end the war.

The team led by Vance had been ready to leave but was postponing, the White House said, citing difficult logistics for negotiations. The announcement followed a report from Al-Mayadeen, a pan-Arab satellite channel that is politically allied with the Iranian-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, that Iran was delaying sending its delegation to Switzerland over Israel's ongoing military campaign in Lebanon.

Vance, who was initially personally skeptical of the U.S. going to war with Iran, has increasingly become the administration's face of the conflict and has been outspoken in defending the deal.

Earlier Thursday, he took the relatively unusual step of appearing at the White House to defend the initial deal to extend the ceasefire 60 days and allow for more negotiating — arguing that while it offers concessions, Iran first has to comply with U.S. demands.

"As they dial up their good behavior, we can dial up the economic relief," Vance said. "If they dial down their good behavior, we can turn it off."

But the vice president also had said during those remarks that he was not sure of the timing of his planned trip to Switzerland and that talks might not begin this week. The formal postponement now makes that even less clear.

Vance staying put in Washington came after the U.S. said it had lifted its blockade, allowing oil tankers to begin freely moving through the Strait of Hormuz after months of being unable to use the critical channel. Still, the tentative agreement has drawn sharp criticism from some in the U.S. — including a few congressional Republicans — who worry Washington ceded too much to Iran with relief from sanctions and a potential \$300 billion fund to help with rebuilding.

Earlier, a top Trump administration envoy told U.S. lawmakers in a private briefing that Iran will invite the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog agency to inspect its nuclear sites.

And Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei had seemed to endorse direct negotiations

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for his officials.

"It is obvious that the face-to-face negotiations that will be held in the future will not mean accepting the enemy's opinion," he said in a statement read by state media.

It was Khamenei's first reaction to the agreement, and it was interpreted as a shift in Iran's approach. Hard-liners, especially Khamenei's father, the previous supreme leader, have long opposed direct talks, especially after the U.S. pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers.

The supreme leader has not been seen in public since he was wounded in a strike at the start of the war.

Lawmakers told Iran will invite UN inspectors to its nuclear sites

The agreement states that Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium must at minimum be diluted under international supervision. It also says that Iran shall not procure or develop nuclear weapons — a commitment it has made previously.

Trump envoy Steve Witkoff told members of Congress that Iran will invite the International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect its nuclear sites and begin work on identifying and uncovering the locations of Tehran's enriched material, which is believed to be buried under rubble.

Witkoff's private briefing was described by two people familiar with the conversation who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to share the closed-door details.

The agreement requires Iran to "commit to renounce their nuclear ambitions in writing," said White House spokeswoman Olivia Wales. The IAEA did not respond to a request for comment.

Witkoff told congressional leadership and members of national security-related committees that the agreement the U.S. struck with Iran did not include any side deals, but a side letter was drafted between Tehran and the IAEA extending the invitation.

Witkoff said the letter to IAEA Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi would enable him to bring U.S. nuclear inspectors to Tehran.

Vance defends US-Iran deal and has sharp words for Israel

Before Vance delayed his trip, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif postponed a planned visit to Switzerland, where Islamabad officials had originally planned to host a ceremonial signing ceremony for the agreement. That visit was postponed because the agreement had already been signed by both Iran and the U.S., said two senior officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

President Donald Trump signed the initial pact with Iran on Wednesday while dining with French President Emmanuel Macron at the Palace of Versailles. The deal is slated to take immediate effect and extends a ceasefire while giving each side 60 days to hammer out broader agreements on larger issues.

Vance, in his comments at the White House, shrugged off criticism about the confusing rollout of the initial deal, saying, "I don't think our public messaging has been chaotic."

He also offered a blunt warning to Israel, which has pushed the U.S. to take a harder stance against Iran and launched attacks on the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militia in Lebanon throughout the war, including just before the deal extending the ceasefire was reached. Those attacks complicated the peace efforts with Iran.

Trump "is the only head of state in the entire world who is sympathetic to the nation of Israel at this moment in time," Vance said. "And he happens to be the head of state of the world's superpower."

Shipping starts to pick up

Trump said he signed the agreement to avoid "economic catastrophe" in the U.S., after the war caused oil prices to skyrocket, made financial markets skittish and fueled inflation. The deal caused gas prices to fall and stock markets to rise — though rallies could be threatened again depending on how the next round of U.S.-Iran talks go.

The vice president said more than 12.5 million barrels of oil went through the Strait of Hormuz on Wednesday night and said that the U.S. easing its blockade of Iran means "honoring our end of the early part of the agreement on the military side."

U.S. Central Command said American warships "will remain in the general area to make sure that all

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aspects of the agreement are adhered to, obeyed and in full force and effect."

Iranian state media said shipping had "normalized" at Iran's southern ports but added that the strait remains supervised and under the control of the Iranian military, and transiting through the vital waterway still requires coordination.

Major shipowners began moving vessels through the strait after the agreement was signed, according to maritime data company Lloyd's List Intelligence, though Lloyd's did not give data on how many ships have passed through the strait as of Thursday.

In a media briefing, Richard Meade, editor-in-chief of Lloyd's List, said for the first time in 110 days, ships owned by major companies are transiting the strait after effectively being marooned there since February. It could take weeks or months to fully reopen the strait, and the two alternative routes do not have as much capacity as the strait's central passage.

New York Knicks revel in their NBA victory parade as joyous fans and celebs fill the streets

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE, JAKE OFFENHARTZ and STEPHEN WHYNO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Jalen Brunson held up the golden NBA championship trophy for a forest of outstretched hands to touch as fans celebrated the New York Knicks' first title in 53 years with a booming parade through Manhattan's skyscraper-flanked "Canyon of Heroes."

"Damn, New York, we really did it," Brunson, the finals MVP, said at a celebration at City Hall. "Somehow, someway, I knew we were going to find a way to get this done."

Moments later, Mayor Zohran Mamdani presented keys to the city to the Knicks' players, coaches, owners and staff. Wearing a team jersey under his suit jacket, Mamdani said he and other fans "waited because we knew deep down in our sick, suffering hearts" the Knicks would someday win.

Blue and orange confetti swirled through the air during the parade. Massive cheers of "Let's go, Knicks!" and "Knicks in five!" kept erupting.

And OG Anunoby, who scored the go-ahead basket in Game 4 of the finals on a tip-in with 1.2 seconds left, left his parade float to interact with fans, holding the NBA Cup in-season championship trophy in one hand and a bottle of Patron tequila in the other.

Director Spike Lee, perhaps the team's most iconic fan, was on a float with Brunson, savoring the moment. "I've never been to a parade — ever — and I'm glad it's this one," Lee said.

The MVP's mom, Sandra Brunson, wore a shirt with photos of Jalen and husband Rick, who played for the Knicks and is an assistant on coach Mike Brown's staff. She echoed her son's words, saying, "It was all worth it."

Karl-Anthony Towns hoisted the Eastern Conference championship trophy and a cigar on top of a parade bus while Mamdani danced. Later, Towns approached a group of kids with the NBA trophy to let them get their hands on it, bringing joyful screams.

Knicks fans turn out in force

Several blocks from the parade route, fans stood shoulder to shoulder — sometimes on each other's shoulders — or climbed traffic lights and sanitation trucks. Far away on the Brooklyn Bridge, people gathered just to hear the loudspeakers.

"I had to be here today," said Shareefa Wallace, 34, who got up at 3 a.m. to make her way from suburban Long Island. She grew up in the city going to Knicks games, and she sported the souvenir jersey of a legend from that era, Patrick Ewing.

Owner James Dolan thanked fans for waiting more than a half-century. Brown encouraged fans to keep their energy going "because this championship is about you guys."

'The New York vibe'

Nearby bars and delis filled with fans, some wishing they'd arrived at dawn. But many seemed at peace with only experiencing the parade from a distance.

"We just want to be with the New York energy and the New York vibe," said Jean Strong, who came to

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the parade from Harlem with his nephew and sister.

Terrell Emerson, a chef who grew up in Queens, said he drove from Maryland with his daughter Madison — named in honor of the Knicks' home arena, Madison Square Garden.

Beaming, Madison held a handwritten sign announcing she'd skipped her fifth-grade graduation to be there.

Stars and Knicks legends

Knicks great Walt "Clyde" Frazier — a member of the '70s champion teams — led the parade in a stylish convertible, wearing his NBA title rings. Frazier had late teammates and coaches on his mind.

"They would be amazed at what has happened to the Knicks and how they've really captivated the city this year," Frazier said. "This has exceeded any expectations I ever thought that we'd have."

Timothée Chalamet, Ben Stiller, Jon Stewart, Mariska Hargitay, Tracy Morgan and other celebrities joined the party, while Knicks play-by-play announcer Mike Breen emceed the City Hall ceremony.

Alicia Keys, the singer who collaborated with Jay-Z on the 2009 hit "Empire State of Mind," performed a medley that mixed her song with the classic "New York, New York."

A parade decades in the making

The mere fact that the parade is happening is historic in itself. Although the Knicks won the championship twice in the 1970s, the city didn't host a parade for them either time. Then-Mayor John Lindsay had cut down on ticker-tape extravaganzas for financial and other reasons. Instead, he held a 1970 reception at the mayoral mansion and a jam-packed ceremony in 1973 outside City Hall.

This time, the city went all out. A police officer could be seen holding a sign reading, "This is really happening."

And a massive security operation

Officials said 10,000 police officers were deployed to secure the event, which follows ebullient but sometimes chaotic street celebrations and some violence during the Knicks' title run, including a five-game final against San Antonio.

Police said 10 people in the area around the parade were arrested and three others were issued summonses, on charges ranging from disorderly conduct to felony assault. The Fire Department said it took 30 people to hospitals and treated 31 others at the scene for ailments that included heat-related emergencies, asthma and minor injuries.

Before the parade, a small group of people were crushed against a barrier near Fulton Street, a key subway hub, pinned between a swelling crowd and a group of police officers shoving the barrier.

Some 650 sanitation workers were assigned to clean up what could be tens of thousands of pounds (kilograms) of debris, if recent history is any guide.

Why does New York throw ticker-tape parades?

Ticker-tape parades derive their name from the narrow strips of paper used by telegraph-era "stock ticker" machines. New York brokerage firm workers tossed the paper from office windows during parades in the late 19th century, adding a swirling spectacle.

Over the years, especially up to the mid-1960s, the city rolled out ticker-tape parades for visiting foreign leaders, historic anniversaries and feats in aviation, war, sports, music, space travel and more.

The Knicks' parade was the 210th, coming after a bash for the WNBA's New York Liberty in 2024.

US gas prices dip below \$4 for 1st time since March but remain 25% higher than last year

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN and WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — The average U.S. price for a gallon of gas fell below \$4 on Thursday, hitting a level not seen since the first full month of the war with Iran and providing a bit of relief to consumers squeezed by soaring costs.

Although the tentative peace deal between the U.S. and Iran and the resumption of oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz are pushing energy prices downward, the cost of gas is still much higher than before

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the war began on Feb. 28.

According to motor club AAA, a gallon of regular gasoline averaged \$3.999 on Thursday. It was the first time since late March that prices were that low. And the drop aligns with easing crude oil costs overall, with markets expressing optimism in recent weeks about the prospect of a peace deal.

Even with prices dropping, American drivers are collectively paying about \$1 more per gallon than they were before the war, and gas is 25% more expensive than it was this time last year. That has caused many households to tighten their budgets and rethink how they want to spend their money.

More expensive bills beyond gas

Research has shown that short-term swings in the cost of gas leads consumers to adjust their driving and wider spending, with some even pulling back on core necessities such as groceries when gas prices get high, said Dylan Brewer, an assistant professor in Georgia Tech's School of Economics.

If costs continue to fall in the coming weeks, he said, more people may be able to "loosen their belts a little bit." Businesses that rely on gas and diesel to transport their goods will also benefit, but it could take a few months for that to trickle through the supply chain, Brewer added.

Gas isn't the only thing that's gotten more expensive during the war. Groceries, airline tickets and even condoms and shoes cost more amid global supply chain disruptions. Even if oil and other core necessities such as fertilizer begin flowing from the Middle East again, experts warn that the high costs will likely persist long after the fighting ends.

"Product prices across the United States are projected to keep climbing for the rest of 2026," Pat Penfield, a professor of supply chain practice at Syracuse University, said Thursday.

Penfield pointed to depleted inventories and supply chain problems caused by the war, noting that farmers, for example, had to pay more for fertilizer and other supplies this spring, which will "ripple through to increased food prices by autumn." At the gas pump, meanwhile, limited refinery capacity in the U.S. "remains a significant bottleneck" toward bringing down prices further, he said.

What prices at the pump look like nationwide

Steep fuel costs have already pushed U.S. inflation to its highest level in three years. And many consumers are still paying much more than \$4 per gallon to fill their tanks.

That price is a national average, with costs varying between states due to factors like proximity to supply and differing tax rates. In California on Thursday, the average price for regular gas was about \$5.64, according to AAA. Next costliest was Hawaii, at \$5.57. Meanwhile, prices in Indiana and Texas sat at about \$3.40 and \$3.49 a gallon, respectively.

Recent relief for fuel prices arrived with a drop in costs for crude oil, the main ingredient in gasoline.

Brent crude, the international standard, sat under \$80 per barrel Thursday. And U.S. benchmark crude tumbled to below \$76 per barrel. That's still a little higher than the roughly \$70 price tag before the war, but far below the \$100-plus price from just a few weeks ago.

Why oil costs are falling

Prices fell overnight Wednesday into Thursday after President Donald Trump signed the tentative agreement with Iran. It calls for Tehran to dilute its stockpile of highly enriched uranium and, in a significant concession from Washington, waives U.S.-backed sanctions on the country, immediately allowing Iran to sell its oil freely.

Major ship owners have also begun moving vessels through the Strait of Hormuz since the memorandum of understanding was signed Wednesday, according to maritime data from Lloyd's List Intelligence, although some reported that only more limited side routes were open. And U.S. Vice President JD Vance said Thursday that the U.S. Navy has lifted its own blockade to allow some transit to and from Iranian ports.

Still, it could take weeks or months for traffic to return to prewar levels. Before the war, the strait carried a fifth of the world's crude oil. And Gulf oil producers that throttled back production will need time to get the oil moving again.

Some ship captains may take their time to determine if the passage is safe. The agreement between the U.S. and Iran calls for a permanent end to hostilities and starts a 60-day negotiating clock to reach a final deal on the future of Iran's nuclear program, though Trump left the door open to resume attacks.

Refineries also typically pay for crude oil a month or more in advance, so even after oil prices drop, they won't immediately be processing cheaper products. Energy shocks have been even starker in places that rely more heavily on imports from the Middle East — notably countries across Asia and Africa.

Some GOP senators and Trump allies have harsh reviews of his agreement to end Iran war

By THOMAS BEAUMONT and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican leaders on Capitol Hill, including top national security figures, were voicing strong reservations Thursday — and some outright condemnation — of the Trump administration's agreement to end the fighting in Iran.

The memorandum of understanding signed by President Donald Trump started a 60-day negotiating clock to reach a final deal on the future of Iran's nuclear program. While Trump allies noted the agreement is not final, the lifting of economic sanctions on Iran's sale of oil and the plan for a \$300 billion fund to rebuild Iran and its economy were met with criticism from Republican leaders and conservative influencers, including some close Trump supporters.

"President Trump has pursued peace through strength. I hope the intermediaries working on this deal are not undermining that objective," said Mississippi Sen. Roger Wicker, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who has urged Trump to keep up the pressure on Iran and last month warned against striking a bad deal.

"The \$300 billion fund for the reconstruction and economic development of Iran — though not funded by U.S. taxpayers — would make Iran's payoff under President Obama's 2015 deal look like a pittance by comparison," Wicker said, referring to the Democratic administration's Iran agreement that Trump withdrew from during his first term.

The criticism from within Trump's own party — though hardly unanimous — comes as he is trying to bring an end to the unpopular war fewer than five months from midterm elections, where Republicans are facing headwinds in their effort to hold their narrow majorities.

Trump calls his critics 'fools'

Wicker's points were backed by a number of his colleagues, many of whom supported the war when it began.

"History demonstrates giving billions of dollars to the theocratic lunatics who want to kill you is an exceptionally bad idea," said Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, a staunch supporter of the war. "And so I hope we don't do that."

Trump on Truth Social called his critics "fools" and said the \$300 billion payment to Iran by the United States is "fake news." The interim pact promises a \$300 billion fund for postwar reconstruction. It's not clear where that money will come from — but Trump said, as Wicker noted, the U.S. would not contribute.

"All there is for the U.S. is Success, Lower Oil Prices, and Victory," he posted.

Some senators question financial provisions

As the memorandum was released to Congress on Thursday, several Republican senators said it left them with questions, many of them about its financial provisions.

Majority Leader John Thune and South Dakota colleague Sen. Mike Rounds were seeking clarity on how financial incentives to Iran and conditions barring funding terrorism would be enforced, because "right now, a lot of money's going to go to Iran," Rounds said.

To be sure, there were Republicans more closely aligned with Trump's America First policies in the Senate and elsewhere who were giving him the benefit of the doubt.

Sen. Roger Marshall stressed the point in the memorandum that supporters say gives the U.S. the upper hand. In a social media post, the Kansas Republican said one of the most important provisions "lays out a key commitment that strengthens regional security and ensures that Iran can never have a nuclear weapon."

Louisiana GOP Senate candidate John Fleming, who has focused on Trump's most loyal supporters ahead

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of a June 27 Republican primary runoff, said that means Trump has suggested that the U.S. will strike Iran again if it does not live up to the agreement.

"The criticism may be worthy if there isn't follow-through," Fleming said. "He's using the speak-softly-and-carry-a-big-stick in offering them plenty of help, but at the same time he's got that stick ready if they don't live up to their agreements."

MAGA voices send a warning

Still, some of Trump's strongest supporters in conservative media have warned against the agreement.

Conservative radio host Mark Levin suggested a strategic rethinking to hold off on an agreement with Iran until after the midterms.

"We should consider slow-walking the enemy, building up our munitions, our oil reserves, get the price of gasoline down, get through the midterms, then knock them out," he said in a social media post. Instead, the U.S. seemed to be "rushing to a deal, building up their oil industry" and agreeing to governments "transferring billions to them."

Right-wing social media influencer Laura Loomer, who has long supported Trump while also promoting conspiracy theories, was more pointed in her criticism.

"Who is giving the President tainted, pro-Islamic intel?" she posted on X.

What all the critics shared is an abiding distrust of the Iranian regime, no matter their relationship to Trump.

"It does smack of the kind of appeasement," said former Vice President Mike Pence, whose relationship with Trump was fractured after the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. "Bottom line. I don't trust the Iranians."

Arizona prosecutors dismissing fake elector case but vow to seek new indictment

By JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes is dismissing a sprawling criminal case that alleged President Donald Trump's former chief of staff Mark Meadows, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani and others tried to overturn Trump's 2020 loss in the state.

The decision announced Thursday marks the third such fake elector case filed by states to be dismissed, though the Democratic attorney general is vowing to bring it back to a grand jury in hopes of securing another indictment.

The legal maneuver is aimed at getting around a Friday deadline for starting new grand jury proceedings after Mayes lost an appeal earlier this month. The appeal was filed after defense attorneys argued successfully that the original grand jury hadn't been shown the relevant parts of a law that governs how presidential contests are certified.

"This case is complex and will require substantial presentation of evidence and time to accommodate defendants' request to testify and present evidence," prosecutors wrote, explaining the new presentation of the case to a grand jury won't happen by the deadline. Mark L. Williams, an attorney for Giuliani, said his client and the others charged in the case did nothing wrong and were only exercising their rights to free speech and to petition the government.

"This action was brought to punish Mr. Giuliani and the other Republican defendants for exercising their constitutional rights," Williams said. "It's appropriate that it's being dismissed."

Kelli Ward, the state GOP's chair during the 2020 election season and one of the 18 defendants in the case, wrote on social media that Mayes had damaged the reputations and finances of those charged and "certainly seems unwilling to admit her overreach & put this behind us. She wants to keep persecuting her political opponents."

Mayes' office has declined to comment on Ward's criticism.

Courts have dismissed similar cases in Michigan and Georgia, and a special prosecutor dropped a federal case in late 2024 that charged Trump with conspiring to overturn the 2020 election. Those cases ended

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after Trump defeated Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris in 2024. Cases related to the fake elector scheme remain in Nevada and Wisconsin.

The Nevada charges were dismissed in 2024 after a judge concluded Clark County, the state's most populous county and home to Las Vegas, was the wrong venue for the case. Later that year, though, the case was refiled in Carson City, Nevada's capital.

The Arizona case had been stalled for well over a year while Mayes pursued the appeal.

In Arizona, defense lawyers argued the law allowed for multiple slates of electors to be submitted to Congress in case the results were disputed. Federal law was amended in 2022 to specify that any given state could put forward only one slate of electors and that state governors are responsible for signing off.

Joe Biden won Arizona in 2020 by 10,457 votes.

The state attorney general has faced steep challenges in making her case.

It was filed nearly three and a half years after the 2020 election and levels complicated conspiracy charges against the 18 defendants. A dozen dismissal requests filed by defense attorneys have slowed progress in court.

The first judge on the case recused himself in late 2024 after an email surfaced in which he told fellow judges to speak out against attacks on Harris' campaign for the presidency. The next judge ordered the case to be sent back to a grand jury.

Of the 18 Arizona defendants, two were former Trump aides, five were lawyers working for Trump and 11 were Republicans who submitted a document falsely claiming Trump won Arizona.

Three defendants have resolved their cases, including one who pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge.

The rest pleaded not guilty. Some said they signed the certificate in case Trump won court challenges and a new slate of electors was needed urgently before Congress' Jan. 6 deadline to tally votes.

The case has factored into Arizona's attorney general race, where both Republicans vying to challenge Mayes in the Nov. 3 general election have publicly said they would dismiss the charges if they were elected to the post. Mayes is running unopposed in the July 21 primary.

Mike O'Neil, an Arizona pollster and political analyst, said he believes Mayes would face criticism from Democrats if she had decided to abandon the case altogether. "People who are upset about this aren't the people who would vote for her anyway," O'Neil said.

Stocks rise on Wall Street, erasing much of their loss from a day earlier

By DAMIAN J. TROISE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks rose on Wall Street Thursday and erased most of their losses from a day earlier to notch weekly gains.

The market's reversal was powered by sharp gains for big technology companies. The decline on Wednesday was driven by anticipation that the Federal Reserve will likely raise interest rates this year in an effort to fight inflation.

On Thursday, stocks faced less pressure as bond yields eased and oil prices spent most of the day falling.

The S&P 500 rose 80.48 points, or 1.1%, to 7,500.58. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 72.15 points, or 0.1%, to 51,564.70. The Nasdaq composite surged 496.28 points, or 1.9%, to 26,517.93. Every major index notched weekly gains.

U.S. markets will be closed Friday for Juneteenth.

Technology stocks had some of the biggest gains and the most influence on the broader market's rise. Intel surged 10.6% after President Donald Trump announced that the semiconductor giant will make chips for Apple in the U.S. Other big semiconductor companies gained ground. Nvidia rose 3% and Micron Technology jumped 8.7%.

On the losing end, SpaceX fell for the second straight day since its ballyhooed debut on the U.S. stock market last week. The Elon Musk-led rocket maker and AI company was down 3.6% following a 4.9% loss Wednesday.

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Oil prices wavered after the United States and Iran signed an agreement to end their war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz to oil tanker traffic. Brent crude, the international standard, spent most of the day lower before settling 0.4% higher at \$79.85 per barrel. U.S. benchmark crude fell 0.2% to \$75.85 per barrel.

Airlines had some of the bigger gains. American Airlines rose 3.7% and United Airlines rose 2.1%. Cruise line company Carnival jumped 3.2%.

Energy companies lost ground. Exxon Mobil fell 2.1% and Chevron fell 2.2%.

Prices for crude oil are still above roughly \$70 per barrel from before the war, but are well below the \$100-plus price from a few weeks ago.

Higher oil prices have been weighing on markets throughout the U.S. war with Iran. The current deal between the nations waives sanctions against Iran and allows it to sell its oil freely. It also opens up the Strait of Hormuz, where a fifth of the world's oil supply is shipped.

"While investors are welcoming the agreement as a constructive step for geopolitical risk, uncertainty remains elevated around potential flare-ups, the pace of shipping normalization, control of the waterway, the cost of access, and the path forward for Iran's nuclear program," said Adam Turnquist, chief technical strategist for LPL Financial, in a research note.

Rising energy costs have been putting more pressure on already hot inflation. The average price of gasoline in the U.S. has dipped below \$4 a gallon, but is still 25% higher from a year ago. Prices have been rising for a wide range of goods because of higher shipping costs.

Hotter inflation prompted the Federal Reserve to shift course from cutting its benchmark interest rate to likely raising rates by the end of the year. Lower interest rates can boost the economy by making borrowing easier for businesses and households, but it also tends to stoke inflation.

The Fed has been trying to balance its job of curbing inflation while supporting employment growth. The jobs market has remained relatively strong amid rising inflation, with low unemployment and solid job growth.

The central bank closed its two-day meeting on Wednesday by maintaining its benchmark interest rate at its current level. But it signaled that it might raise the rate at least once by December.

"This shift in the risk distribution helps explain why around half of the committee thought that an interest-rate hike this year might be needed," said James McCann, senior economist at Edward Jones, in a research note.

The Fed's stronger signal for an eventual rate hike prompted a jump in bond yields on Wednesday, but they eased on Thursday.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.45% from 4.49% late Wednesday. The yield on 2-year Treasury, which more closely tracks action by the Fed, fell to 4.18% from 4.20% late Wednesday.

Markets were mixed in Europe after closing lower Asia.

Supreme Court sides with a Texas man who says it's not a crime for marijuana users to have guns

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court ruled Thursday against a broad federal ban on gun ownership by marijuana users, the latest in a line of firearm cases from a court that has expanded gun rights.

The justices decided unanimously in favor of Ali Danial Hemani, a Texas man who argued that a law barring guns from anyone who regularly uses illegal drugs violates the Second Amendment.

Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote that his opinion narrowly limits the government's power to take guns away from drug users who are not considered dangerous. Hemani, who was not charged with any other crimes or accused of using the weapon under the influence, is thankful he "finally has closure," lawyer Zachary Newland said.

The decision is a loss for President Donald Trump's Republican administration, which had defended the 1968 law despite arguing against other gun restrictions. Its core argument "fails under every measure," Gorsuch wrote.

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The law was originally meant to keep guns away from dangerous people, but the millions of people who now use marijuana can't all be characterized that way, Gorsuch wrote. While recreational use is illegal under federal law, about half of states allow it and cannabis use for health purposes is widespread.

"Whatever one thinks of these developments, the federal government has not just tolerated them; it helped fuel them," Gorsuch wrote. "All of which leaves it awkwardly positioned to suggest that the millions of Americans who now regularly use marijuana are categorically and unusually dangerous."

The law was also used in a case against Hunter Biden, who was convicted in Wilmington, Delaware, of buying a gun while addicted to cocaine in 2018. He was later pardoned by his father, Democratic President Joe Biden.

Someone addicted to an illegal drug could potentially still be prosecuted after Thursday's decision.

"We do not address efforts to ban addicts, or those presently intoxicated, from possessing a firearm," Gorsuch wrote. Prosecutors could charge a marijuana user if they had evidence the person was dangerous, he said.

Recreational use remains illegal on a federal level even after the Trump administration reclassified medical marijuana as a less-dangerous drug in April.

Gun rights and pro-cannabis groups join forces

The case made for some unusual political alliances.

The American Civil Liberties Union and the National Rifle Association supported Hemani's case, as did cannabis legalization groups such as NORML. On the other side were gun safety groups including Everytown that usually oppose the administration on Second Amendment issues.

The ACLU applauded the ruling, saying that nearly half of Americans have reported using marijuana at some point in their lives.

"The court has sent a strong message that the government cannot criminalize the conduct of large numbers of people by making categorical and unfounded assumptions about whether they are dangerous," said Cecillia Wang, legal director at the ACLU.

NORML applauded the decision as a "vindication of personal freedom" and the Second Amendment Foundation called it a "major victory for gun owners."

The group Smart Approaches to Marijuana, which opposes legalization of the drug, condemned it.

"While the justices in this case appear to be most concerned with historical battles over Second Amendment rights, public health and safety are the collateral damage in this decision," said CEO Kevin Sabet.

Gun control groups were more measured, with Everytown saying the decision still recognizes that "drugs and guns can make for a dangerous mix."

It is rare to see standalone criminal charges filed against people accused solely of owning guns and using drugs, though they are more often filed against people also accused of other crimes.

The opinion is the latest in a series of firearm cases to reach the Supreme Court since its landmark ruling expanding gun rights in 2022 led to a wave of challenges around the country.

Since then, the high court has upheld a law aimed at protecting victims of domestic violence and strict regulations on ghost gun kits but has struck down a ban on bump stocks, an accessory that enables rapid fire. The justices are also considering a second firearm case this term over strict regulations on carrying guns in Hawaii.

Obama Center opens in Chicago with a call to defend democracy and a celebrity crowd

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

Former President Barack Obama formally opened his presidential center in Chicago on Thursday with a call to defend democracy as three former presidents joined him on stage in an extraordinary event featuring politicians, A-list celebrities, athletes and other internationally known figures.

"I hope this center will serve as an affirmation of just how special, how precious our democracy truly is and remind us what we can achieve when we embrace our shared responsibilities as citizens," the nation's

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first Black president told the crowd.

Bono, John Legend, Christina Aguilera, Marc Anthony and Eddie Vedder took turns on the stage ahead of Bruce Springsteen and Stevie Wonder, who closed the show singing "Higher Ground" as the former presidents, world leaders and others danced along.

President Donald Trump was conspicuous both in his physical absence and by not being mentioned by any of the speakers or performers. Trump called the \$850 million center a "total disaster" in a social media post in February.

Obama voiced his support for character, honesty, integrity, kindness, compassion and sense of duty, praising both Democrats and Republicans, including those he defeated.

"Every president here today, as different as we are, has tried our best to uphold values that John McCain and Mitt Romney believed in no less than I did," Obama said. "It is our greatest inheritance."

Reflecting on his arrival in Chicago in 1985 as an untested political organizer, he said he could not have built the Obama Presidential Center anywhere else. He met his future wife Michelle nearby, their wedding reception was within walking distance, his children were born in the neighborhood and he launched his first candidacy not far away.

"It's an expression of thanks, an acknowledgment that so much of what I hold most dear I owe to the people of this city and the people of the surrounding neighborhoods," Obama said.

Michelle had some emotional words for her husband

The Obamas and their daughters shared the stage with former presidents Joe Biden, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton along with former first ladies Jill Biden, Laura Bush and Hillary Rodham Clinton. Former Vice President Kamala Harris and many other leading Democrats were in the audience.

Michelle Obama spoke directly to her husband when she stepped up to the podium. "Eight years in the crucible and not once did you melt in the heat. Not once did you let it harden you.

"Instead, you used it to reveal your truest essence," she said. "Your stubborn optimism and unflinching courage. Your dazzling brilliance and unpretentious decency. Your ferocious work ethic and absolutely unshakable moral fiber. And to do it all as a first."

She ticked off highlights from her husband's eight years in office, including ordering the raid that led to the killing of Osama bin Laden, "standing up for marriage equality" and "listening to science."

"And you did it all with such grace and class and cool," she said. "You made the hardest job in the world look like a walk in this beautiful park."

Obama appeared to wipe away a tear as she praised him.

Michelle Obama also referenced the current "anxious and divisive times" and warned against being cynical or complacent as "everything feels so upside down." She pitched the center as "a respite from all that."

A-list entertainers sang inspirational anthems and protest songs

Jennifer Hudson sang the national anthem and Aguilera delivered a rousing rendition of "What a Wonderful World." Pearl Jam's Vedder, joined by Chicago teenagers in the nonprofit Guitars Over Guns program, sang an original song called "Better Believe," written just for the dedication.

Legend sang "Someday We'll All Be Free" and was joined by the rapper Common and Uniting Voices Chicago for their Academy Award-winning song "Glory."

Bono, who said he was representing the Irish, joined with The Edge in singing the U2 song "City of Blinding Lights." The Roots served as the house band. And Springsteen sang "Land of Hopes and Dreams" before turning to the Obamas and saying "I love you."

Wonder sang "All I Do" and "Signed, Sealed, Delivered (I'm Yours)" before the grand finale, joined by the performers who preceded him.

The VIP crowd included several potential 2028 Democratic presidential candidates; civil rights leaders Andrew Young and Al Sharpton; Oprah Winfrey; comedians David Letterman, Conan O'Brien and Stephen Colbert; actor Tom Hanks; tennis legend Billie Jean King and Chicago Cubs Chairman Tom Ricketts.

Former world leaders in attendance included former German Chancellor Angela Merkel and former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

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Event kicked off weekend of celebration

The three-hour invite-only celebration included commentary from a nearby park where thousands gathered, and it was livestreamed to many more. It kicks off a weekend of events as the center opens to the general public on Juneteenth.

"This is not a monument to the Obamas," said Valerie Jarrett, the Obama Foundation's chief executive and former Obama top adviser. "This is a tribute to all those who made this journey possible."

The opening, like the ribbon-cuttings of other presidential libraries over the years, had a heavy focus on accomplishments. This former president also expressed some regrets — such as the increase in political polarization during his two terms. "It's one of the few regrets of my presidency — that the rancor and suspicion between the parties has gotten worse instead of better," Obama said in his final State of the Union.

"Some of the exhibits reflect unfinished business," Obama said Thursday. "In some cases, my own shortcomings and mistakes."

General admission tickets for the center are sold out through the end of October. More than a million visitors a year are expected at the nearly 20-acre campus.

Vance, skeptical of foreign wars, becomes the face of Trump's Iran war deal

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — JD Vance was supposed to be spending the week promoting his new book, the kind of event a potential presidential candidate like the vice president typically uses to speak to a wide audience about his life and values ahead of a campaign.

Instead, the rollout of Vance's second book, "Communion: Finding My Way Back to Faith," has been largely crowded out by something else he's put his name on: the deal to end the Iran war.

The Republican vice president has embraced the role of chief defender of the agreement he and President Donald Trump signed with Tehran, giving a series of interviews touting it as a success, releasing a video championing it and parrying questions about it during a briefing at the White House.

It's a striking emergence for a politician who's known for his skepticism of foreign military interventions and who seemed reluctant to speak on the conflict when Trump launched it in February.

The vice president is poised to yoke himself further to the conflict's outcome, when he's expected to kick off a new phase of negotiations with Iran — though when that will occur was still up in the air Thursday.

Vance becoming a hype man for the agreement seems to be an all-in gamble that, should he decide to seek the White House in 2028, voters will reward him for being the face of ending an unpopular conflict.

It's also setting Vance up as the presumptive fall guy should the deal with Iran falter.

Trump joked about such a possibility on Wednesday.

"If it works out, I'm going to take the credit," Trump said. "If it doesn't work out, I'm blaming JD."

Officials release text of the deal after backlash

Vance on Thursday referred to Trump's comment as a joke and said he wasn't worried. He added: "Look, the entire team has worked very well on this, and we've got this thing to a very good place for the American people."

The White House in a statement called Vance the president's "right-hand man and an invaluable member of the President's talented national security team."

"That's why the Vice President was trusted to lead these negotiations alongside Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner," White House spokeswoman Olivia Wales said. "What President Trump and his team achieved on the battlefield and at the negotiating table is nothing short of remarkable and will strengthen American security for years to come."

But backlash, including from conservatives, began growing this week after the U.S. digitally signed a memorandum of understanding with Iran on Sunday.

Vance spokesman Luke Schroeder said in a statement: "It's unfortunate that some Republicans are attempting to undermine the President's efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East and ensure Iran never

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has a nuclear weapon."

Officials gave shifting answers about when they would release the text, but leaked copies of a draft were quickly met with anger and skepticism from Democratic and Republican U.S. lawmakers, as well as Israel and pro-Israel advocates. Their criticisms included concerns that the deal, meant to open a two-month negotiating period, seemed to offer Iran wins up front while guaranteeing little in return and that Trump's stated reason for launching the conflict, to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, remains unresolved.

Vance has reiterated that Iran must meet its obligations.

In response to the backlash and mounting questions, the U.S. on Wednesday provided the text of the agreement to journalists.

The agreement states that Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium, which is believed to be buried under rubble, must at minimum be diluted under international supervision. It also states that Iran shall not procure or develop nuclear weapons — a commitment it has made previously. But beyond stating that the U.S. and Iran will negotiate over Iran's nuclear program, other commitments still need to be worked out.

Criticism on the right persisted after the text was released.

Conservative radio host Erick Erickson, a hawk who has defended the war, said Wednesday: "This is an American surrender."

Texas Republican Sen. Ted Cruz, another potential 2028 presidential candidate, criticized the agreement and said to reporters, "I think the president, unfortunately, is receiving bad advice."

Trump's Operation Epic Fury has angered wings of his movement

The conflict, which has stretched into its fourth month, has cleaved Trump's broad Make America Great Again coalition and angered both those who favored a harder line against Iran and those drawn to Trump's "America First" foreign policy underscored by a message of "no new wars."

Critics, including Republicans, have already started pointing fingers in Vance's direction, questioning whether the deal resembles the 2015 nuclear agreement struck by Democratic President Barack Obama and whether this new agreement achieves Trump's stated objectives for launching the war, dubbed Operation Epic Fury.

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, a Trump ally and Iran hawk, had been skeptical of the agreement and referred to Vance on social media as "the architect of the deal."

After the agreement was released, Graham issued a tepid statement of support, saying, "I see little downside to trying."

Ben Domenech, The Daily Wire's opinion editor, said on Fox News that everything he was hearing about the deal "seems bad" and appeared to cast blame on Vance by alluding to his first book, "Hillbilly Elegy."

"Are we going to backslide into being some kind of 'hillbilly Obama' kind of GOP?" Domenech said.

GOP allies say Vance can navigate the politics

The Trump administration has not offered formal briefings to Congress on the details of the memorandum, but Vance has quietly started doing outreach to some Republican senators on Capitol Hill.

Sen. Bernie Moreno, R-Ohio, a close ally of Vance's, said the vice president would be able to assuage even critics within his own party who are skeptical of the deal because "JD is just the president's messenger, and the president's going to prove them all wrong."

Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., said the deal "certainly adds to the national security and geopolitical chops" of Vance, who spent two years as a U.S. senator for Ohio before ascending to the vice presidency.

But Cramer acknowledged the risks if the agreement goes awry.

"I guess the nice thing is, if you're not the No. 1 person, you can take credit and avoid risk, avoid the criticism, but probably not so easily," Cramer said.

Vance argues Iran is not a quagmire like the Iraq war

In interviews this week, Vance has sought to speak directly to the skeptics in his party, a preview of the difficult explanations he may be pressed to make as a candidate on the war.

On Megyn Kelly's show, the vice president said the critics "believe Iranian propaganda" about the deal. But he acknowledged some of the frustrations on the hawkish right while trying to reassure the anti-

interventionists that the Iran conflict isn't the war in Iraq, where he served as a Marine.

Democrats have stressed that even as Vance becomes the face of the Iran deal, the fate of any administration official who harbors presidential aspirations — particularly hawkish Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who has largely been quiet in the agreement's final phases — will be tied to its outcome.

"I think any member of this administration is going to rise or fall on the basis of the Iran war and the handling of the economy," said Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii.

FDA panel backs first-of-its-kind flu vaccine using mRNA technology

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MATTHEW PERRONE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new kind of flu vaccine moved a step closer to the U.S. market Thursday as federal health advisers recommended approval of the first made with the same mRNA technology that was key to ending the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Food and Drug Administration is evaluating Moderna's new shot, dubbed mFlusiva, for older Americans ahead of the winter flu season. Moderna is seeking full approval for the vaccine's use in people ages 50 to 64 — along with authorization for use in those 65 and older while it conducts additional testing.

The FDA's independent advisory committee evaluated Moderna's studies of the vaccine and voted unanimously that its benefits appear to outweigh any risks for both age groups. The FDA will consider that recommendation in making a final decision by early August.

Tens of thousands of Americans die from influenza every year, and older adults are among the most vulnerable. There are various types of flu vaccines already available in the U.S., including three specifically recommended for people 65 and older. But vaccines made with the Nobel Prize-winning mRNA technology are faster to manufacture than other types — something experts say might help if the shape-shifting flu virus mutates in a way that requires suddenly brewing new doses to match.

"Having this technology available puts us in a better position to be prepared for emerging strains in the future," said Dr. Flor Munoz-Rivas of Texas Children's Hospital, one of FDA's advisers.

In a study of 40,000 people age 50 and older, Moderna's mRNA vaccine reduced flu cases by about 27% compared with those given another routinely used vaccine brand. In a smaller study of people 65 and older, Moderna's shot also generated a strong protective immune response compared with a high-dose flu vaccine already recommended for that age group.

Data showing strong immune reactions "were very compelling," said FDA adviser Dr. Anna Durbin of Johns Hopkins University, adding that "the vaccine looks very promising."

Moderna's Dr. Rituparna Das told panelists that the company's ability to quickly manufacture mRNA vaccines that closely match the latest flu strains could prevent thousands of hospitalizations in older Americans.

Severe flu cases in the U.S. generally rise in years when the flu shot doesn't closely match the circulating virus. Moderna officials noted that flu strains for each fall's vaccines now are chosen several months earlier than the yearly recipe update for COVID-19 shots that mostly are mRNA-based — and there can be a mismatch if the flu virus mutates after the recipe is made.

At the meeting, FDA vaccine reviewer Dr. Timothy Brennan suggested the agency was open to approving the vaccine for older adults ahead of the coming flu season, despite the need for more information about its use in frail seniors or people with weak immune systems.

If it's approved, Moderna is planning its required next-step study to include 400,000 people 65 and older, half given the mRNA vaccine and the rest given one of today's special-for-seniors shots. It's supposed to repeat that study for two flu seasons.

Moderna's data showed no major safety issues although the shot did cause some temporary reactions including injection-site pain, fever, headache, tiredness and aches. The latter reactions are common in a variety of vaccines, but occurred somewhat more often than with today's flu shots. The FDA said that's typical of mRNA vaccines.

Those temporary reactions can be a signal that “your immune system is responding,” said Dr. Hayley Gans, a Stanford Medicine pediatrician and FDA adviser who stressed it will be important to explain that to vaccine recipients.

Earlier this year, Moderna’s data was at the center of a highly unusual public dispute as a then-top FDA official blocked the company’s application for its first-of-its-kind shot.

The embattled vaccine chief at the time, Dr. Vinay Prasad, said the company should have compared its shot to a high-dose flu vaccine recommended for seniors rather than a standard-dose brand. It was a sign of FDA’s heightened vaccine scrutiny under Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Moderna challenged that decision, noting that FDA staff had approved that main study’s design and citing a separate, smaller study comparing the mRNA shot with a high-dose vaccine for seniors. Days after the spat, the FDA accepted Moderna’s application.

Moderna also is studying the vaccine in younger adults and plans a separate study in 9- to 17-year-olds this fall.

Families of kids with disabilities warn Education Department changes could break a flawed system

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH, ANNIE MA and MORIAH BALINGIT AP Education Writers

For months, and sometimes longer, parents of kids with disabilities say they have waited for the Education Department to make progress on their complaints of bullying or other discrimination.

Now that the department is offloading civil rights enforcement and special education, some parents and advocates warn a process that has largely been stalled since President Donald Trump took office will see only more chaos and roadblocks.

“It’s to the point I don’t even check in anymore with the attorney,” said Nicole May, an Ohio mother. May filed a complaint in spring 2024 with the department’s Office for Civil Rights, alleging her teenage daughter was bullied over her hearing aids and was getting in trouble in class because she couldn’t hear her teachers. More than two years later, the case lacks a resolution.

Under the changes announced Tuesday, the Department of Justice will take over civil rights enforcement in schools, and the Department of Health and Human Services will oversee special education. The moves help fulfill Trump’s campaign promise to dismantle the Education Department. Linda McMahon, the education secretary, pitched the changes as a way to get more help to families of kids with disabilities.

Advocates said special education doesn’t belong in a health department, which usually treats disabilities as conditions to manage, instead of differences in how children learn. The top Republican on the Senate education committee agreed, saying he’d pursue legislation to keep special education out of Health and Human Services.

Some families already are taking discrimination cases elsewhere

For many, though, the response to the announcement was a sigh of resignation.

The Education Department’s civil rights office had long been the last resort for parents who believe their child is facing discrimination at school, with a mandate to review all complaints. Under Trump, the backlog of cases has ballooned, and resolutions have dwindled. Increasingly, attorneys say they are turning elsewhere to try to obtain justice for children.

The reaction is a marked change from a year ago, when parents and attorneys were in a panic as Education Department staff and attorneys were slashed.

The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services has shrunk by roughly a third since 2024, and the Office for Civil Rights is roughly 40% smaller. Meanwhile, in the Department of Justice, the Education Opportunities Section has shrunk by half, according to estimates provided by Justice Connection, a network of department alumni.

“I think a lot of people are mad, but they are like, ‘What are we going to do?’” said Emily Harvey, the co-legal director at Disability Justice, formerly Disability Law Colorado, who has watched her cases languish.

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When Trump took office, she had a federal complaint pending, alleging some Colorado schools were illegally rejecting enrollment from kids outside their neighborhood boundaries because they had disabilities. Harvey also has a case pending at the Department of Justice, alleging a district south of Denver restrained and secluded disabled students hundreds of times, even though the practice is supposed to be reserved for emergencies.

"I feel like they're probably collecting dust on a virtual shelf somewhere," Harvey said.

In response to the federal backlog, she helped to push for a new state law that expands the types of civil rights cases Colorado education officials can pursue.

States across the U.S. already investigate various special education complaints, including when parents allege schools aren't following a child's individualized education program, or IEP. But the Colorado legislation, signed into law in May, allows the state to pursue the types of cases typically handled at the federal level, such as those involving allegations of discrimination and harassment.

Harvey said she didn't think the federal civil rights office was ever perfect. "But I think it's become even less help for people who are trying to resolve issues," said Harvey, who worked as an Education Department civil rights attorney in 2020 and 2021.

Boston-area special education advocate Craig Haller said he's heard nothing on a complaint he filed early last year with the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights. Ever since the Trump administration started dismantling the department, he has leaned more on Massachusetts's state system for resolving special education matters.

He recently used that system to help a student whose high school didn't take into account his special education plan when it suspended him.

"I got it fixed for my client," Haller said. But without the federal Office for Civil Rights, "I can't get it fixed systematically."

Department workers say the dismantling has made their jobs harder

While only Congress can close the Education Department, McMahon, a billionaire and former CEO of World Wrestling Entertainment, has signed 10 additional agreements to give department functions to other federal agencies.

So far, those agreements have not reduced the number of employees working on specific programs. But the union that represents department workers says staff have run into issues with equipment and access at their new postings.

"It's hard to describe how inefficient the implementation of the (agreements) has been," said Rachel Gittleman, the union's president.

The Education Department said Wednesday the latest agreements will help the Office for Civil Rights run "more effectively and efficiently."

"Compliance and enforcement of federal civil rights laws will remain a priority," the department said in a written statement.

Taken together, the fracturing of programs, enforcement and oversight for disabled students across multiple agencies raised questions of what would fall through the cracks, special education advocates said.

Robyn Linscott, who directs education and family policy at The Arc of the United States, a major disability rights group, recalled attending a three-hour listening session the Education Department hosted in January. Families, educators and advocates described barriers to accessing proper support and services. Although they acknowledged breaks in the system, not a single parent advocated for moving oversight of special education to Health and Human Services.

Still, she isn't surprised the Trump administration moved the program anyway.

"It has only been 24 hours, but I think we anticipated this move for over a year," she said on Wednesday.

In Congress, senators from both sides of the aisle said they would try to stop the move to put special education in Health and Human Services.

Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana said he would "publicly commit" to working with his Democratic colleague, Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia, on legislative action that would push the administration to change course. Cassidy, who lost a primary election this spring and has less than six months left in his Senate term,

has personal knowledge of the education challenges faced by kids with disabilities: His wife co-founded a network of charter schools for students with dyslexia.

If special education is moved, he said Wednesday, it should go to the Labor Department. That agency, he said, is better positioned to support people with disabilities as they learn and work.

Ultimately, what matters to parents is whether they can get the services their children need, said Rob Harris, an IEP advocate in Colorado. Families spend an inordinate amount of time navigating systems that should be working together to serve children, but often aren't. Harris has navigated those systems himself: His 19-year-old daughter is blind.

"Families don't experience the government through organizational charts," Harris said. "We experience it through the services our children receive."

Stranded ships have begun transiting the Strait of Hormuz, maritime data company says

By MAE ANDERSON Associated Press

Major shipowners have begun moving vessels through the Strait of Hormuz since the U.S. and Iran signed an interim agreement to end their war, maritime data company Lloyd's List Intelligence said Thursday.

In a media briefing, Richard Meade, editor in chief of Lloyd's List, said for the first time in 110 days, ships owned by major companies were crossing the strait after effectively being marooned there since February.

The strait is a critical passageway for the world's oil and natural gas. Before the war, the waterway off Iran's coast carried a fifth of the world's crude oil. Its closure during the war has created a historic energy crisis.

Lloyd's List did not say how many ships were transiting through or had passed through the strait as of Thursday. It said tankers controlled by major ship owners Grimaldi Group, Cosco, Knutsen and NYK had passed through the strait. Two Iran-flagged, National Iranian Tanker Company-owned, sanctioned crude oil tankers entered the strait, according to Lloyd's List.

Meanwhile, U.S. Vice President JD Vance said Thursday that the U.S. Navy lifted its blockade of the strait to allow some ships through Iranian ports.

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani wrote on X that an Italian merchant ship owned by the Grimaldi Group was among the first vessels to transit the strait after the agreement's signing.

Maritime data and tracking company Kpler said it observed six verified ship crossings on Wednesday and another 11 on Thursday.

Phillip Belcher, marine director of Intertanko, a trade group for global independent tanker owners, said the main central route of the Strait of Hormuz was still closed and has an estimated 80 mines that need to be cleared. But ships have been passing through the smaller northern route, which goes through Iranian waters, and the southern route, which goes through Omani waters.

"Those two routes now seem to be fully open," Belcher said.

However, it will take weeks or months to fully reopen the strait, and the two alternative routes don't have as much capacity as the central passage in the Strait of Hormuz.

"This is like a highway where the road in the middle is closed and you're using that hard shoulder," Belcher said. "That's now being used as the main route. We need to get back to having the highway open."

Lloyd's List estimated that 550 merchant ships will need to prepare to exit the Persian Gulf, including 160 tankers, 200 bulk carriers, 60 container ships and 10 vehicle carriers.

Kenyan McDuffie concedes DC mayoral primary to Janeese Lewis George

By GARY FIELDS and MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Washington, D.C., mayoral candidate Kenyan McDuffie on Thursday conceded the Democratic primary race to Janeese Lewis George.

Although the official certification of the primary race is continuing, McDuffie said in a statement that “it is clear that the voters have chosen a different path.” The former member of the D.C. council said he had contacted Lewis George and congratulated her. He thanked his supporters and urged them to continue working for the city.

“The campaign may be over, but the work of building a safer, more affordable, more prosperous city continues.”

The Associated Press has not declared a winner in the race. Lewis George had a little less than 53% of the vote Thursday morning, which is just a few percentage points above the 50% threshold to avoid ranked choice voting.

The city is scheduled to release preliminary ranked choice voting results on Sunday. AP will call the race before then if it is clear that the ranked choice process will be avoided.

Lewis George has pledged to aggressively stand up to federal intervention into Washington, D.C.’s, affairs, setting up a potential showdown with President Donald Trump over his administration’s moves to challenge the city’s limited autonomy.

If the results stand, Lewis George is likely to win November’s general election in the heavily Democratic city. The winner in the general election will replace Muriel Bowser, who decided not to run again after three terms.

Lewis George would join Robert White Jr., who won the Democratic primary for the district’s delegate to Congress, as the top local officials who likely will contend with the federal government’s intentions for the city. They each campaigned on a promise to take a harder line than their predecessors against the Trump administration’s moves on the district, including its deployment of the National Guard on an ongoing, open-ended mission meant to fight crime.

“As mayor, I will work with anyone who makes D.C. safer,” Lewis George told a crowd of cheering supporters Tuesday night, “but I will also stand up to Trump.”

Washington has limited autonomy and federal leaders retain significant control over local affairs, including approval of the budget and laws passed by the D.C. Council.

Trump further encroached on that autonomy last year when he briefly federalized the city’s police force and deployed an ongoing law enforcement surge that included the National Guard. His efforts to downsize the federal government also roiled the capital region, costing thousands of people their jobs. And he has been reshaping the city by renovating storied landmarks and putting his name or image on buildings.

Lewis George, a self-described democratic socialist and a member of the D.C. Council, has already come under fire from Trump, who last week threatened to place the city under federal control if she won.

“Maybe we’d take back Washington, run it on the federal basis,” he said.

Lewis George, 38, and a third generation Washingtonian, has vowed to overrule an executive order by the city’s police chief permitting local law enforcement to cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents. Lewis George argued the order “hurt the trust of our community.”

She also pledged to use any levers available to her through the city’s home rule compact to resist what she called authoritarian infringements on the district’s local governance.

“We have legal tools we can use to fight back,” she told the AP in an interview before the vote. “And we know that when we have gone to court, we’ve won.”

Bowser found herself walking a fine line between staying in Trump’s good graces and responding to the concerns of constituents, many of whom said she didn’t push back hard enough on Trump’s actions. Eleanor Holmes Norton, the 18-term, 89-year-old delegate to Congress, meanwhile, faced mounting concern from critics who said she wasn’t forcefully pushing back on the Trump administration’s moves against the city.

Ukrainian drones set a Moscow refinery ablaze in a major attack on the Russian capital

By BARRY HATTON Associated Press

Ukraine struck a major Moscow oil refinery Thursday for a second time in a week, sending huge plumes of black smoke over the capital and disrupting hundreds of flights at its airports in one of its biggest drone attacks since Russia's full-scale invasion over four years ago, officials said.

Ukraine has repeatedly targeted Russian oil facilities, aiming to cut Moscow's revenue for the war and make Russians feel the consequences of the invasion. Some areas have reported fuel shortages.

The attack by dozens of drones came hours after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he had held "an important coordination call" with the presidents of the United States and France and had won key pledges of further support from this week's G7 summit.

"If Ukraine is going to burn, your Moscow will burn too," Zelenskyy said, adding that the attack was part of Kyiv's effort to bring Russian President Vladimir Putin to the negotiating table. "It is time to end the aggression, time to end this war."

Ukrainian attack embarrasses Putin again

The Moscow attack was the latest embarrassment for Putin. Ukrainian drones attacked his hometown of St. Petersburg earlier this month as he welcomed foreign VIPs to his showcase economic forum in the city.

Putin on Thursday was in Kazan, some 700 kilometers (430 miles) east of Moscow, hosting leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as Russia seeks to bolster business and other ties with the regional bloc.

Russia's state-controlled TV channels only briefly mentioned the attack on Moscow. Pro-Kremlin newspapers reported it, with some praising the performance of air defenses while noting that the strike highlighted the need to further strengthen the defensive shield around the capital.

Vyacheslav Volodin, speaker of the lower house of Russia's parliament, warned that Moscow would respond by ramping up its strikes.

"Their action will lead to our counteraction and launching harsher blows, with more powerful weapons," Volodin said in televised remarks.

Some Russian hawks urged the Kremlin to respond with nuclear weapons. Nationalist Konstantin Malofeyev criticized the military for "fighting at half-strength in a gentlemanlike way."

"War means victory at any cost," Malofeyev wrote on his Telegram channel, suggesting the use of "the nuclear weapons that our ancestors created and stockpiled while mobilizing the entire country's strength precisely for this purpose — to win."

Fires rage at Moscow refinery

Thick, black smoke and occasional flames spewed from the Moscow Oil Refinery amid its red-and-white smokestacks on the southeastern edge of the city, about 15 kilometers (9 miles) from the Kremlin. Sooty, black rain fell on cars, according to local video.

"One of the most popular questions asked by Muscovites this morning is 'What is going on?'" Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said in a post on X. "I can answer. Your country started a war of aggression against ours. For years, it has been killing our people. Now that you know what's going on, ask Putin when he is planning to end it."

The refinery is one of Russia's biggest, according to its website, producing more than a third of the Moscow region's fuel. It was last attacked by Ukraine on Tuesday, but officials said that fire was swiftly put out.

Thursday's fire at the refinery was "largely contained," Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said hours afterward, adding that remaining hotspots were being extinguished.

As Ukraine pressed its strikes on Russia's energy infrastructure, fuel supplies appeared to be under strain. Gas station chains in multiple regions have introduced restrictions on what drivers could buy. Russian independent news outlet Agentstvo reported that one out of every four gas stations has introduced some kind of restrictions.

Authorities in the capital said in a statement hours after the attack that "supplies of oil products to

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Moscow and the work of all gas stations in the city continue as normal.”

The attack also temporarily halted flights from four Moscow airports, transport and aviation authorities said. The Russian business daily Kommersant counted more than 500 delayed or canceled flights at the airports, based on their online flight information.

In the greater Moscow region, a drone hit a residential building in the town of Zhukovsky, according to Gov. Andrei Vorobyov. Buildings elsewhere were damaged by drone debris, injuring 17 people, including two children, he added.

Ukraine seeks more help from NATO, EU

“Russia is on the back foot: militarily, economically and politically,” EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said on X after meeting Thursday with Ukrainian Defense Minister Mykhailo Fedorov. “Now is the time to provide Ukraine with even greater support and to exert even more pressure on Russia to end the war.”

Zelenskyy held talks Thursday in Brussels with NATO and European Union leaders, and the German and Ukrainian defense ministers signed an agreement to jointly develop an air defense system to counter ballistic missiles. Zelenskyy described it as the start of an “anti-ballistic missile coalition” and invited others to join.

Russia has relentlessly struck Ukraine with those types of missiles, which air defenses struggle to counter.

Russia says it downed over 500 Ukrainian drones

The Russian Defense Ministry said its air defenses overnight shot down 555 Ukrainian drones over multiple regions, with almost 200 intercepted as they approached Moscow. That was roughly double the number of drones that Russia launched at Ukraine overnight, according to the Ukrainian air force.

“If Putin does not want to end this war and wants to continue it, we will not sit quietly — we will respond,” Zelenskyy said in a voice message to a group chat with journalists.

He has accepted an unconditional ceasefire demanded by U.S. President Donald Trump, but Putin has refused, and U.S.-led peace efforts have fizzled.

Ukraine disrupts Russian supply lines

Along with pledges of more diplomatic and military help at the G7 summit, Ukraine recently has gained momentum on the battlefield against Russia’s bigger army, thanks to its high-tech drones, Western officials and analysts say. Longer-range drones are choking Russian supply lines in occupied regions of Ukraine, in addition to disrupting oil production.

French President Emmanuel Macron said the G7 summit was “very important for Ukraine” because its supporters — crucially including the U.S. — vowed to help it, although he provided no details. The U.S. under Trump has cut back assistance to Ukraine, leaving the Europeans as the biggest suppliers of military and financial aid. Trump and Zelenskyy have had a sometimes strained relationship.

“America is with us on Ukraine, that is very important,” Macron said as he and Trump left the Palace of Versailles near Paris.

In other developments Thursday, Russia struck the city of Sumy in northeastern Ukraine with two glide bombs that killed a 64-year-old man who was fishing in a river, said Oleh Hryhorov, head of the regional military administration. A Russian strike on the central city of Dnipro killed one man and wounded nine, said Oleksandr Hanzha, head of the Dnipropetrovsk regional military administration.

Today in History: June 19

Union troops arrive in Galveston on ‘Juneteenth’

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, June 19, the 170th day of 2026. There are 195 days left in the year. This is Juneteenth.

Today in history:

On June 19, 1865, Union troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, with news that the Civil War was over and that all remaining enslaved people in Texas were free — an event celebrated as the Juneteenth national holiday in the U.S.

Also on this date:

In 1910, the first-ever Father’s Day in the United States was celebrated in Spokane, Washington. (President

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Richard Nixon would make Father's Day a federally recognized annual observation through a proclamation in 1972.)

In 1953, Julius Rosenberg, 35, and his wife, Ethel, 37, convicted of conspiring to pass U.S. atomic secrets to the Soviet Union, were executed at Sing Sing Prison in Ossining, New York; they were the first American civilians to be executed for espionage.

In 1963, Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova completed her historic flight as the first woman in space, landing safely at the conclusion of the Vostok 6 mission.

In 1964, the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 was approved by the U.S. Senate, 73-27, after surviving a lengthy filibuster.

In 1975, former Chicago organized crime boss Sam Giancana was shot to death in the basement of his home in Oak Park, Illinois; the killing has never been solved.

In 1986, University of Maryland basketball star Len Bias, the first draft pick of the Boston Celtics two days earlier, suffered a fatal cocaine-induced seizure.

In 1987, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Edwards v. Aguillard*, struck down a Louisiana law requiring any public school teaching the theory of evolution to teach creation science as well.

In 1991, the last Soviet troops withdrew from Hungary after a decades-long presence, retreating amid the collapse of the Soviet bloc and under pressure from Hungary's new democratic government.

In 2018, President Donald Trump signed the nation's 10 millionth patent, awarding it to a California employee of the Raytheon Co. who found a new way to get real-time readings from large laser radars.

Today's Birthdays: Hall of Fame auto racer Shirley Muldowney is 86. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi is 81. Author Tobias Wolff is 81. Author Salman Rushdie is 79. Actor Phylicia Rashad is 78. Rock singer Ann Wilson (Heart) is 76. Actor Kathleen Turner is 72. Singer-choreographer-TV personality Paula Abdul is 64. TV host Lara Spencer is 57. Actor Jean Dujardin is 54. Actor Robin Tunney is 54. Basketball Hall of Famer Dirk Nowitzki is 48. Actor Zoe Saldaña is 48. Rapper Macklemore is 43. Actor Paul Dano is 42. NBA player Jordan Poole is 27. Actor Millie Gibson is 22.