

Groton Daily Independent

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Saturday, June 27

U14 Legion at Vern Jark Tournament, Aberdeen
Sr. Legion at The ROCK Tournament, Madison
U8 Baseball - Groton Tournament (Red & Blue)

Groton Daily Independent
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Sunday, June 28

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 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.

U14 Legion at Vern Jark Tournament, Aberdeen
Sr. Legion at The ROCK Tournament, Madison

U12 Softball hosts Mobridge, DH, 2 p.m., (B&W)

U10 Softball hosts Mobridge, DH, 4 p.m., (G&W)

U8 Softball hosts Mobridge, DH, 2 p.m. (B&W)

U14 Softball hosts Mobridge, DH, 4 p.m.

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1440

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

X Games Reimagined

The Summer X Games kicks off in Sacramento, California, after a multimillion-dollar, private equity-backed revamp that includes new team-based competition. Scroll for the schedule here.

The sporting event credited with popularizing action sports like skateboarding and BMX biking is shifting from stand-alone, individual competitions to a three-event season featuring mixed teams with five men and five women. Private equity firm MSP Sports Capital envisioned the new format after purchasing X Games from ESPN in 2022. Several of the teams, which represent cities like New York and São Paulo, are also owned by private equity firms. Investors see parallels between the fragmented action sports market and the WNBA five years ago, which has seen a 345% surge in average franchise values since 2024.

The first X Games were held in Rhode Island in 1995, under the name Extreme Games. There, world-renowned skateboarder Tony Hawk completed a near-perfect run in the skateboard vert.

Former Trump adviser John Bolton pleads guilty in classified files case.

Bolton yesterday pleaded guilty to one of 18 counts of mishandling classified information from his 17-month tenure as national security adviser during the first Trump administration. Bolton, who has become a critic of President Donald Trump, admitted to sharing an electronic diary entry with two family members. He will pay \$2.25M and faces up to 60 months in prison when he is sentenced, Oct. 28.

US strikes Iran in response to alleged ceasefire violation.

The US military yesterday struck missile and drone storage locations as well as coastal radar sites. The move came after Iran allegedly deployed at least four drones at ships traveling through the Strait of Hormuz Thursday, and one reportedly hit the upper deck of a Singapore-flagged cargo ship. The interim US-Iran deal signed last week stipulates that commercial ships have safe passage through the strait.

Separately, Lebanon and Israel yesterday signed a framework agreement for the partial withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. The deal, mediated by the US, is predicated on dismantling the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group.

Mistrial declared in case over origins of Palisades fire.

A federal judge declared the mistrial after two days of jury deliberation failed to yield a unanimous verdict on the fatal January 2025 fires in Los Angeles. Jonathan Rinderknecht, a 30-year-old former Uber driver, is accused of starting a small fire on a popular hiking trail that smoldered and metastasized into the roughly 23,000-acre Palisades fire. The federal government said it plans to retry the case.

OpenAI to limit its most powerful model yet to government-approved partners.

The artificial intelligence company yesterday framed the restrictions as a short-term fix while Silicon Valley and federal officials devise more robust AI regulations. The new model, called GPT-5.6 Sol, reportedly excels at coding, biology, and cybersecurity. The move comes weeks after Anthropic suspended its next-generation "Mythos-class" AI model on a government directive.

Separately, new reports suggest OpenAI is leaning toward delaying its initial public offering until next year.

King Charles and Queen Camilla will not live in Buckingham Palace after revamp.

The royal couple said the 775-room palace will reopen next spring after a 10-year, \$487 million taxpayer-funded renovation, with increased public access and a primary role as an office and ceremonial center. They will be the first monarchs since 1837 not to live in the palace, instead staying at their longtime home, Clarence House.

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Separately, this week, King Charles became the first British monarch to disclose his tax bill, revealing he is one of the country's top 100 taxpayers. The royal family began paying taxes only in 1993 and is not subject to an inheritance tax.

Ukraine launches one of the largest drone attacks since war with Russia began.

Russia-held Crimea declared a state of emergency yesterday after Ukraine launched one of the largest drone attack on record since Russia's invasion over four years ago. Russia reported intercepting roughly 660 drones overnight Thursday, across roughly a dozen regions. The attack came hours after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy ordered a "40-day influence operation," widely interpreted to mean an escalation of attacks.

Scientists virtually unwrap delicate ancient Roman scroll, revealing new books.

The scrolls were found beneath the ashes of a town near Pompeii, in the 18th century, but they were so charred that attempts to physically unroll them reduced them to ash. Now, using advanced imaging and artificial intelligence, researchers have recovered text from some of the oldest scrolls. Among the findings are references to previously unknown books by philosopher Philodemus. Over 600 scrolls remain unread.

Humankind(ness)

Dear readers— In honor of Father's Day this month, we're pausing our usual act of kindness stories to share reader submissions about dads. Enjoy!

"Growing up, my father took lots of time to teach me math, even attending nighttime tutoring sessions with me ... all to no avail! Fast-forward to me as a single mom, helping my then-young son with his homework, and the lesson was math. Incredibly, I easily walked my son through his math problems, then called my father and let him know that all his hard work had finally paid off! I can still hear the laughter we shared!"

— Debora M. in Cary, North Carolina

"I remember the first fish I ever caught when I was 4½. My dad was fishing with a fly rod and asked me to hold it while he lit a cigarette. I held it, and almost immediately, I felt something tugging on it. I told my dad, and he said to reel it in. I know now that he already had a fish on the line when he handed the rod to me. I'm 76 years old and remember like it was yesterday. That's the kind of dad I had. Many more memories over the years, but that one stands out in my mind!"

— Bob W. in Milam, Texas

"My father had a small business in our village for 46 years. He quietly provided this ongoing service. At his funeral, people I did not even know came up to me saying, 'Oh, honey, we never would have had Christmas except your dad said, "Just get things and we'll figure it out later."' Others told me, 'On a late Saturday night, we called your dad and he opened so we could get clothing for a family member's burial.' Two of many stories showing his quiet dedication, caring, and giving. Those qualities have been powerful models in my life. He took seriously the do good, but let no one know about it! In fact, he's probably looking down at me right now thinking, 'She should not be sharing this!' I was blessed to have him as an amazing role model."

— Martha J. in Edmore, Michigan

Humankind(ness) is a reader-built corner of joy. So, what act(s) of kindness did you experience this week? [Tell us here.](#)

GROTON 1912 ★ HISTORICAL JAIL

★
315 1ST AVE. E, GROTON

Open House

**SUNDAY,
JULY 12,**

★
10 A.M. TO 3 P.M.
★



★ *Come see the
newly restored jail* ★

Effective Immediately

CITY OF GROTON WATER RESTRICTIONS

*We appreciate your immediate cooperation
to keep our water levels safe.*

If your house number is odd, you may only water
on odd days (& **only before 11am or after 6pm**).

If your house number is even, you may only water
on even days (& **only before 11am or after 6pm**).



**Absolutely NO WATERING
between 11am - 6pm.**

Failure to comply will result in fines.
After a warning is issued, fines will start
at \$50 and double with each offense.

Paving Project Scheduled to begin on S.D. Highway 27 South of Langford

LANGFORD, S.D. – On Monday, June 29, 2026, an asphalt concrete paving project is scheduled to begin on S.D. Highway 27, approximately two miles south of Langford. This operation is part of a larger asphalt paving project on Highway 27 in the Aberdeen region. The contractor will begin cold milling and then pave asphalt concrete when the cold milling is completed on this 14-mile stretch.

Traffic Impacts: During paving operations, traffic will be reduced to one lane. Traffic will be guided through the work zone with flaggers and a pilot car during the paving operations.

The prime contractor for this \$4.2 million project is Bituminous Paving, Inc. of Odessa, MN.

The expected completion date for the asphalt paving by Langford is Friday, Aug. 21, 2026. The overall project completion date is Friday, Oct. 30, 2026.

Groton Legion Post 39 With Tough Game Against Hayfield Varsity Vikings

By GameChanger Media

Groton Legion Post 39 had trouble keeping up with Hayfield Varsity Vikings in a 9-0 loss on Friday.

Hayfield Varsity Vikings got on the board in the top of the first inning after Austin Dahle singled down the left field line, Axel Meek singled to left field, and Layne Nelson grounded out, each scoring one run.

Kael Steele earned the win for Hayfield Varsity Vikings. The southpaw allowed one hit and zero runs over five and one-third innings, striking out 10 and walking seven. Jarrett Erdmann took the loss for Groton Legion Post 39. The hurler went four and two-thirds innings, giving up six runs (two earned) on five hits, striking out eight and walking four.

Alex Abeln led Groton Legion Post 39 with one hit in three at bats. Groton Legion Post 39 had a strong eye at the plate, accumulating seven walks for the game. Carter Simon and Braeden Fliehs led the team with two bases on balls each.

Dahle drove the middle of the lineup, leading Hayfield Varsity Vikings with three runs batted in. The right-handed hitter went 3-for-4 on the day. Steele collected two hits for Hayfield Varsity Vikings in three at bats. Hayfield Varsity Vikings had patience at the plate, piling up six walks for the game. Ben Nelson and Haden Simonson led the team with two free passes each.

Next up for Groton Legion Post 39 is a game at West Central Legion 18U on Saturday.

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Groton Legion Post 39's Alex Abeln Takes Hit Streak Into Game Against West Central Legion 18U

Groton Legion Post 39's Alex Abeln takes a 5-game hitting streak into their matchup against West Central Legion 18U on Saturday at Madison. Abeln has gone 7-15 during the streak with one extra base hit.

Last Time Out:

West Central Legion 18U topped Beresford Area Post 72 Sr's 4-2 at Madison,SD.

Player Highlight:

Jordan Schwan hits and pitches for Groton Legion Post 39. Schwan primarily plays left field on the field. Schwan has hit for power this season with one home run, two triples, and one double among Schwan's nine hits. Schwan has induced four groundballs on five balls in play this season.

About Groton Legion Post 39:

Groton Legion Post 39 has a record of 8-6 this season. Carter Simon's 1.081 OPS leads Groton Legion Post 39. The infielder has a 0.490 OBP and a 0.591 slugging percentage this season. Jarrett Erdmann leads Groton Legion Post 39 with 23 and one-third innings pitched. The lefty has a 4.20 ERA this season. Karsten Fliehs leads Groton Legion Post 39 with 78 total fielding chances this season. Fliehs's primary position is catcher.

About West Central Legion 18U:

West Central Legion 18U has three wins against seven losses this season. Karson Vessells's 1.100 OPS leads West Central Legion 18U. The catcher has a 0.500 OBP and a 0.600 slugging percentage this season. Kane Grace leads West Central Legion 18U with 12 innings pitched. Hayden Whiting leads West Central Legion 18U with 36 total fielding chances this season. Whiting's primary position is catcher.

Land for Sale

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& northern
Clark County
646 tillable acres,
133 pasture**

**For more info, visit:
www.keminklandco.com**



**Rod Kemink, Broker
605-880-2112
Watertown, SD**



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.*





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Podcast: Trump, Rushmore, fireworks, Little Bighorn and how it's all related

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

LONE HILL: *For me personally, you know, the, the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence is very, I guess like a slap in the face, you know, it's, you know, we, It's not really a priority for us, you know, we, we kind of view it as a betrayal, you know, they stole our, our, they stole our lands, basically.*

O'BRIEN: Welcome back to Searchlight Report, a podcast from South Dakota Searchlight that brings you up to date on policy and politics in the state. I'm your host Meghan O'Brien.

A fireworks show at Mount Rushmore next week will mark the two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. President Donald Trump's Freedom 250 planning group announced earlier this week that he will attend.

While state and federal leaders are preparing for the display, a different commemoration drew thousands to eastern Montana this week — the 150th anniversary of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, also known as the Battle of the Greasy Grass.

You just heard from Trina Lone Hill, a former historic preservation officer for the Oglala Sioux Tribe. She currently serves on the tribal council.

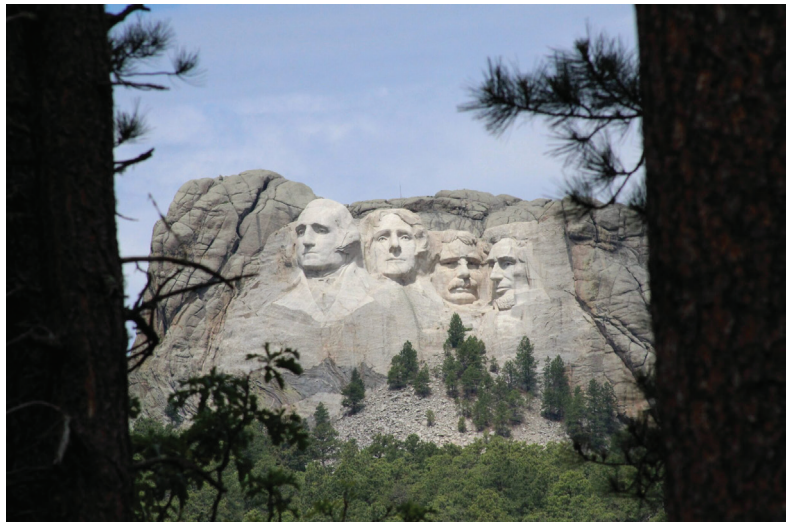
LONE HILL: *A priority for us and our people, we're celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Little Bighorn, or Greasy Grass, that battle where we actually defeated the government, the U.S. government in battle. And it's a big commemoration for our people, the Northern Arapaho, Northern Cheyenne, and the Lakota people. So that's what we're, we're actually focusing on.*

The conflict on June 25th, 1876, was a major victory for some Great Plains tribes. It happened during the United States' encroachment on their land, after the discovery of gold in the Black Hills.

This year, representatives of those tribes worked with the National Park Service to commemorate the anniversary at the battlefield in Montana. Lone Hill was one of more than a dozen speakers at the event. It also featured cultural demonstrations, and presentations from historians and descendants of battle participants.

LONE HILL: *This is something I said we have to keep going for our families. We can't lose that history. Craig Howe wants to preserve that history too. He's a founder of the Center for American Indian Research and Native Studies, also known as CAIRNS. He's a citizen of the Oglala Sioux Tribe.*

HOWE: *We're a small research and education center that focuses on issues important to American Indian communities, and also bringing awareness of these communities to the wider population.*



A June 2025 view of Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota's Black Hills. (Photo by Seth

Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

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The signing of the Declaration of Independence didn't have an immediate effect on tribes in the Great Plains region, he says.

HOWE: *These tribes existed prior to the founding of the United States and therefore, these tribes have inherent rights. They're not rights given to them by the United States. These are inherent rights that existed prior to the United States. This is critical to understand.*

The relationship between the United States and tribes is like a rollercoaster, Howe says. As the country expanded, so did policies and programs that were aimed at erasing Indigenous languages, cultures and ways of life.

HOWE: *And then through time, we can just go through federal policy and practice, and we can see that sometimes the United States, as the government, supports and promotes the perpetuation of tribes as these nations within a nation. And other times they want to get rid of these tribes and, you know, like in the 1950s, we had termination. That was a policy of the United States was to terminate these tribes, and, and terminate all the responsibilities that the United States has to these tribes.*

Howe wants there to be more consistent education about Native American history, not just a conversation during a specific anniversary.

HOWE: *So, I think to display that history really, I mean, the, the, a birthday is an opportunity to do that, but in this case when we're talking about, I just think it should be embedded in the formal educational system in our country. That it shouldn't, we shouldn't need some 250 years before we talk about it again.*

Recognizing that history is important to the state's Secretary of Tribal Relations Algin Young.

YOUNG: *As we commemorate America's history, it's essential to recognize how deeply it is connected to the heritage of South Dakota's nine tribal nations.*

He's a member of the South Dakota America 250 commission — a group of Cabinet members, the state historian and other appointees formed by an executive order by former Governor Kristi Noem.

During her tenure, Noem's relationship with tribal nations in South Dakota became tense.

At one point in time, she was banned from all nine reservations after she accused tribal leaders of benefiting from drug cartel activity and said Native American children quote "don't have any hope." Young says her successor, Governor Larry Rhoden, is working to rebuild those relationships.

YOUNG: *It's a complex relationship, and, you know, I feel Governor Rhoden has done an outstanding job on reaching out to the tribes and trying to build that relationship. As many have said, it's a reset.*

Serving alongside Young is Ben Jones, the state historian. He also chairs the state's America 250 commission.

Jones researched articles from newspapers around the state during the country's bicentennial, including the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

JONES: *And the thing that stuck out to me was in the, in December of 1976, the Argus had an article, and there were two or three articles from tribal members that the American Indian representation of the bicentennial in South Dakota was next to zero.*

He wanted it to be an inclusive celebration this time.

Jones and Young both made phone calls and sent emails and invitations to tribal leaders in the state to be a part of the celebrations.

Jones was disappointed at the lack of response.

JONES: *The Declaration of Independence is for all. And certainly, I'm very familiar with the history of this region and the Lakota and Dakota and the Mandan and Arikara, all of the people who were here first. So there was just a strong desire personally, and I think among all the members of the commission that we include everybody and everybody who lives in South Dakota to be a part of this.*

Lone Hill, of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, says the declaration's language toward Indigenous people is part of why she's focusing instead on the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

LONE HILL: *They call us savages in that Declaration of Independence, you know, they call us merciless Indian savages, you know, we're still referred to as that, they don't see us as human.*

Lone Hill was referencing the declaration's list of the British king's alleged "injuries and usurpations." That part of the declaration says, quote, "He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us and has en-

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deavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, ” end quote.

I asked Jones about that language.

JONES: *That should invite people to question why that is. I find it very lazy, frankly, that people read that and infuse in that what they want to see about somebody based on their current understanding of today and the politics of today or in their own lifetime, in their own experience.*

Members of South Dakota tribes have also raised concerns specific to the Black Hills. The Lakota creation story is tied to Wind Cave in the southern Black Hills, and multiple sites in the hills correspond to celestial features in Lakota spirituality.

Lone Hill says the cultural significance of the area wasn't considered when federal leaders decided to issue a permit for the fireworks display.

LONE HILL: *These areas around Mount Rushmore, you know, we have burials, we have human remains, we have, historic, I mean, you know, we have petroglyphs, we have medicines. All of these things are affected by those chemicals that are in those fireworks, you know, the watershed, the water table, everything is in danger, and they just don't consider that.*

It's one of the reasons why people protested the last iteration of the fireworks display in 2020.

Law enforcement arrested more than a dozen people when they blocked the road to Mount Rushmore that day. The charges were later dropped.

Many Native American people remain opposed to fireworks at Mount Rushmore. That's according to Nick Tilsen, the CEO of NDN Collective.

TILSEN: *It doesn't make sense to do fireworks at Mount Rushmore. So, my guess is that Lakota people all across the homelands from this area won't sit on the sidelines.*

The protest was about more than fireworks, Tilsen says. The memorial, which is in the Black Hills, is on land that tribes lost to broken treaties.

Many Native American people and groups, including Tilsen's organization, advocate for the return of the Black Hills to Lakota ownership.

TILSEN: *To think that this is about fireworks at Mount Rushmore is to simplify, oversimplify the issue, and I think that we need to be having meaningful conversation about what the return of the land in the Black Hills is, back to Indian people.*

The National Park Service told South Dakota Searchlight it established a First Amendment area that's been designated to "accommodate any demonstrations." The service did not say where that area would be.

Trump will attend the fireworks this year. The announcement came from Trump's Freedom 250 planning group, and from Governor Larry Rhoden's office.

Trump also attended the last fireworks show at Mount Rushmore in 2020. Then-Governor Kristi Noem asked him to reinstate the display. He said then that "nobody knew why" the fireworks had been done away with in the first place.

In reality, the reasons were well-documented. The National Park Service approved fireworks at Mount Rushmore during the 1990s and early 2000s. But after concerns about wildfires sparked by embers, water pollution from fireworks chemicals and litter from exploded fireworks packaging, the agency rejected the displays for 11 years.

During past shows, dozens of firefighters were stationed throughout the surrounding forest to put out stray sparks before they became larger fires.

Cheryl Schreier, a former superintendent at Mount Rushmore, still has the same concerns.

SCHREIER: *So, if you place thousands of people in an area like that, and you have fire starts from fireworks, potentially, you have to evacuate all of those people on limited roadways that are going to be already impacted by a huge number of support staff, and vehicles, as well. It doesn't make a lot of sense.*

The National Park Service told Searchlight it is working closely with the U-S Wildland Fire Service, Black Hills National Forest and local agencies to ensure protection for the public and the park.

The Park Service mostly relied on findings from a 2020 environmental assessment to justify this year's event, with some updated information.

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This year's report finds that endangered species, including the northern long-eared bat, are in the area. Noise from the fireworks could cause young bats to suffer stress ranging from possible separation from their mothers to potential death.

The species has experienced severe population decline in recent years due to a fungal disease.

The report also considered an alternative to the fireworks — using drones to create a light show in the case of potentially high wildfire danger from drought or other factors. But the National Park Service decided against that plan, due to security concerns.

This year's environmental assessment says that drone shows have become common in recent years, but drone use at the Memorial is generally prohibited for visitors. At next week's show, they could create concerns for quote "VIPs with heightened security requirements."

South Dakota's Department of Tourism signed a \$700,000 contract to fund the fireworks show earlier this year. That contract included the cost of fireworks and lighting elements — which the department says can be used if environmental conditions require an alternative to fireworks.

The department did not release further details about the lighting elements. Neither did a California-based company called Pyro Spectaculars, the company that got the contract. Pyro Spectaculars' website says it can produce drone light shows.

The contract is double what the state paid for fireworks in 2020, when there was no backup light show planned. It also gives the National Park Service the authority to enforce a go/no-go protocol for inclement weather like rain, high winds and other weather conditions.

Parts of Pennington County, where Mount Rushmore is located, have been experiencing some of the most extreme drought conditions in the state. Two wildfires in the area earlier this year burned more than 14,000 acres combined.

The event, officially known as South Dakota's Freedom 250 Mount Rushmore Fireworks Celebration, will have 4,800 attendees who won tickets in an online lottery. That's about 3,000 less than the amount ticketed in 2020. The National Park Service will close all roads at the park boundary at 11 P-M on July 2. On July 3, the park will only be open to ticket holders.

That's all we have for this episode of Searchlight Report. Audio for this episode of the podcast came from recordings by South Dakota Searchlight.

The podcast is based on reporting by South Dakota Searchlight's staff — editor Seth Tupper, senior reporter John Hult and reporters Joshua Haiar, Makenzie Huber and me.

I write the scripts and produce the audio, with editing by Seth Tupper.

South Dakota Searchlight is part of States Newsroom, the nation's largest nonprofit news organization. Until next time, I'm South Dakota Searchlight's Meghan O'Brien with the Searchlight Report.

Republican governor candidates spar over prison policy in dueling speeches

Doeden and Rhoden give back-to-back addresses at state party convention

BY: SETH TUPPER

RAPID CITY — The two remaining Republican candidates for governor of South Dakota clashed over prison policy Friday night in what might have been the closest thing to a debate that voters will see before the party's nomination is decided in a July 28 runoff election.

The candidates delivered back-to-back speeches to a crowd of hundreds during the Republican state convention at The Monument events center.

Aberdeen businessman Toby Doeden said too many people in South Dakota return to prison after being released.

"Our recidivism rate has peaked at 50% — third worst in the country," Doeden said. "We have a higher recidivism rate than almost every liberal state in the country."

The 50% figure comes from the state Department of Corrections' latest annual report, which says half

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Toby Doeden, left, and Gov. Larry Rhoden deliver speeches to the South Dakota Republican Convention on June 26, 2026, at The Monument events center in Rapid City. (Photos

by Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

of the people released from prison in South Dakota return within three years of their release.

Where South Dakota ranks nationally is difficult to ascertain due to differences in the ways that states define recidivism. Rhoden has acknowledged the rate is "higher than any of our neighboring states."

Rhoden responded to Doeden's criticism, saying "he's right: our recidivism rate is way too high."

"And why is that? Because we have no room," Rhoden said. "We have three prisoners stacked in rooms that are built for one. We have no room for programming."

Rhoden said he's solving that problem with a new men's prison he convinced legislators to build. The \$650 million facility, which is under construction in northeast Sioux Falls, will be funded without debt due to money lawmakers set aside for several

years before approving the project in September. It will replace the oldest parts of the state's 145-year-old Sioux Falls penitentiary.

Rhoden said he got the project approved despite dealing with lawmakers whose support was divided among the candidates for governor. There was a "Doeden camp" in the legislative prison debate, Rhoden said, and "the Dusty camp and the Hansen camp" — a reference to U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson and state House Speaker Jon Hansen, who finished third and fourth in the four-way June 2 primary race.

"All three of those candidates were lobbing bombs at me, because they didn't want to see us get a win," Rhoden said.

Neither Rhoden nor Doeden lobbed many verbal bombs in their speeches Friday, despite an ongoing feud between their campaigns about Rhoden's refusal to debate. The two men participated in three debates with the other two candidates before the primary. Because nobody reached 35% in that election, the top two finishers — Doeden at 31% and Rhoden at 25% — advanced to a top-two runoff.

Doeden pledges to be unifying catalyst

The state Republican Party invited Doeden and Rhoden to speak at the convention and limited each of them to 15 minutes. By the flip of a coin, Doeden went first.

He spent the first part of his speech detailing what he described as the four principles that would guide him as governor: smaller and more efficient government, lower taxes, strong law and order, and quality educational opportunities for children.

After calling South Dakota "the greatest state in the country," Doeden offered several critiques, including the recidivism rate. He said state government spending and taxes have increased too much, education in the state has "taken a step backwards," and "people are living less affordable lives."

Doeden, in his first run for elected office, pledged to be "the catalyst unifying this party to the strongest place it has been in decades." He met several people at the convention, he said, who told him they were sorry for saying critical things about him on Facebook before the primary.

"I said it's OK," Doeden said. "The slate was wiped clean at midnight on June 2."

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Rhoden: 'I'm that guy'

After Doeden finished, Rhoden began by saying that the first lady, Sandy Rhoden, is "always suggesting to me that there are things that people don't know about me that I take for granted." So Rhoden used the first part of his speech to talk about serving as an elder in his church, as president of a local cooperative board, as a coach of basketball and softball, as a six-year member of the National Guard, and as a school board member and legislator.

Rhoden was elevated from lieutenant governor in January 2025 when his predecessor, Gov. Kristi Noem, resigned to accept a job leading the federal Department of Homeland Security in President Donald Trump's administration.

Rhoden described Noem as "the strongest person I know" and said "she was the right person for the job at that time," referring to the COVID-19 pandemic years.

But, Rhoden said, "when I took the reins, the water had gotten pretty choppy in our state." The unsolved problems he inherited included what he described as the "three P's": a prison, a pipeline and property taxes.

In addition to getting the prison construction project across the finish line, Rhoden brought an end — for now — to a controversial carbon-capture pipeline proposal by signing a bill into law that bans such projects from using a court process known as eminent domain to gain access to private land. He also signed several bills into law that will lower property taxes for homeowners in the coming years, although two of them rely on higher sales taxes to bring property taxes down.

"We absolutely need somebody that can bring our party together and unify people and move an agenda forward," Rhoden said. "And I'm that guy."

State Republican party officials allowed media coverage of the speeches after blocking media access to U.S. Senate Majority Leader John Thune's convention speech Thursday night. Several apologized to South Dakota Searchlight and said it was a "misunderstanding."

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

Group fails to gather enough petition signatures to put new South Dakota tax law on the ballot

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

Opponents of a new law that uses a higher state sales tax rate to fund property tax reductions for homeowners said Friday they did not collect enough petition signatures to put the measure on the Nov. 3 ballot.

South Dakotans for Fair Taxes needed 17,508 signatures from registered South Dakota voters to refer the law. A press release from the group announcing its failure to reach that threshold did not say how many signatures were gathered. The law will take effect Wednesday.

The state sales tax rate is scheduled to return from 4.2% to 4.5% in July 2027, when a temporary rate reduction expires. The new law will capture the revenue from the increase and use it to reduce property taxes imposed by school districts.

South Dakotans for Fair Taxes said the law unfairly requires renters to pay a higher sales tax while limiting tax relief to homeowners. Ned Horsted chairs the group.

"The cost of living crisis is hitting all South Dakotans," he said in a statement, adding that the law "disproportionately benefits those with the most expensive homes and is paid for by the rest of us at checkout, including groceries for our families."

The group's coalition included Bread for the World South Dakota, the South Dakota AFL-CIO, and Dakota Rural Action.

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.

Moderate US House Dem group questions USDA's Rollins over screwworm response

BY: AMELIA TWYMAN

WASHINGTON — Members of the New Democrat Coalition asked the U.S. Department of Agriculture on Thursday to provide fresh details about the nation's screwworm outbreak and demanded that the Trump administration allocate more resources to containing the spread.

Reps. Sharice Davids of Kansas, Gabe Vasquez of New Mexico and Jim Costa of California led 18 other members of the moderate coalition in a June 24 letter to Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins in which they highlighted ranchers' and farmers' growing concerns over the New World screwworm's impact on livestock health and food prices.

They pushed for greater transparency and more departmental resources to address these worries, noting that producers in the industry are prepared to work with USDA to help "eradicate" screwworms.

"Right now, in the face of this serious and quickly developing situation, ranchers and farmers want real solutions, not excuses or finger pointing," the lawmakers wrote. "It is time to take responsibility for events that occur under your leadership and move forward to work to improve the situation."

Screwworms in the South

The New World screwworm is a type of parasitic fly that lays its eggs in livestock and other animals, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Eventually, the pest's eggs hatch into larvae that will eat the flesh of their host, often leading to sickness or death.

They are most commonly found in South and Central America. Screwworms had not been found in the U.S. since 1966 until two cases emerged in Texas and New Mexico at the beginning of June. The USDA confirmed there were 25 total — and 22 active — screwworm cases in animals as of June 25.

Though the recorded cases have so far stayed confined to Texas and New Mexico — most of them in the Lone Star State — ranchers and lawmakers from agricultural states across the U.S. are demanding additional support from the federal government in their efforts to fight the outbreak, the lawmakers said.

"The administration must now recommit to transparency and proactive communication with stakeholders and the public about the situation, while also taking appropriate steps to ensure that producers in border states are prepared and have the necessary tools to prevent further spread," they wrote in their letter to Rollins.

In a statement to States Newsroom, a USDA spokesperson took exception to the lawmakers' suggestion the department could be more communicative about the situation.

"The Trump Administration is the most transparent administration in history, as we are sure these lawmakers know, the Secretary and Department have gone to unprecedented lengths to communicate updates on the New World screwworm to our local, state, and industry partners, the press, and everyday Americans," the spokesperson wrote in a late Friday email.

Workforce questions

The representatives requested that USDA release information by July 1 pertaining to department resources and staffing, screwworm surveillance zones, wildlife monitoring, the supply of sterile flies and various economic impacts, among other things.

They asked for a detailed breakdown of how much equipment and personnel USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, which typically handles the nation's pest-related epidemics, is dedicating to the screwworm outbreak, as well as what leadership's response will be if the outbreak continues to spread.

They also want Rollins to "identify any positions within APHIS that have been eliminated or relocated" and those that have been "eliminated and since restored" since President Donald Trump took office and began making staffing cuts in January 2025.

Throughout June, some Democrats in Congress have questioned USDA's ability to manage the threat due to recent department layoffs.

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According to the Office of Personnel Management, USDA has lost more than 21,000 employees since Trump began his second term, clocking in at one of the largest reductions of any federal agency or department.

Rollins at a hearing this month said her department has recently devoted more full-time staff to working on screwworm prevention and set aside \$1.3 billion to help tackle the issue.

Sterilized flies

The Democrats' letter also asked about USDA's plan for breeding more sterilized flies, which help reduce the New World screwworm population by limiting reproduction.

Specifically, they asked for details about when a new sterile fly-production facility in South Texas will produce its first bug and how USDA plans to meet its goal of breeding 500 million flies per week in the meantime.

Near the end of the letter, representatives pointed to a recent USDA analysis that estimated a larger screwworm outbreak in Texas could cost producers up to \$1.8 billion. They implored Rollins to share more details about the possible economic impacts of different levels of screwworm surges and what that could mean for Texas, New Mexico and the "broader cattle sector."

USDA, lawmakers wrote, can combat screwworms with "adequate staffing, reliable sterile-fly capacity, clear timelines, science-based movement protocols, and close coordination with state animal health officials and affected stakeholders."

"That response is essential to protect the health of the nation's livestock, safeguard producers' livelihoods, and drive this pest out again," they added.

The New Democrat Coalition comprises relatively moderate members, including most of the few House Democrats who represent rural districts.

Along with Davids, Vasquez and Costa, Reps. Angie Craig of Minnesota, who is the ranking Democrat on the House Agriculture Committee, Eugene Vindman and James Walkinshaw of Virginia, Debbie Wasserman Schultz and Darren Soto of Florida, Greg Landsman of Ohio, Seth Moulton and Lori Trahan of Massachusetts, Greg Stanton of Arizona, Salud Carbajal of California, Raja Krishnamoorthi of Illinois, Terri Sewell of Alabama, Chrissy Houlahan of Pennsylvania and George Latimer of New York signed the letter to Rollins.

A handful of Texas representatives also signed the message, including Marc Veasey, Joaquin Castro, Henry Cuellar and Vincente Gonzalez.

Amelia Twyman is an intern at States Newsroom's Washington bureau. Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, she now studies journalism and creative writing at the University of Maryland. She works as an assistant news editor at the university's independent student newspaper, The Diamondback. Amelia is set to graduate in 2028.

States show their stuff:

The Great American State Fair opens in D.C.

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — Visitors from across the United States traveled to the National Mall Thursday for the opening day of the Great American State Fair, a days-long event that is part of President Donald Trump's Freedom 250 celebration of the nation's semiquincentennial.

States and territories showed off cultural and agricultural exports at exhibits stretching nearly a mile. Attendees snapped photos on the small Grand Ole Opry stage in the Tennessee booth, kids tried putt-putt at Indiana's miniature golf course and cowboys rode horses at Montana's rodeo.

A 110-foot Ferris wheel slowly turned at the center of the freshly manicured lawn, framing the Washington Monument and the U.S. Capitol in the distance on either side. Nearby stood a model of Trump's controversial "triumphal arch."

People collected swag from each state — drawstring bags from Ohio, stickers from South Dakota, snacks from Tennessee — and could receive a stamp on state fair passports.

The fair is part of the larger Freedom 250 programming and kicked off Wednesday night with a rally

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on the mall featuring a speech from the president that closely resembled his remarks along the 2024 presidential campaign trail. The festivities will continue over Independence Day, when Trump will deliver a second speech followed by what is promised to be an impressive fireworks display.

The president will visit North and South Dakota as part of his Freedom 250 tour for the opening of the Teddy Roosevelt presidential library and Independence Day eve fireworks above Mount Rushmore.

Freedom 250 then extends into August with a high school athletic competition in Washington, D.C., dubbed the "Patriot Games" and a Freedom 250 INDYCAR race around the National Mall.

The administration's celebration is separate from the America250 commission, created by Congress a decade ago, and which has its own nationwide programming this year.

From Lake Erie to the Ohio River

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine and first lady Fran DeWine greeted guests in Ohio's pavilion. The couple posed for photos in front of a map of the Buckeye State.

"We wanted to see on the wall all the different things, from Lake Erie to the Ohio River, all the different fun things you can do in Ohio," the Republican governor said, adding the state has local celebrations and initiatives planned for the 250th anniversary, including "Movies in Ohio" for community showings of films that feature the state.

Ohio's first lady showcased a children's literacy exhibit on the opposite wall and touted the roughly 427,000 participants in the state's partnership with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, a program that mails free children's books monthly to households with kids under age 5.

"We've mailed out 27 million books. We know that a child's brain is 80% developed by age 3, so we want to get them those books early," she said.

Reflecting on America's milestone birthday, the governor said, "We're always a work in progress, Ohio's a work in progress, this country is a work in progress."

"I think you know the thing we need to keep in mind, all of us, is there's some essential core principles that we all believe in. ... We may disagree about different policies, but the core principles are the same," he said.

Cartwheels on the lawn

People from various states walked from exhibit to exhibit, while stopped in the nation's capital during road trip vacations.

Tanya Geders, 43, of St. Louis, Missouri, did a cartwheel in the mall lawn, trying to persuade her son to join in. The family stopped at the state fair on their way to Virginia Beach.

"We're like, well, if we go to the ocean, we can go to D.C. and what a better time to be here than the 250th anniversary," Geders said.

Robyn Toman, 71, of Severn, Maryland, escorted her 12-year-old grandson Miles to meet DeWine and grab a photo with the governor.

Toman said she remembers the country's bicentennial.

"I was a kid about his age, and I came in 1976. I said, 'We're gonna go, let's go down to D.C. for a couple days and see this,'" she said.

"We've enjoyed it. We went over to the archives yesterday, and saw the Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights. And, oh, that was so nice, that was fantastic."

Not all states are there. A spokesperson for Washington state's lieutenant governor's office told States Newsroom the administration declined to join because of "the costs to the state associated with participating."

According to news reports, Connecticut, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont did not contribute exhibits, though many are still represented by flags outside the individual booths.

The state officials did not immediately respond to States Newsroom for confirmation.

All states that reportedly did not participate, with the exception of Vermont, are Democratic-led.

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

Agricultural economist encourages careful optimism amid trade changes and federal assistance

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

PIERRE — Resumption of trade with China and potential year-round availability of E15 biofuel could positively impact the farm economy, according to an agricultural economist who spoke Thursday at the Governor's Ag Summit in South Dakota.

But David Widmar, who focuses on agricultural trends and decision-making for farmers at Agricultural Economic Insights, said they have to balance their optimism with the tough times they're still facing.

Federal aid for farmers last year helped some of them survive tariff-related market disruptions, and President Donald Trump is pushing for an additional \$11.1 billion. That could provide more relief, Widmar said, but "we can't continue" on a federal funding "treadmill forever."

"These are a life raft, not a kayak," he said. "Kayaks are toys that we can plan on using. Life rafts are things that we use to get to the shore. Make sure we don't confuse those two things."

Profits in the livestock sector have been strong, Widmar said, while soybean farmers have been struggling. China temporarily boycotted U.S. soybean purchases last year in response to President Donald Trump's tariffs on Chinese products.

Trade should be getting "back to normal" after productive diplomacy, Widmar said, but China primarily buys soybeans during the winter months, which is when farmers should expect to see change.

On a longer-term basis, Widmar said the year-round sale of E15 — a gasoline blend containing 15% ethanol — could give farmers more momentum, but it's "not quite ready for primetime."

The Trump administration sent a proposal to Congress earlier this week that asks lawmakers to include the year-round sale of E15, among other policy changes, in any supplemental spending bill it approves in the coming weeks and months.

Current federal regulations restrict the sale of E15 from June 1 to Sept. 15 because of its effects on air quality.

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

GOP dreams of another big budget bill dashed by Trump demands for SAVE America Act

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — Republicans have one more opportunity to use the complex process they relied on to enact their "big, beautiful" law and provide tens of billions in additional funding for immigration enforcement — a chance that becomes less likely the more divisions over a voter identification bill splinter the party.

Debate over a third reconciliation bill has been simmering in the background for months, though GOP lawmakers have yet to reach consensus about whether they should draft another massive package, like they approved last year, or a more narrow one that could help the party boost defense spending.

That budget reconciliation process gives Republican leaders a way to get around Senate rules that would otherwise force bipartisanship, giving them a loophole out of negotiating major legislation with Democrats.

But it comes with several hurdles in order to get that special treatment, including that each provision in the bill have an impact on federal revenue or spending that is not deemed "merely incidental" by the Senate parliamentarian.

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Those in-the-weeds restrictions aren't especially important to President Donald Trump, who wants Republicans in Congress to prioritize a voter identification bill, which cannot move through reconciliation, over everything else.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., tried to find middle ground in late June, proposing lawmakers use reconciliation to create a grant program for states that implement voter identification requirements.

Johnson acknowledged the challenges to using reconciliation amid narrow majorities in each chamber, but said he thinks Republicans can accomplish their goals if they "stick together."

He, however, didn't have details to share.

"Stay tuned. We're working through that," Johnson said. "Doing a reconciliation bill is a very complicated process of consensus building, where we have a collection of ideas that, I think, every Republican, certainly, agrees with in principle."

A few hours later, sitting in the Oval Office, the president batted down the idea of any compromise on the elections bill, creating more public disagreement between the top Republicans in the country.

"Not really. No," Trump said when asked whether he'd "be open to a compromise measure" moving through the reconciliation process.

Hardball tactics

Lobbying for the full bill, which would require people show proof of citizenship to register to vote and a photo ID when casting a ballot, isn't only coming from the president.

Far-right Republicans in both chambers are using hardball tactics to cajole their leaders to get the legislation to Trump's desk, even if it means delaying work on their colleagues' priorities.

Utah Sen. Mike Lee is one of several Republicans posting on social media and holding press conferences. He recently called for Americans to "encourage your senators to resume debate on the Senate floor—with a plan to keep debating it until it passes."

"Tell your senators: Pass the SAVE America Act," Lee wrote in another post. "Accept no excuses or half measures."

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., has become somewhat frustrated with constant pressure from some of his members, who are diverting time and resources to a bill that cannot pass.

"At the end of the day, I have to deal with reality," Thune said. "And sometimes the alternative universe that is X doesn't reflect the facts on the ground."

Thune said it's been "very clear" for some time there isn't enough support among Republicans to change the Senate rule that requires at least 60 lawmakers vote to limit debate on most bills. That legislative filibuster forces bipartisanship and gives the minority party, which could be Republicans as soon as next year, a seat at the table.

"There are not the votes to nuke the filibuster and there aren't going to be 10 Democrat votes to all of a sudden support the SAVE America Act," Thune said. "Those are just hard realities and I think people at some point have to come to grips with that."

Trump cancels signing for housing bill

West Virginia Republican Sen. Shelley Moore Capito said that despite months of effort, the voter identification bill doesn't have the votes to become law.

"If you can't get to 60, you can't pass it. I mean, that's pretty simple," she said. "Now, he says talk it to death and people will change their minds. I don't think that's a strategy that's going to be in success. We tried that earlier this year to keep talking, we didn't get to the end."

Capito said voters want to see Republicans focus on issues that can improve people's lives, like the broadly bipartisan housing affordability bill both chambers approved this month. Trump was set to sign that bill during a ceremony on Capitol Hill but canceled at the last minute to try to push through the election bill.

"So, yeah, they want to see us do something," she said. "They don't want to see us sitting up there yakking all the time."

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Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Susan Collins, R-Maine, wants to use the time to avoid another government shutdown when the next fiscal year begins Oct. 1 — no easy feat following three shutdowns over the last year.

Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman John Boozman, R-Ark., hopes to reach final agreement on the farm bill in the months ahead after years of delays and stopgap measures for those agriculture and food safety net programs.

He brushed aside demands from some other GOP lawmakers to use the budget reconciliation process to pass another party-line package.

"We had trouble with the one that we just did and that was very, very narrow. I mean, that was strictly Homeland Security," Boozman said. "When you start doing a bigger package, like they're talking about and you start involving various committees, it becomes a lot more issues involved that you have to work out. And so it just gets very complex."

Boozman added that working through the several steps of that process takes weeks, which lawmakers may not have.

Other priorities

Missouri Republican Sen. Josh Hawley said the party needs to focus on legislation that would lower "the cost of everything," in part, by eliminating taxes on gasoline and health care.

"That's something that would be a huge benefit to every working person out there immediately," he said. "Let them take all health care costs off of their federal taxes, so they paid no taxes on it."

Louisiana Republican Sen. John Kennedy said he thinks lawmakers should use the budget reconciliation process to significantly bolster defense funding. But he said "duh" when asked by States Newsroom whether the limited number of days in session would make that difficult.

Lawmakers are set to be out of session for nearly all of August and September.

"I think if we want to get more money for defense, we have to do it through reconciliation, which means we need to start immediately," he said.

Ohio Sen. Bernie Moreno has a lengthy list of issues he wants to see Republicans address before November, including a bill he's set to release later this summer with Massachusetts Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren that would shore up the Social Security trust fund.

"It's not really a third-rail issue, because what we're saying is that everybody should pay the same amount of money for Social Security," he said. "When you have something that literally 90% of Americans support, I think we should be able to get something on that across the finish line."

The two lawmakers wrote in an op-ed published in The New York Times the bill would raise the cap that ensures people don't pay into Social Security on earnings more than \$184,500.

"Since the vast majority of Americans make less than that, most people are paying Social Security taxes on 100 percent of their earnings while the highest earners are paying on only part of theirs," they wrote.

"Why should a middle-class nurse pay a larger share of her paycheck — than a wealthy corporate lawyer?" they added. "This is doubly unfair in an economy in which top earners' wages, over time, have pulled far ahead of those of the average worker."

Iowa Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley said he'd like lawmakers to ensure E15 gasoline, a blend that includes 15% ethanol and is usually unavailable in summer, can be sold year-round, though he hadn't thought about any other issues the party should press for ahead of November.

"I guess I can't answer your question," he said. "I just haven't thought about it."

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

Women's prison population, correctional costs projected to grow through 2035

States could spend billions more to incarcerate women over the next decade

BY: AMANDA WATFORD

It costs significantly more to incarcerate women than men, adding to the financial burden on state and local correctional systems, according to a new report from the nonpartisan think tank Council on Criminal Justice.

The report estimates that imprisoning a woman costs between \$87,000 and \$122,000 a year, or roughly 25% to 75% more than the average annual cost of about \$70,000 per incarcerated person, including both men and women. Women make up about 10% of the nation's correctional population.

Researchers attributed the higher costs to a combination of factors, including smaller prison populations, the need to house women with different security classifications in the same facilities and higher healthcare expenses.

"As the number and cost of incarcerating women grow, policymakers have an opportunity to pursue approaches that better enhance accountability, public safety, fiscal responsibility, and the well-being of families and communities," Stephanie Akhter, the director of the Council on Criminal Justice's Women's Justice Commission, said in a news release.

The report projects those costs will continue to grow over the next decade. Researchers estimate the number of women under correctional control, including prisons, jails, probation and parole, will rise from about 992,000 in 2022 to 1.1 million by 2035.

Most of that growth is expected to occur in confinement settings. The women's prison population is projected to increase 27% by 2035, while the jail population is expected to grow 20%, according to the report.

As a result, annual spending associated with women's involvement in the justice system is projected to rise from between \$23 billion and \$26 billion in 2025 to between \$30 billion and \$34 billion by 2035.

The report says the increase reflects both projected population growth and rising correctional costs. Researchers noted that women's prison populations declined during the COVID-19 pandemic but have been growing again since 2021, in some places rebounding faster than men's populations.

The analysis also attempted to quantify some costs that fall outside correctional budgets. Researchers estimated that the loss of unpaid household labor and caregiving performed by women in prison amounts to about \$2.8 billion annually, a figure projected to rise to \$3.8 billion by 2035.

A companion report released alongside the analysis modeled the effects of cutting women's time served in prison by 50% in Illinois and North Carolina. Researchers estimated that earlier releases would result in roughly 100 additional arrests annually in each state among women who otherwise would have remained incarcerated, with about 9 in 10 involving nonviolent offenses, while generating more than \$60 million a year in net savings.

The reports were prepared for the Council on Criminal Justice's Women's Justice Commission, which studies women's involvement in the criminal justice system and related policy issues.

Stateline reporter Amanda Watford can be reached at awatford@stateline.org.

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

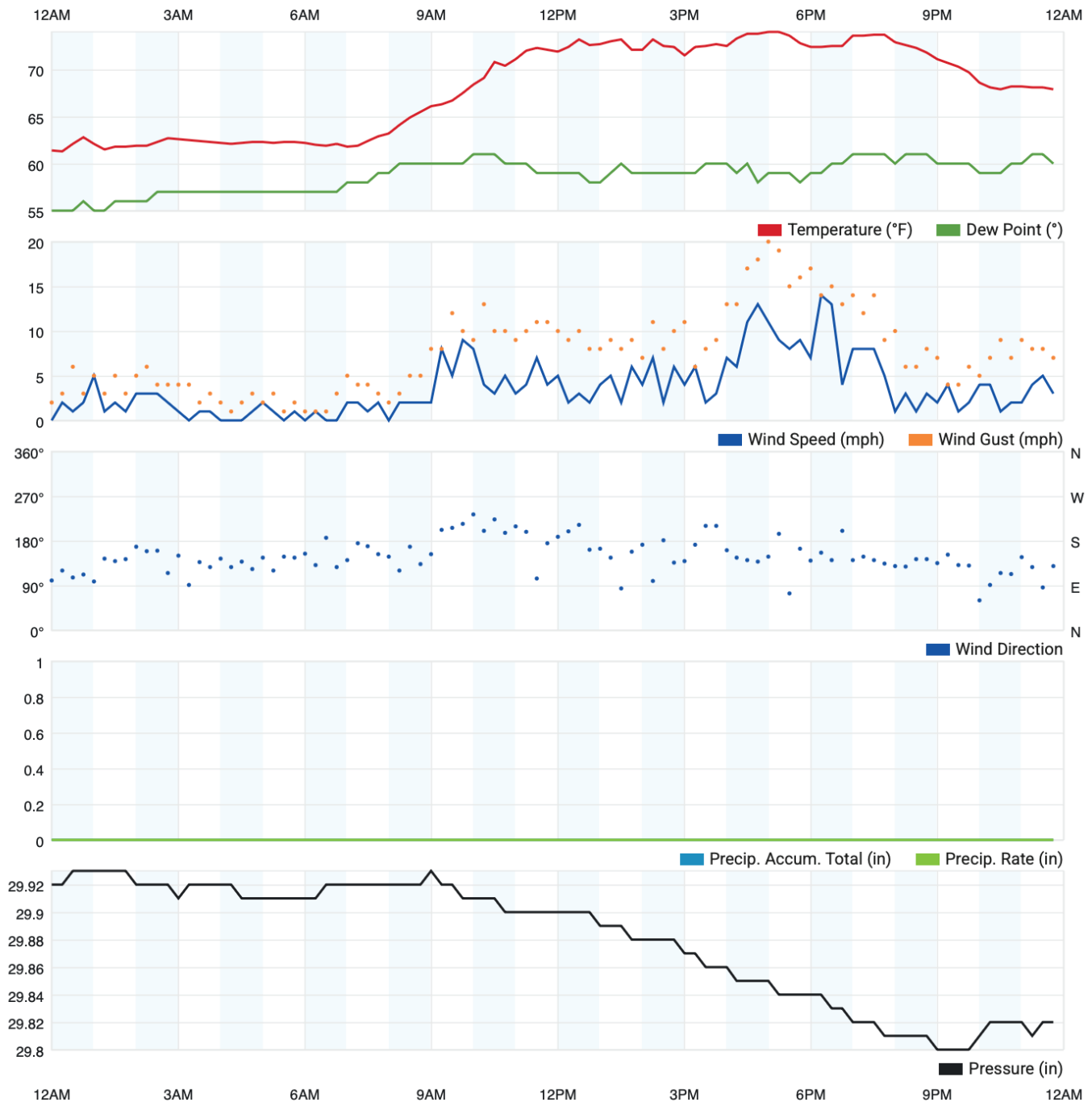
Amanda Watford (formerly Hernández) covers criminal justice for Stateline. She has reported for both national and local outlets, including ABC News, USA Today and NBC4 Washington.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

June 26, 2026



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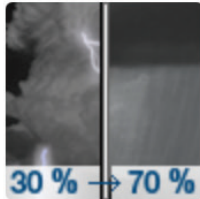
Today



High: 85 °F

Breezy.
Slight Chance
T-storms then
Mostly Sunny

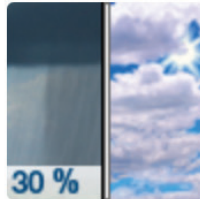
Tonight



Low: 66 °F

Chance
T-storms and
Breezy then
Showers
Likely

Sunday



High: 90 °F

Chance
Showers then
Partly Sunny

Sunday Night



Low: 66 °F

Partly Cloudy
then Slight
Chance
T-storms

Monday



High: 92 °F

Slight Chance
Showers

THREAT ASSESSMENT

HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

2

WHAT THIS MEANS:
Isolated to Scattered Severe
Storms Possible

7 PM this evening
through the overnight
hours

PRIMARY THREATS

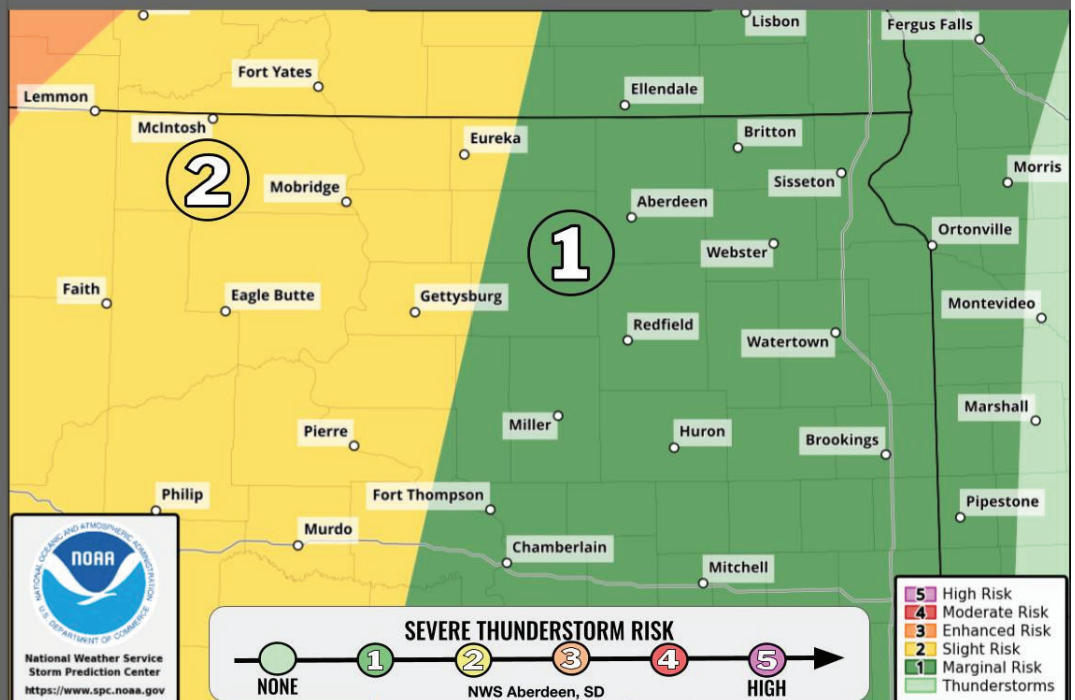

DAMAGING
WIND GUSTS
of 60-75+ mph


LARGE HAIL
over 2" in
diameter

SECONDARY THREATS


TORNADOES
POSSIBLE west of
the Missouri River

Slight Risk For Severe Storms this evening & overnight



Scattered to isolated severe storms (levels 1 to 2 out of 5) are possible this evening into the overnight hours. The main concern for the strongest storms with winds gusting over 75 mph or hail of 2" or more in diameter will be over portions of central South Dakota. Stay weather aware tonight.

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Severe Weather Threats - High Winds

June 27, 2026
5:14 AM CDT

Wind Threat Highlights:

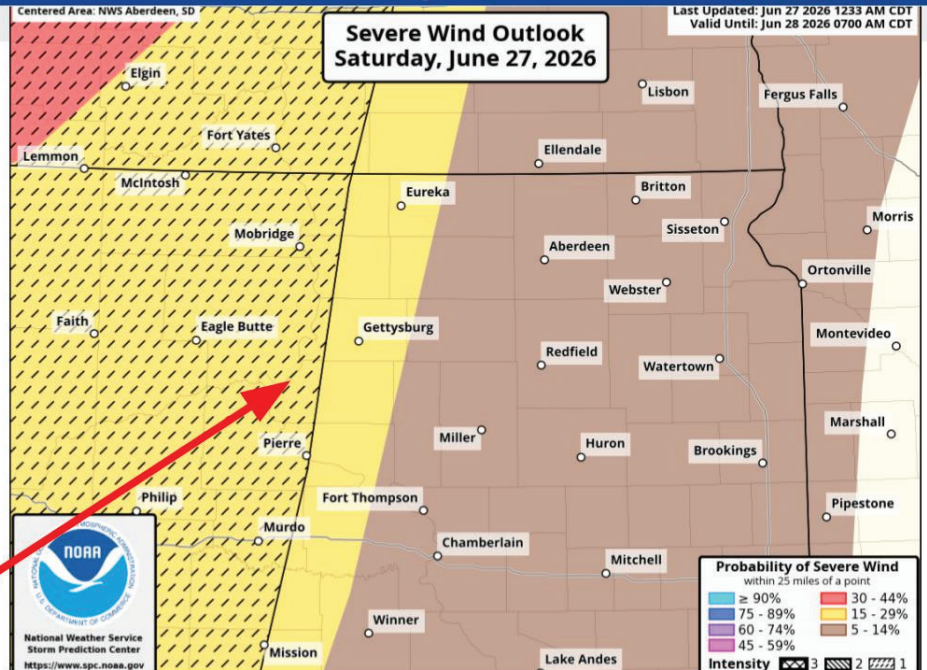
Winds gusting to around 60 mph. However, the strongest storms mainly west of the Missouri River will be capable of producing wind gusts of 60-75 mph during the evening and overnight hours.

Cities At Risk:

Cities west of a line from Mound City, Mobridge, Pierre, and Murdo

Intensity Levels:

-  3 High-end ongoing derecho
-  2 Bow echo/derecho possible
-  1 Peak gusts 74 mph+



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Scattered to isolated severe storms are possible tonight. Other than brief heavy rain and lightning, the main concerns with the strongest storms will be winds gusting 60-75+ mph and/or hail the size of quarters 2+ inches in diameter. The area of concern for the strongest winds will be mainly west of the Missouri River.

HOT WEATHER AHEAD!



Highs in the Upper 80s and 90s Sunday through at least the 4th of July!



STAY SAFE IN SUMMER HEAT



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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 75 °F at 5:06 PM

Low Temp: 61 °F at 12:02 AM

Wind: 21 mph at 4:58 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 104 in 1936

Record Low: 42 in 2017

Average High: 83

Average Low: 58

Average Precip in June.: 3.37

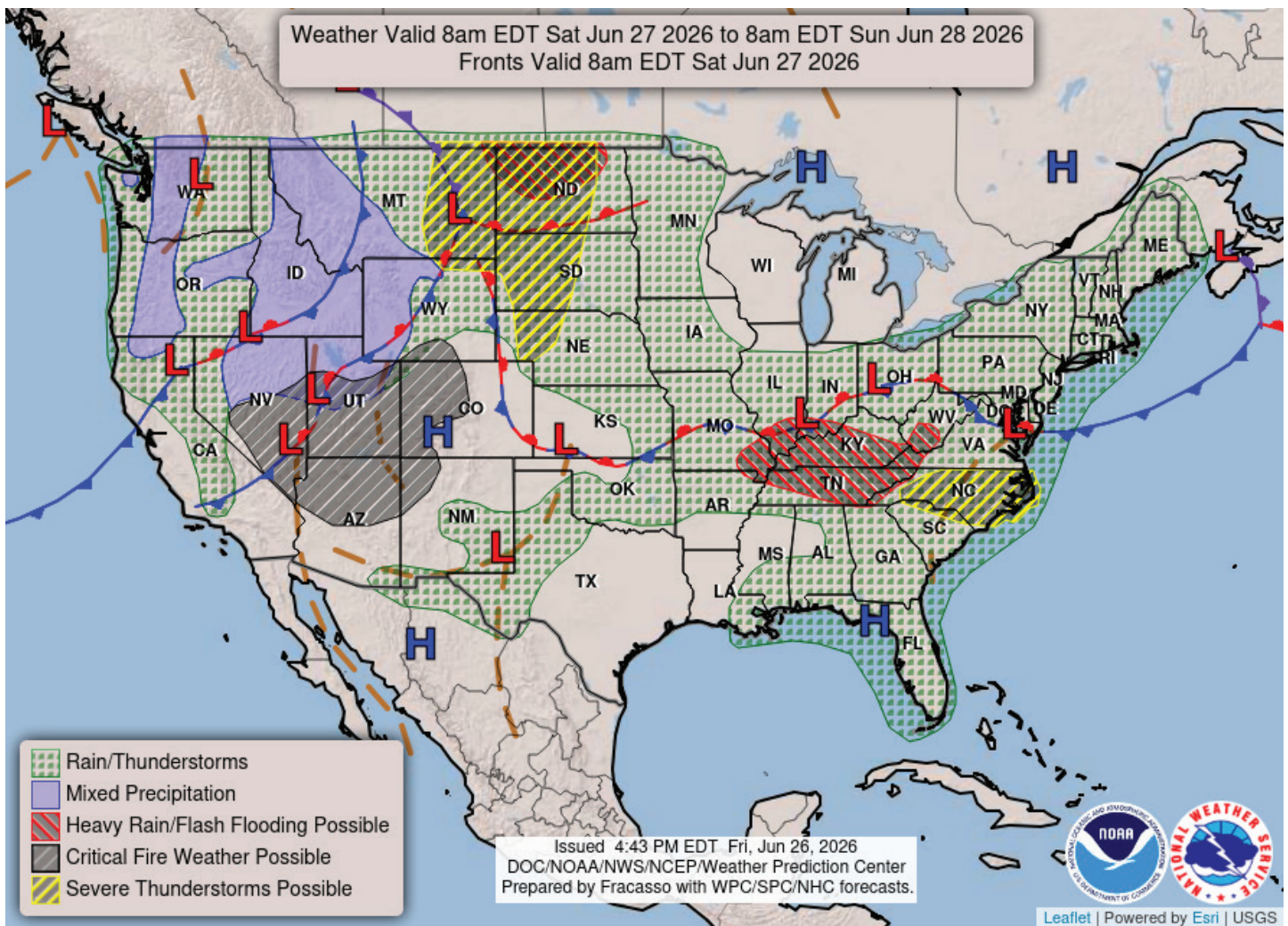
Precip to date in June.: 1.37

Average Precip to date: 10.62

Precip Year to Date: 8.13

Sunset Tonight: 9:24 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:46 am



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Today in Weather History

June 27, 1894: Three people were injured as a tornado destroyed a home 5 miles north of Houghton in Brown County. Lumber on a wagon was scattered for over a mile. This tornado was estimated to be an F2. Also, a second F2 tornado formed south of Aberdeen and moved northeast and went near Randolph, to beyond Bath. Several barns and two homes were destroyed along the narrow path. Three other small funnels were seen to touch down. Another tornado with estimated F2 strength moved ENE from northeast of St. Lawrence to Bonilla and Hitchcock. At least one home was destroyed. One person was killed in the destruction of her home, north of Wessington. An estimated F2 tornado hit 2 miles south of Henry. At least two small houses were blown away. There was another possible tornado 12 miles north of Henry. Numerous tornadoes continued into Minnesota.

June 27, 1928: A long-lived estimated F2 tornado moved southeast from 7 miles west of Faulkton, passing north and east of Orient. Buildings were damaged on nine farms. One home near Orient was riddled with timbers from a nearby grain elevator. This tornado was estimated to travel a distance of 40 miles.

1901 — There was a rain of fish from the sky at Tiller's Ferry. Hundreds of fish were swimming between cotton rows after a heavy shower. (David Ludlum)

1915 — The temperature at Fort Yukon AK soared to 100 degrees to establish a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1957 — Hurricane Audrey smashed ashore at Cameron, LA, drowning 390 persons in the storm tide, and causing 150 million dollars damage in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi. Audrey left only a brick courthouse and a cement-block icehouse standing at Cameron, and when the waters settled in the town of Crede, only four buildings remained. The powerful winds of Audrey tossed a fishing boat weighing 78 tons onto an off-shore drilling platform. Winds along the coast gusted to 105 mph, and oil rigs off the Louisiana coast reported wind gusts to 180 mph. A storm surge greater than twelve feet inundated the Louisiana coast as much as 25 miles inland. It was the deadliest June hurricane of record for the U.S. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 — Thunderstorms moving out of Nebraska produced severe weather in north central Kansas after midnight. Thunderstorm winds gusting to 100 mph damaged more than fifty camping trailers at the state park campground at Lake Waconda injuring sixteen persons. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 80 mph at Beloit and Sylvan Grove. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — The afternoon high of 107 degrees at Bismarck, ND, was a record for the month of June, and Pensacola, FL, equalled their June record with a reading of 101 degrees. Temperatures in the Great Lakes Region and the Ohio Valley dipped into the 40s. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Ohio Valley to western New England. Thunderstorm spawned six tornadoes, and there were 98 reports of large hail and damaging winds. Tropical Storm Allison spawned six tornadoes in Louisiana, injuring two persons at Hackberry. Fort Polk LA was drenched with 10.09 inches of rain in 36 hours, and 12.87 inches was reported at the Gorum Fire Tower in northern Louisiana. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1995: The Madison County Flood on June 27, 1995, was the worst flash floods Virginia had seen since the remnants of Camille dropped up to 30 inches of rain one night in Nelson County in August 1969. The Nelson County flood ranked as one of the nation's worst flash floods of this century and resulted in the deaths of 117 people. The Madison County flood killed one person.

2011: Polar temperatures and unusual snowfall chill several cities in Brazil's southern states. Four cities in Santa Catarina state are blanketed in snow. The town of Urubici reported a temperature of 23.9 degrees Fahrenheit with a wind chill of 16.6 degrees below zero. In Florianopolis, the capital of Santa Catarina and a renowned sea resort, thermometers registered 21.2 degrees.

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Daily Devotion

The Privilege of Knowing God

God wants a relationship with you and has left unmistakable evidence.

Psalms 19:1-6: 1 The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

2 Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge.

3 There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard.

4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun,

5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course.

6 Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them; And there is nothing hidden from its heat.

There is no greater privilege than knowing God—and no greater tragedy than missing out on developing a relationship with Him.

While on earth, both believers and unbelievers enjoy the benefits of God's kindness (Matthew 5:45). Some people seem unaware of what Scripture teaches about eternity. Others have simply never heard the good news. Yet Romans 1:18-20 makes clear that everyone has access to evidence of God's existence. Creation itself—its design, beauty, and order—point to a Creator.

God also reveals Himself through the human conscience (Romans 2:14-15). Even people without access to Scripture recognize that certain behaviors—like murder, theft, and betrayal—are wrong. There's a moral law written on every heart.

And for those willing to look deeper into the testimonies of Scripture, we have God's fullest revelation: His Son Jesus Christ (John 14:7-9). The life of our Lord—who was fully God and fully man—perfectly demonstrates the Father's heart toward us.

The Almighty has made Himself known through creation, through the sense of morality written on your conscience, and most fully through Scripture and Jesus' life. God desires a relationship with you. Answer with a seeking heart, and watch as He reveals Himself to you, day by day.

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:
06.26.26

7 15 33 37 51 2

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

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 8 Mins 38
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.26.26

5 13 30 33 52 6

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$511,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.24.26

26 39 45 49 51 2

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$30,800,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 8 Mins 38
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.24.26

2 12 13 26 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$151,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 23 Mins 38
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.24.26

3 11 20 31 65 5

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 52 Mins 38
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.24.26

13 14 16 21 38 14

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$348,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 52 Mins 38
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

A small plane has crashed into a Beijing high-rise, killing the pilot and injuring 13

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese authorities on Saturday said a small plane that crashed into a building in Beijing the day before had killed the pilot and injured 13 others.

The authorities of the Chaoyang district, a vibrant business area, said a two-seat light sport aircraft collided with a high-rise building near the East Third Ring Road at 5:55 p.m. on Friday and caused the casualties.

The short statement on WeChat did not identify the building or the pilot, who the authorities said was the only person on the craft.

The global flight-tracking service provider Flightradar24 on Friday said the plane crashed into the CITIC Tower, also known as China Zun, which rises more than 1,700 feet (528 meters), just east of a major ring road in a cluster of skyscrapers.

The 108-story CITIC tower, shaped like an ancient Chinese wine vessel, is one of the most recognizable skyscrapers in Beijing and is the tallest building in the city.

Flightradar24 posted on social media the path of the plane, a Sunward SA 60L Aurora, which took off from an airport about 50 kilometers (30 miles) east of Beijing. It headed westward and ended just east of the East Third Ring Road.

Associated Press photos showed on Saturday apparent marks of the crash on the glass facade on one side of the CITIC Tower. A hole there had been covered up.

It was not immediately known what caused the crash in a city with strict airspace controls, including a recent ban on drones. An investigation is underway into the situation, the authorities said.

It was also unclear whether the injured were in the building or were hit by debris, but the statement said they were receiving treatment.

The CITIC tower is just a roughly 20-minute drive from Zhongnanhai, a former imperial garden that now serves as headquarters of China's top leadership, and a 15-minute drive from the Forbidden City, a popular tourist attraction.

Social media posts about the crash were scrubbed from China's walled-off internet on Friday, though footage has made its way outside of China's firewall and is circulating on overseas sites such as X.com. A report by financial news platform Caixin about the crash's casualties soon became inaccessible on Saturday. Chinese authorities consider such incidents to be a sensitive matter.

Images and videos shared on social media appeared to show debris from a small aircraft near the skyscraper. While the images were consistent with the location, it was not possible to independently confirm their authenticity. One image of the wreckage shows a partial registration number of "B-12." The full registration number of the aircraft is B-12PP.

According to Flightradar24, the aircraft was operated by Shuangyue General Aviation, an apparent reference to Dongshi Shuangyue (Beijing) General Aviation, whose website was not accessible on Saturday. The firm provides services ranging from private pilot training to aerial sightseeing tours, said an online platform citing official data.

SA 60L is a product of Starair Aircraft, based in China's central Hunan province. According to Starair's website, the single-engine aircraft accounts for more than 70% of China's light sports aircraft market and has been exported to Australia and the United States.

Its maximum cruise speed is 220 kilometers (137 miles) per hour and its maximum takeoff weight is 600 kilograms (1,322 pounds), the website said.

Iranian drones attack Bahrain and a ship is struck in the strait after US airstrikes on Iran

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran launched a drone assault targeting Bahrain while a ship in the Strait of Hormuz separately came under attack Saturday, likely Tehran's response to overnight airstrikes by the United States.

The attacks across the Persian Gulf show the danger of the Iran war again spinning out of control, even after Iran and the U.S. reached an interim deal to try and agree on a final accord to end the conflict.

The U.S. had launched its airstrikes in response to an Iranian drone attack on a ship trying to get out of the strait on Thursday, continuing a string of attacks that have shaken the uneasy ceasefire in the war.

Meanwhile, a multinational maritime body overseen by the U.S. Navy said Saturday that it would expand a route near Oman in the strait to allow for both inbound and outbound traffic — likely setting up a new flashpoint with Tehran.

Bahrain condemns Iran's drone attack

That Iran targeted Bahrain likely was not coincidental. The kingdom has been one of the strongest critics of Iran and is home to the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet. It just hosted U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio for a meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council's foreign ministers, which ended with a call for an end to Iran's attacks and the strait to be completely open.

A statement from Bahrain's Foreign Ministry said a "number of Iranian drones" targeted the country. It called the attack "a flagrant threat to the security of citizens and residents."

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard earlier on Saturday issued a statement carried by the state-run IRNA news agency saying it had targeted several locations "of the U.S. terrorist army in the region."

It did not name what areas were targeted.

The U.S. military's Central Command said the military struck Iranian missile and drone locations and coastal radar sites in the overnight strikes.

U.S. Vice President JD Vance, who has led the American negotiations with Iran, said on social media Friday night that Iran should "pick up the phone" if there are disagreements about the ceasefire agreement.

"But violence will be met with violence," Vance said.

The U.S. and Iran are still negotiating terms of the deal, including issues such as getting ships through the key strait and addressing the future of Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium. Under the interim deal, the two sides have 60 days to work out the details.

Ship comes under attack as strait route expands

Meanwhile, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said that a tanker was attacked Saturday in the strait, saying the crew was safe and no environmental damage was reported. No one immediately claimed the strike, but suspicion immediately fell on Iran.

Just after the report of the ship attack, the Joint Maritime Information Center, overseen by the U.S. Navy, said the route near Oman's shores is expanding to allow for both inbound and outbound traffic.

Iran has insisted ships must obey its orders and is warning it will start charging fees for transit through the strait, through which a fifth of all oil and natural gas once passed. However, ships have been increasingly trying to get out of the Gulf in recent days, to Iran's ire.

Ebrahim Azizi, who heads the Iranian parliament's national security commission, wrote Friday that "the Strait of Hormuz is governed by Iran, so: Respect the rules."

The U.S. and Gulf Arab states have rejected Iran's demands. The strait is considered around the world as an international waterway, despite being the territorial waters of Iran and Oman.

In its announcement, the Joint Maritime Information Center warned that the threat in the region to ships was "substantial."

"Mariners are advised of the existence of mines and should expect a naval presence as clearance operations continue," it said.

Andy Burnham distanced himself from UK Prime Minister Starmer, but may be stuck with his policies

By BRIAN MELLEY and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain looks set to get a change of tone at the top, replacing stolid, unpopular Prime Minister Keir Starmer with popular, affable Andy Burnham.

But the charismatic Burnham may have difficulty — at least initially — distancing himself from policies set in motion by his predecessor.

Burnham, the former mayor of Greater Manchester who was sworn into Parliament hours after Starmer announced his resignation on Monday, will be constrained by the platform the center-left Labour Party was elected on that decisively ended 14 years of Conservative rule in 2024.

It's not entirely clear how he'll navigate those limits and bring his unique brand of politics to the revolving-door post that would make him the 7th prime minister in a decade. He'll lay out his economic vision in a speech next week.

"At the moment, Andy Burnham is being almost hailed and held up as a folk hero that will save British politics," said Matthew Flinders, politics professor at University of Sheffield. "The tide is changing and the big issue for Andy Burnham is that when the world suddenly moves against him and he becomes a folk devil, will he sustain the pressure?"

Next PM will seek to boost a sluggish economy and ease cost of living

Burnham is currently the only contestant for the job of leading the Labour Party and the country, and will likely take over July 17 if no one else enters the race. His return to the House of Commons follows a decade leading the region around the U.K.'s third-largest city, birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, which has enjoyed an economic revival during his tenure.

His main challenge will be to overcome Starmer's inability to deliver promised economic growth, repair tattered public services and ease the cost of living.

Burnham highlighted those issues — along with housing and creating opportunities for young people — in a post on social media after Starmer said he was quitting.

"The country expects stability, seriousness and a continued focus on the issues that matter most and that is what it will get," he said on X.

Burnham, who is widely regarded as sitting to the left of Starmer in the party, has said he'll revive a sluggish economy without going beyond the current government's spending and borrowing plans. That pledge has helped reassure markets traumatized in 2022 after Prime Minister Liz Truss announced unfunded tax cuts and then withdrew them, leading to her 49-day record as Britain's shortest-serving leader.

"If you are a Labour prime minister from the soft left of the party, the markets don't need that much invitation to panic," said Mark Goodwin, a politics lecturer at Coventry University. "They will start from a position of skepticism. So he'd have to be very, very careful."

He said Burnham will face a challenge "to convince people that this is something different, without the markets reading that as 'This is too different.'"

Burnham faces big questions over budget priorities

Burnham promotes what has been called "Manchesterism," a business-friendly socialist approach that involves harnessing private investment for major projects and decentralizing government to give communities more control of housing, utilities, transportation and education.

In a possible preview of how he would move power from the capital, he is reportedly planning to move some of the prime minister's operation closer to home, about 200 miles north of 10 Downing St., the London office and home of the U.K.'s leader.

He has said he would not raise taxes on workers — sticking to a Starmer pledge — and suggested policies that include easing the tax burden on businesses, and possibly reversing an increase in a tax employers pay to fund pensions, public health care and welfare.

The big question is how he will fund programs, if he'll scrap existing priorities, and how he'll meet demands for higher defense spending, said Jill Rutter, senior fellow at the Institute for Government think tank.

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Starmer's government pledged to meet a NATO target of spending 3.5% of GDP on the military by 2035. But John Healey stepped down as defense secretary this month after complaining that Starmer was not moving fast enough to meet the target.

Burnham more comfortable with domestic issues

Burnham's lack of experience on the world stage could present a challenge improving the so-called special relationship with the U.S. after President Donald Trump turned on Starmer.

Trump described Burnham this week as a "town" mayor and said he heard he was "extremely liberal" and probably wouldn't expand North Sea oil drilling — one of his frequent gripes about Starmer.

Starmer made a priority of forging cordial ties with Trump despite their political differences, and was rewarded with a U.S.-U.K. trade deal. But it came at the cost of angering some in Labour's liberal voter base, and the president soured on Starmer after the British leader criticized his designs on Greenland and declined to enter the Iran war.

Burnham has not always said nice things about Trump. After Trump's followers stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, Burnham posted on X that "any politician who gave Trump the time of day should be ashamed right now."

Starmer won praise from many for his international role, especially in bolstering European support for Ukraine. But he was criticized by some for being distracted by foreign affairs, Rutter said. She doesn't expect the same from Burnham and he could farm out some of those duties by choosing an experienced hand as foreign secretary, the U.K.'s top diplomat.

"I don't think Andy Burnham will want to be 'never-here Andy' in succession to 'never-here Keir,'" Rutter said in reference to Starmer's globetrotting moniker.

Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper said on Wednesday that she spoke with Burnham about policy issues and said "he's 100% behind our unwavering support for Ukraine" and "is a fundamental believer in NATO and in our shared deterrence and in the multilateral partnerships that we have."

Playing it safe at first could allow radical reshaping

An early priority for Burnham will be something Starmer struggled with: crafting a clear and convincing narrative that people understand about the direction he wants to take the country, Flinders said.

That plays to Burnham's communications skills and the popularity he has achieved by presenting himself as an amiable northern everyman who favors T-shirts over suits and ties, plays soccer for kicks and is known for spinning 1990s tunes during DJ battles.

So far, he has played it safe and tried not to raise public expectations too high. But if he can prove himself to be a competent leader and win public support to survive the remaining three years before a general election must be held, he can lay out a bolder vision for another term in his own manifesto.

Burnham has spoken of reshaping the political system, such as replacing the House of Lords with an elected senate and introducing proportional representation in voting. He also said he'd like to see the U.K. rejoin the European Union in his lifetime, though he backed away from that during his campaign in a constituency that voted 2-to-1 in favor of Brexit.

"My sense is that he will take some time, sensibly, to build up his team, his narrative, his story and his connections in order to then try to secure a public mandate and the next general election to then approach the more radical phase that he wants to deliver, which is exactly what Margaret Thatcher did in the '80s," Flinders said.

Crucial window for rescuing survivors narrows as Venezuela enters third day after deadly twin quakes

By REGINA GARCIA CANO, JUAN PABLO ARRAEZ and MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

LA GUAIRA, Venezuela (AP) — The situation has grown more desperate by the hour in Venezuela as people dig through the rubble of collapsed homes and apartment buildings three days after the devastating one-two punch of 7.2 and 7.5-magnitude earthquakes, knowing time is running out to find survivors.

Authorities announced Friday night that they would block access to La Guaira, the epicenter of the de-

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struction, as chaos and traffic began to hamper search efforts. Officials said anyone who wants to enter would now have to seek official permits, but provided few details of who would be allowed in.

Venezuelans took the search for missing loved ones into their own hands, citing a scarcity of government rescuers, as the human toll of Wednesday's quakes climbed to at least 920 dead and more than 51,000 missing. People reported seeing few state rescue teams in the hardest-hit areas, despite authorities projecting an image of a robust government response.

Aid agencies consider the first 48 to 72 hours to be a crucial time frame to retrieve people alive, though that can be extended if they have access to food and water.

"Each person saved is a miracle," said Jorge Rodríguez, president of the National Assembly. "We are not going to hide absolutely anything about the magnitude of this tragedy."

Anxious families wait to see if relatives survived

In the state of La Guaira, just north of the capital, Caracas, Nazareth Jimenez sobbed into a loved one's shoulder as she watched neighbors use hammers and power tools to try to cut through slabs of concrete in a building reduced to a mountain of debris. She was wracked with anxiety as she waited to see if her siblings, nephews, nieces and friends would emerge alive.

"My God, how are we going to get them out of there?" Jimenez murmured.

"We're making a call for help to the government and countries across the world," she said, pleading for machinery capable of moving collapsed structures. "There are still people alive in there."

Government forces distributed food and water to survivors in La Guaira, and acting President Delcy Rodríguez said her government was mounting a full response during these "critical hours for rescuing people alive."

She welcomed the arrival of international rescuers and humanitarian aid. She said La Guaira had been militarized and more help was on the way, even as residents said it was just a fraction of what they needed.

The disaster poses a huge challenge for Rodríguez, the former vice president who took office in January after the capture and removal of then-President Nicolás Maduro by the United States. Venezuela has been facing economic disarray for more than a decade, and many people reject the legitimacy of the political movement Rodríguez represents.

The number of dead was expected to climb, and people reported tens of thousands of missing on independent digital databases. Those figures likely included people who have been incommunicado due to the lack of cellphone signals, and some reports may be duplicates.

The number of injured was more than 3,300 as of midday Friday, and authorities said they rescued 243.

Millions of people reeling

The International Organization for Migration said up to 6.76 million people could be affected, some 2 million of them in Caracas alone. The destruction was amplified by the quick succession of shallow quakes, experts said.

Loyce Pace, the International Red Cross' regional director for the Americas, said "people are still terrified to reenter what were their homes."

Indeed, many continued to sleep on the street.

Omar Reyes said around 20 family members died.

"I've been left alone in this life," Reyes said, walking through the rubble where two of his children were buried.

In the city of Maiquetia, people lined up outside stores and pharmacies that served them one by one behind closed doors. At one point a woman in a crowd threw herself to the ground to protect a package of diapers with her body, desperate to keep it.

Traffic and throngs of motorcyclists at times disrupted search efforts. Mexican soldiers and volunteers repeatedly asked for silence to try to hear signs of life under the rubble, but bikers — civilian and uniformed — continued to honk horns and rev engines to the first responders' frustration.

Some people began to carry off basic goods such as toilet paper and food from stores in Catia La Mar, adjacent to the country's main airport. Others swarmed a civilian pickup truck that was giving out bread

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and water, until a soldier intervened. The parking lot of a pharmacy turned into a makeshift shelter with tarps, hammocks and tents.

A few miles away, Yuleidy Cadenas, 28, stood across the street from a collapsed public housing building, hoping her son, mother and brother would be pulled out alive.

She fled barefoot from another building as it collapsed Wednesday and found her mother's 12-floor apartment tower had pancaked.

"I got on top of the rubble and told them to yell back, and nobody did, not my brother, nor my son or my mother," Cadenas said.

International aid on the way

Venezuelan authorities said Friday that 861 volunteers from Mexico, the U.S., El Salvador, Switzerland, Colombia and beyond were in the country, and more were coming from elsewhere.

Acting President Rodríguez said she spoke to U.S. President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Friday and they reaffirmed their commitment to send rescue teams and aid equipment.

Dangerous weather hampers firefighters and leads to fireworks bans in western US

By SUSAN MONTTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

Hot, dry and windy conditions are fueling a fast-moving wildfire in Utah, forcing the governor to declare an emergency and restrict fireworks as critical weather across the West gives way to mounting concerns that anything could cause a spark.

Firefighters are facing more challenges on the ground from what fire managers and experts call unprecedented conditions.

Air tankers and helicopters were grounded Friday as winds picked up on the Cottonwood Fire, the largest blaze currently burning in the U.S. Gusts were clocked at 45 miles per hour (72 km/h) and humidity levels were in the single digits, leaving crews with few options for slowing the flames, especially as they raced through the treetops.

"We are not expecting the weather to be kind to us for the next couple of days," said Alyssa Mason, a spokesperson assigned to the fire. "We are seeing extreme fire behavior out there with some crown runs and definitely some spotting."

Burning in a sparsely populated area of southern Utah, the Cottonwood Fire ballooned Friday to more than 112 square miles (290 square kilometers). One of several large wildfires burning in Utah, it severely damaged the Eagle Point ski resort in Beaver County and forced evacuations. In the community of Marysvale, the smoke blocked out the sun Friday as ash rained down.

"We're looking at a full 48 hours of critical weather that we have not seen in Utah in the last five years," meteorologist Jason Straub told a community meeting in Beaver County Friday evening.

A cold front on Sunday will bring winds that could push the fire in new directions before the weather starts stabilizing next week, he said.

The smoke pushed mostly east, meaning air quality at popular vacation spots like Zion and Bryce Canyon national parks — located far south of the flames — hasn't been significantly affected beyond some haze in the Bryce area.

Still, the plume was visible from miles away, even as far as Colorado.

It's like nothing seen in recent memory, Utah state forester Jamie Barnes said earlier this week. She acknowledged that fires are spreading farther and faster "under conditions that defy historical expectations."

Nationally, nearly 3 million acres have burned since the start of the year, pushing the U.S. ahead of the 10-year average. The National Interagency Fire Center said firefighters are making progress on containing fires from Alaska to Florida.

Red flag warnings cover the West

Conditions including low humidity and strong winds have triggered red flag warnings across a wide swatch stretching from Idaho to southern Arizona and New Mexico. Some of the forecasts predicted winds of 25

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to 35 miles an hour (40 km/h to 56 km/h), with the worst conditions expected from northern Arizona into central and southern Utah.

At Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona, officials were preparing for a power outage on Saturday. The utility that serves the area had warned that it would likely initiate a safety outage in hopes of lessening the risk of wildfire in the area.

Visitors will be able to purchase park passes at entrance stations as long as backup power systems remain operational, but park officials said visitors should come prepared. That means downloading maps and other important information before arriving and ensuring that phones and other electronic devices are fully charged.

Power shutoffs have become more common in the West as wildfire risk has expanded. It's usually a last resort after utility forecasters weigh factors like sustained wind and gust speeds, available fuels and topography.

With extreme fire conditions persisting, Rocky Mountain Power has issued a public safety power shutoff watch/warning for areas of central, southern and eastern Utah through the weekend.

As long as it's hot and dry, the risk will be high

Tim Brown, a research professor and director of the Western Regional Climate Center, said the potential for extreme fire behavior will remain as long as it's hot, dry and windy. He pointed to parts of the West that have been mired by persistent drought, including Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico.

"I would not be surprised to see a lot of restrictions come out as we get closer to the July Fourth weekend," he said. "People really need to be aware of their surroundings if they're going to be out in the forested campground areas and grassland areas."

Gov. Spencer Cox set the temporary fireworks restrictions through July 5 as the nation prepares to celebrate its 250th anniversary, saying "this year is different."

While the Cottonwood Fire's cause was unknown, the governor's order noted that humans have been the cause of most fires in the state so far this year.

Even in Florida, where there have been multiple brush fires, authorities are urging people to skip the personal fireworks and instead leave the pyrotechnics to professionals putting on carefully planned shows.

Back fire camp, Mason talked about Utah's snowpack and steam flows peaking early in March, resulting in what she called extreme dryness. Then came the wind storms like never seen before, she said.

"If anything happens out there, any kind of spark hits fuels," she said, "it is more than likely going to start a fire and more than likely going to get pretty big pretty quick."

Heavy rain pounds western Japan as 2 tropical storms approach

TOKYO (AP) — Heavy downpours triggered flooding in parts of western Japan on Friday as two approaching tropical storms added to a seasonal rain front already stuck above the country.

Storm Mekkhala was off the western coast of Japan's southern remote island of Amami as of late afternoon Friday as it headed northeast, the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

Another storm, Higos, was traveling nearby and the two storms are expected to reach the Tokyo region Saturday while dumping heavy rain, the JMA said.

Earlier Friday, a man was injured as he fell into a waterway in Nara, according to Japan's NHK public television.

Television footage from Kyoto showed the Kamo River swollen with muddy water. A flooding alert was issued in parts of Kyoto, Osaka and other areas in western Japan.

The Fire and Disaster Management Agency said more than 30 homes were flooded in Nara and Hiroshima on Friday. Heavy rain also disrupted some train operations and flights in the area.

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The scars of war among survivors in Sudan

By SAM MEDNICK, FAY ABUELGASIM and BERNAT ARMANGUE Associated Press

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) — Three years of war have devastated much of Sudan. The impact has been pressed into the skin of survivors, and their memories.

Thousands of people are dead. Millions are displaced. Associated Press journalists spent more than a week in and around the capital after the army retook Khartoum last year. It continues to fight elsewhere against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.

Here are some of the war's survivors and their stories. A member of the military media accompanied the AP during the visit, including during interviews. The AP retains full editorial control of its content.

Soccer dreams shattered

Omer al-Toum had dreamed of playing for Sudan's national soccer team. But everything changed in October, when an unexploded weapon went off in his house as he tried to use it to loosen a nail. He lost part of his right leg and left arm. His remaining leg was shattered.

Calm and good-natured, the 33-year-old swoons these days over his 8-month old daughter, trying to stay positive.

"When I knew that my leg had been amputated, my family expected more of a reaction from me but I didn't show them how affected I was," he said.

Now al-Toum can't bathe or get out of bed alone, and some doorways in the house aren't wide enough for his wheelchair. He wants prosthetics but must travel abroad for good ones.

He's found solace in coaching soccer, and tells young players to stay in school to keep other options alive.

"As long as you are still breathing, you are still capable of doing many things. And when God takes something away from you, he will surely compensate you with other things," he said.

A sister's death

Noon Madani didn't want to leave the house that day in August nearly three years ago, but her older sister insisted. Paramilitary forces controlled her neighborhood outside Khartoum, but an overdue bill needed to be paid.

On the way home, a missile killed her 18-year-old sister and crushed the 16-year-old Madani's legs.

Soft-spoken in her wheelchair, her legs in casts, she recalled looking at missile fragments in her sister's head as she lay beside her, unable to move.

"You can't imagine when someone suddenly tells you that your daughters were hit by an artillery shell. You enter a phase of breakdown," said their father, Omer Bakar.

Madani remained in a hospital for six months for surgeries, battling infections and sometimes waiting for a doctor to be found after others fled.

Doctors say she should be able to walk again. Her younger brothers wheel her to school every day. She studies science and dreams of becoming a doctor.

"We are trying to forget the war," her father said, "the nightmare we finally woke up from."

8 years old

When her house was struck in February 2025, Fatma Ageb's husband was asleep. Her older daughters had just discussed what to get their baby sister for her birthday. That was the last thing the 38-year-old remembers of that day.

The shelling killed her husband and their older daughters, 10 and 12. It pierced her body with shrapnel and badly injured their 8-year-old.

"If it wasn't for Zeinab I wouldn't want to live. She's always calling for her sisters and father," Ageb said, wiping tears from her cheeks.

The attack scarred her daughter's face and she lost her right eye. She wears a glass one in its place.

Sitting beside her mother at a hospital and wearing a necklace with a character from the movie "Frozen," Zeinab shyly held up a drawing she made and winced in pain while a doctor attended her wounds.

Friends and relatives pooled money for the girl's operations but she needs more, and her mother doesn't know where she'll find the money.

While she tries to be strong for her daughter, Zeinab's scars are a reminder of what they've lost.

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A volunteer shaken

Tariq Abuzeid had spent years helping others, raising money to run soup kitchens out of his house and distributing medicine to the sick. When the war came to Khartoum, the construction worker kept assisting people.

But in December 2023, he was caught in intense shelling after distributing food. He lost his right leg.

Surrounded by family, the 52-year-old now tries to be stoic, yet breaks down when he thinks about how circumstances have changed.

"I used to serve people. ... Now I feel like I am a burden," he said.

The attack caused massive bleeding, which he said compromised his immune system. He takes dozens of pills a day but is still in pain. He struggles to find a good prosthetic and a wheelchair, not easy in Khartoum.

And yet his volunteer work continues. Large metal bowls were stacked in his yard as he prepared to serve others their next meal.

Fleeing sexual assault

By July the hunger had become too much to bear, so the 50-year-old woman fled the besieged town of Dilling in South Kordofan with her two daughters. But she says they were abducted by the paramilitary RSF.

Hands bound, faces covered, they said they were driven for hours to a makeshift base in the desert with more than a dozen other women. The woman said she was gang-raped there until she bled, and was beaten regularly for months.

The AP does not name people who have been sexually assaulted. The United Nations has called sexual violence one of the Sudan war's "defining features."

Each night, the woman would cringe hearing fighters' footsteps approach the room where they were held. The men would point to the woman they wanted and take her away, she said.

When they came for her daughters, 25 and 20, she told them to take her instead.

One night when the fighters were out, she fled with her daughters into the desert. Terrified and weak, they walked for days before finding help in another town.

The RSF did not respond to request for comment.

Now they are in a center for women in Khartoum. Crying, she said a doctor told her the injuries from sexual assaults were so bad that her uterus should be removed.

Older buildings and substandard construction left Venezuela vulnerable to earthquakes

By GARANCE BURKE, MICHAEL BIESECKER and BYRON TAU Associated Press

Older buildings, substandard construction and geography left many neighborhoods in Venezuela vulnerable to strong earthquakes like the ones that struck the country this week.

Engineers and other experts said the back-to-back earthquakes on Wednesday were among the most intense to hit the country in more than a century, leveling buildings and leaving more than 900 dead with the number expected to rise. Videos and satellite imagery from the disaster zone reviewed by The Associated Press reveal scores of multistory buildings had collapsed.

Microsoft's AI for Good Lab analyzed satellite imagery of Catia La Mar in La Guaira state, one of the hardest hit cities along the Caribbean coast. Using AI-based damage assessment models, Microsoft determined that about a third of the city's nearly 30,000 structures were damaged.

Among the factors that left so many structures at risk: Some housing complexes in northern Venezuela were constructed quickly during recent oil booms, and builders may not have adhered to best practices that mitigate the risks of serious seismic activity, according to experts.

Engineers said that older housing erected in the 1950s and 1960s — before modern earthquake standards were adopted — may not have been retrofitted to survive such violent shaking. And many buildings were constructed on geography and soft soils that compound the danger of the earthquakes, the experts said.

Tall buildings and older concrete contributed to damage

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David Cocke, a structural engineer in California and former president of the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute, said that a combination of soft soils, tall towers and older concrete structures contributed to the widespread damage, particularly when buildings pancaked, or collapsed floor-by-floor.

"They just don't have the more modern reinforcing steel connections that we put in those kinds of buildings today," said Cocke.

Since the 1970s, engineers have known that concrete buildings are particularly susceptible to earthquakes and seek to reinforce new construction with steel. While many rich nations have forced property owners to retrofit or tear down dangerous buildings, many poorer or middle income countries have lagged in enforcing upgrades as they battled more immediate woes.

"Some of the more advanced countries like Japan and New Zealand and the U.S. have made those changes, but some of the other countries have not," Cocke said. "It's a very typical kind of construction all over the world."

'Soft stories' and soft soil played a role

Other experts noted that a number of buildings that collapsed also had non-structural walls comprised of heavy bricks, or they had "soft stories" in which their ground floors consisted of garages or similar open spaces. Such construction increases the risk of pancaking, they said.

"Soft stories are a huge problem everywhere in the world," said Eduardo Miranda, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Stanford University. "And in Venezuela, they are particularly prevalent, and if you combine softer soils with a soft story, buildings can collapse."

Marcos Ferreira, a geophysicist and researcher at the Geological Survey of Brazil, said the destruction in Venezuela was compounded by the back-to-back quakes, known as a doublet. A similar incident took place in Turkey and Syria in 2023, killing almost 60,000 people.

"It is as if I am screaming and then someone starts screaming, too," Ferreira said. "That amplifies the vibration and adds to the potential hazard."

Newer buildings also collapsed

Venezuelan government officials took steps following a deadly 1967 quake to update building codes. But it is unclear how many buildings were retrofitted to comply with those rules.

In late 1999, former President Hugo Chávez's first year in office, floods and landslides destroyed housing, including in coastal northern Venezuela. The government went on a building spree to replace the demolished structures and to house so many displaced people, said Juan Carlos Vielma, a Venezuelan civil engineer who is head of academic affairs of the civil engineering school at Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaíso, Chile.

Some of the newer buildings appear to also have collapsed.

"Something that leaves me perplexed is the fact that, among the collapsed buildings, more than one was recently designed and built in accordance with current standards," Vielma said. "We need to embark on a process not only of reconstruction, but also of reviewing the applicable standards, since something might have gone wrong within our engineering processes, too."

States seek to lower drug prices by targeting the companies that manage them for health plans

By JOHN HANNA Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — As consumers worry about medication costs, states are trying to lower drug prices by reining in big companies that oversee prescription coverage for health insurers.

Some of those companies, called pharmacy benefit managers, also own pharmacies, and one of them, CVS, has spent millions of dollars fighting the regulations.

Affordability is a key issue ahead of this year's midterm elections. Legislators in at least a dozen states passed laws this year to limit compensation to the companies, set minimum payments from the companies to pharmacists and require the companies to disclose more information to their clients, states and the public.

A Tennessee law will bar pharmacy benefit managers from operating retail pharmacies as of July 1, 2028,

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though CVS Health Corp. has filed a federal lawsuit to avoid having to close its 136 pharmacies there.

About 6 in 10 U.S. adults said in a poll conducted earlier this year by healthcare research nonprofit KFF that they were at least somewhat worried about being able to afford their prescriptions. About 4 in 10 said costs had led them not to take medications as prescribed within the previous year, either by taking less than the prescribed dose, using over-the-counter substitutes or not filling prescriptions.

Dozens of proposals emerge across the US

Pharmacy benefit managers, particularly CVS and two other large companies, handle most U.S. prescriptions.

Lawmakers in at least 26 states introduced more than 120 bills this year on PBMs, according to an Associated Press search using the bill-tracking software Plural, with about a quarter of the bills clearing at least one chamber.

The companies manage pharmacy claims for health insurers and negotiate with manufacturers over drug prices and what medications will be covered. Critics concede that the size of the top companies gives them leverage that health plans wouldn't have on their own.

The benefit managers argue that they're the only player in the drug supply chain created to help push drug costs down and they claim credit for an increased use of less-expensive generic drugs, now 90% of U.S. prescriptions.

"If PBMs already didn't exist, you'd need to invent one," Prem Shaw, president of the CVS Health group overseeing its pharmacy and PBM operations, said in a recent interview. "Blaming PBMs for high drug prices is like blaming umbrellas for the rain."

CVS fights restrictions in Tennessee

Drug companies, PBMs and their allies have spent at least \$24 million on opposing broadcast and digital advertising since the start of 2025 to influence public opinion, according to the ad-tracking firm AdImpact. CVS spent \$4 million this year on ads opposing Tennessee's new law.

CVS sued Arkansas last year after it enacted similar legislation, and a federal judge blocked its law. CVS also settled three lawsuits in which Louisiana accused it of unfair trade and deceptive practices in lobbying against legislation there last year, agreeing to pay \$45 million without acknowledging wrongdoing.

The CVS lawsuit in Tennessee alleges that the company, which operates 9,000 pharmacies nationwide, is facing "naked protectionism" from lawmakers who operate independent pharmacies — including the law's main sponsor, state Sen. Bobby Harshbarger, and co-sponsor Sen. Shane Reeves.

Independent pharmacies say they're being squeezed

In Knoxville, Seth White, who manages a CVS pharmacy, will have to find a new job if the Tennessee law stands, and he's also worried about hundreds of its customers having to go elsewhere for their medications.

Some 900 miles (1,400 kilometers) away in Coldwater, Kansas, Lisa Gales is on the opposite side of the debate. She and her husband operate the Main Street Pharmacy, and she said they rely heavily on sales of non-pharmacy items to offset low reimbursements from pharmacy benefit managers.

Gales calculates she lost money on 86% of the prescriptions she filled last year. A new Kansas law will require PBMs to pay a \$10.50 dispensing fee per prescription. Gales called it a "great win," even though, "It's still way under what it's costing us."

A new Louisiana law imposes an \$11.81 dispensing fee. Another says PBMs must operate for the benefit of their health-insurer clients and people enrolled in health plans.

Critics deride each mandatory dispensing fee as an extra "pill tax" that will drive up consumers' costs. Backers dispute that, saying the laws also limit what PBMs charge health plans for the cost of medications themselves — so that it's often well below wholesale prices.

Pharmacy benefit managers push drugmakers to give big discounts on those wholesale prices but face criticism for keeping any portion of them. Some states now require PBMs to pass along all discounts.

Patients are watching the debate

It all worries consumers, particularly in small towns, who fear it could become harder to get their medications if PBMs squeeze independent pharmacies on reimbursements to the point of endangering their

businesses.

In southeastern Kansas, Faith Sanders, a 79-year-old retired nursing home administrator, said the pharmacy in her hometown of Cedar Vale is important because without it people would have to drive 35 miles (56 kilometers) "to go out of town to get anything."

For her many elderly neighbors, she said, "We get to the point where it's hard for us to get out of town."

Meanwhile, even some PBM critics question whether states can effectively regulate them. In Tennessee, state Rep. Robert Stevens, a Nashville-area Republican, told colleagues during a debate that cracking down on PBMs "needs to be done by Congress and not by us."

Congress did pass new PBM regulations in February. One law will prevent PBMs from keeping any rebates they've negotiated on drug prices for health plans that supplement federal Medicare coverage for Americans over 64.

Last-place Mets fire manager Carlos Mendoza. Team owner Steve Cohen says 'fans deserve better'

By MIKE FITZPATRICK AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — From the front office to the field, the New York Mets have failed in almost every area over the past year.

And on Friday, manager Carlos Mendoza took the fall.

Halfway through a wretched season, Mendoza was fired as skipper of the underperforming Mets and replaced by former San Diego Padres manager Andy Green, who was already working in the organization.

Last-place New York was 34-47 at the season's midpoint, 15 games behind NL East-leading Atlanta and 9 1/2 back of the final NL wild-card berth.

Mets owner Steve Cohen had high expectations for a team without a World Series title since 1986. New York opened the season with baseball's highest payroll at \$358 million and was projected to pay an additional \$124 million in luxury tax.

"There is no sugar-coating it: This season has been a disappointment and our fans deserve better than what we've delivered," Cohen said in a statement.

Although in some ways Mendoza had been on the hot seat for months, in others it was a stunningly swift decline for a skipper viewed as a rising star in 2024, when he earned high praise and was a Manager of the Year finalist after taking the Mets on a surprising playoff run in his debut season.

At a Citi Field news conference before Friday night's 2-1 loss to the Philadelphia Phillies, president of baseball operations David Stearns thanked Mendoza for his contributions and called it "a very difficult day."

"Despite all of our efforts, Mendy's included, we haven't been able to get this going this year. And I take responsibility for that," Stearns said. "I also have a responsibility to push us forward, to look for solutions and to make difficult decisions and change when I think it's needed."

Slowed by injuries to Francisco Lindor, Juan Soto, Clay Holmes, Francisco Alvarez, Luis Robert Jr. and Jorge Polanco, the Mets (34-48) are a season-worst 14 games under .500 after dropping their seventh in a row. Friday night marked only the 10th time all year — and first since April 22 — that Lindor and Soto were both in the starting lineup. On two of those occasions, one left early because of a calf strain.

New York traded pitcher David Peterson, who had been the team's longest-tenured player, to the Chicago Cubs on Thursday and could pivot to a selloff this summer and retooling for the future.

"I understand we have an uphill battle ahead of us this year, but we're not turning the page," Stearns said. "I think sometimes a new voice, a new perspective, a new view, helps. And sometimes it's really difficult to explain why or how. But at this point, it was time to try."

Stearns said he informed Mendoza of the decision when they met Friday morning, and the Mets held a team meeting Friday afternoon.

"At the end of the day, this is not on him. It's more on us, the players, that we didn't perform to our capabilities," Lindor said.

The 46-year-old Mendoza spent 15 seasons working for the New York Yankees, the last four as bench

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coach, before the Mets hired him to replace Buck Showalter after the 2023 season. They reached the National League Championship Series in 2024 but missed the playoffs last year and are among baseball's biggest disappointments this season.

"If we were playing better, he'd still be here. It's just unfortunate he had to take the fall," infielder Bo Bichette said.

Since starting 2025 a major league-best 45-24 through June 12, the Mets are 72-103. The team went 206-199 under Mendoza, who was in the final guaranteed season of a three-year contract. He was hired by the Mets a month after Stearns arrived.

After signing Soto to a record \$765 million, 15-year contract before the 2025 season, Stearns made major changes last offseason. He overhauled Mendoza's coaching staff and allowed fan favorites Pete Alonso and Edwin Diaz to leave as free agents. Brandon Nimmo and Jeff McNeil were traded, and Stearns brought in Bichette, Polanco, Robert, Freddy Peralta and Marcus Semien.

None of it has worked.

New York had a 12-game losing streak in April, its longest since 2002, and made six errors in the nightcap of Wednesday's doubleheader loss to the Chicago Cubs, the team's most in a game since 2014.

The 48-year-old Green, a former major league infielder, joined the Mets in 2023 as senior vice president of baseball development and had been running their farm system. He was given the title of interim manager for the rest of the season and will wear uniform No. 70.

"Tough. I don't think anybody dreams of sitting in this seat this way," Green said.

Green managed San Diego to a 274-366 record from 2016-19, finishing with losing records in all four seasons.

Stearns said Green will return to a front-office role after this season and the Mets will conduct a full search for a new manager. Green said he loves the player-development job he had and chose it largely to be able to spend more time with his three daughters.

"This wasn't something I was running to," Green said. "This felt more like a responsibility than an opportunity."

Green played four games for the Mets in 2009, his final big league appearances as a player. He became the team's fourth manager since Cohen bought the club from the Wilpon and Katz families after the 2020 season, following Luis Rojas, Showalter and Mendoza.

Mendoza is the third major league manager to lose his job since the season started. Boston's Alex Cora was replaced by Chad Tracy and Philadelphia's Rob Thomson by Don Mattingly, with both of those changes coming in late April.

Roster shuffle

In other moves, the Mets reinstated outfielder Tyrone Taylor (right hip flexor strain) from the 10-day injured list and recalled left-hander Zach Thornton from Triple-A Syracuse to make his second big league start Friday night against Philadelphia. The club optioned outfielder MJ Melendez and right-hander Daniel Duarte to Syracuse following Thursday night's 10-inning loss to the Cubs.

Ex-national security adviser John Bolton pleads guilty to illegally retaining classified information

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

GREENBELT, Md. (AP) — Former Trump administration national security adviser John Bolton pleaded guilty on Friday to illegally retaining classified information, sealing a deal with federal prosecutors that could allow him to avoid a prison term.

Bolton, who became an outspoken critic of President Donald Trump after serving in the Republican's first administration, is scheduled to be sentenced on Oct. 28 by U.S. District Judge Theodore Chuang in Greenbelt, Maryland.

Bolton, 77, of Bethesda, Maryland, pleaded guilty to a single count of illegally retaining national defense

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information, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years. His plea agreement with the Justice Department may enable him to avoid time behind bars, but the judge ultimately will decide his punishment.

Trump celebrated the plea on his social media platform late Friday, calling Bolton a "terrible person" and writing, "Hopefully, he will be dealt with harshly!"

The plea agreement recommends capping any prison sentence at five years, but the judge isn't bound by that part of the deal. Bolton, who also agreed to pay a fine of \$2.25 million, can withdraw his guilty plea if the judge imposes a longer prison sentence or a larger fine.

Bolton must pay half of the fine within five days of his plea and the balance within 90 days. He agreed to forfeit his retirement pay for his federal service. The plea deal also requires him to submit to a debriefing with federal intelligence officials and perform up to 100 hours of community service.

After a prosecutor read aloud a summary of his offenses, Bolton agreed that it was accurate.

"I'm sorry for it," he told the judge.

Defense attorney Abbe Lowell said Bolton "did what real leaders do" by pleading guilty.

"He took responsibility for a mistake he made, thereby saving the government resources to pursue a case that could expose additional sensitive information," Lowell said in a statement after the hearing.

U.S. Attorney Kelly O. Hayes, the top federal prosecutor for Maryland, said Bolton knew how to properly handle and store classified information.

"He also knew the damage to national security that could be caused by mishandling that sensitive information. Nevertheless, as Mr. Bolton just admitted, he put our national security at grave risk in violation of the law," Hayes told reporters.

Bolton was charged last October with 18 counts of either retaining or disseminating classified information, including diary-like notes that he shared with relatives as he wrote a memoir about his career in government.

Other Trump adversaries have been charged with federal crimes during his second term in the White House. While some of those cases have collapsed under judicial scrutiny and amid claims of political retribution, Bolton didn't mount a vigorous defense against his charges before cutting a deal.

FBI agents searched Bolton's Maryland home and Washington, D.C., office last August, but the investigation began before Trump returned to the White House in January 2025.

Bolton served as national security adviser for more than a year in Trump's first administration before getting pushed out in 2019. He later published a book called "The Room Where it Happened" that presented an unflattering portrait of Trump's leadership.

The Trump administration fought unsuccessfully to block the book's release, claiming it contained classified information that could jeopardize national security. Trump derided Bolton as a "crazy" warmonger who would have led the country into "World War Six."

Bolton's indictment focused on notes that he shared with his wife and daughter rather than the contents of his book. After sending one document, Bolton wrote in a message to his relatives, "None of which we talk about!!!" In response, one of his relatives wrote, "Shhhhh," prosecutors said.

Bolton shared over 1,000 pages of diary-style information about his daily duties as national security adviser with his family members, according to a court filing accompanying his guilty plea. There is no evidence that his relatives shared the information with anybody else.

However, sometime after Bolton left government service, a hacker linked to Iran accessed classified information from Bolton's personal email account, the court filing says. Bolton directed a representative to notify U.S. officials about the hacked account in 2021.

OpenAI and Anthropic limit new AI models to Trump-approved customers during cybersecurity review

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

ChatGPT maker OpenAI said Friday it is restricting the release of its new artificial intelligence model at the request of President Donald Trump's administration, the latest in an unprecedented government vetting of AI products for cybersecurity risks.

Its chief rival, Anthropic, announced hours later that the Trump administration has approved a limited release of its strongest cybersecurity model, two weeks after the U.S. Commerce Department effectively banned it.

Both companies said their newest models would be available to small groups of trusted partners. OpenAI said its new AI product, called GPT-5.6 Sol, would be accessible only to customers approved by the Trump administration.

"We don't believe this kind of government access process should become the long-term default," OpenAI said in a statement. The company said it viewed the testing period as a temporary step on the "path to broader availability in the coming weeks."

OpenAI's staggered release of a powerful new AI system follows actions the government took earlier this month against Anthropic, maker of the Claude chatbot. Anthropic took offline two new AI models, known as Fable 5 and Mythos 5, just days after unveiling them to comply with a Trump directive blocking their use by foreign nationals. The government on Friday lifted restrictions on one of those models, Mythos 5, enabling it to be "redeployed to a small group of cyber defenders and infrastructure providers," Anthropic said.

The White House said Friday it continues to collaborate with frontier AI labs on addressing the challenges of scaling the fast-growing technology.

Officials have grown increasingly concerned since Anthropic warned earlier this year that its Mythos model was adept at finding software flaws in a way that could be weaponized by malicious hackers and threaten critical computer networks around the world.

New, powerful AI models have drawn White House scrutiny

Trump earlier in June signed an executive order on AI oversight that established a framework for the federal government to vet the national security risks of the most advanced AI systems for up to 30 days before their public release. The order described participation by AI developers as voluntary but the framework has not yet been fully developed.

Some of Trump's allies have laid blame on San Francisco-based Anthropic and CEO Dario Amodei for the need for heightened government scrutiny.

"Dario came to Washington a few months ago, back in April, and basically said that he had created a cyber weapon called Mythos," said investor David Sacks, who co-leads Trump's council of technology and science advisers, on a recent podcast. "And he spiked the cortisol level, got everyone really worried. And there was some truth to it in terms of the sense that this model had advanced cyber capabilities."

OpenAI, also based in San Francisco, said its new Sol model (pronounced 'SOHL' like the Spanish word for sun) "is better at helping people find and fix vulnerabilities" than it is at carrying out cyberattacks and does not cross the company's own risk threshold. But it acknowledged there could be unforeseen risks especially if its model is combined with other tools.

"That uncertainty, along with the model's broader step change in capabilities, is why we are pairing the model's increased capabilities with stronger safeguards and a phased release," the company said Friday.

OpenAI hasn't named any of the roughly 20 customers that have been approved to use the new model so far.

Critics warn that unpredictable government intervention can hold back US companies

U.S. Rep. Lori Trahan, a Massachusetts Democrat and co-author of a bipartisan bill that would regulate AI, said in a statement that she is concerned "the Trump administration is deciding company by company who gets access to the newest AI model. No law. No process. No oversight. Just appointees in Washington

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deciding who's in and who's out."

A broad group of technology experts has also criticized the government's actions that led Anthropic to shut down Fable, which the company had pitched as a safer version of Mythos. It's now been unavailable for two weeks, even after the government lifted restrictions Friday on the more powerful Mythos.

"I just want to say that pretty much nobody in the cybersecurity industry believes that there's any factual basis for this action," Stanford University cybersecurity expert Alex Stamos said on a call with reporters earlier this week.

Stamos, the chief product officer at AI security company Corridor and a former chief security officer at Facebook parent Meta, said he reviewed an analysis of research on Fable by Anthropic's primary cloud computing backer, Amazon, and didn't find any risks that aren't present with other publicly available AI models, including those made in China.

"If the administration is honest about wanting the United States to beat China in this race, then this is about the dumbest thing they could possibly do," Stamos said.

Oversight ramps up as the AI companies move toward IPOs

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman spoke with U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick about the model release Wednesday, part of a series of negotiations in recent weeks between AI industry executives and Trump officials.

Anthropic has also been part of those talks, but Amodei has had a more contentious relationship with the Trump administration. The Pentagon designated Anthropic as a national security risk for raising ethical and safety concerns about AI usage in war, and Trump himself ordered federal agencies to stop using Claude. Anthropic responded with a lawsuit that is still working its way through federal courts.

Anthropic said Friday it was "pleased" by the partial release of Mythos late Friday and will "continue to work with the government to expand access" and make Fable available again to general users. Lutnick told Anthropic in a letter dated Friday that its work to address the government's concerns "yielded significant progress."

The government's heightened AI oversight adds another complication to exploratory moves by OpenAI as well as Anthropic to take their companies public on Wall Street, following SpaceX's record-setting June 12 initial public offering.

Trump has floated the possibility of the U.S. government owning a stake in leading AI companies, describing a concept where "pieces could be given to the American public, where the American public essentially becomes a partner with the companies."

Utah declares a state of emergency and restricts fireworks as US largest wildfire grows

By KATHY McCORMACK and SUSAN MONTROYA BRYAN Associated Press

Utah restricted fireworks and declared a state of emergency Friday ahead of July Fourth celebrations as the United States' largest wildfire expanded its reach across more tinder-dry forest as crews rush to fight new blazes in the arid state.

The National Weather Service issued a rare "Particularly Dangerous Situation" warning as dry, windy conditions provided fuel for more fires across the western U.S.

The Cottonwood Fire in a sparsely populated area of southern Utah started Monday. It ballooned to more than 112 square miles (290 square kilometers) by Friday, burning unchecked as strong winds grounded air support, forestry officials said. One of six large wildfires burning in Utah, it severely damaged the Eagle Point ski resort in Beaver County, forcing mandatory evacuations.

"We have the 35 miles-per-hour (56 km/h) sustained winds that they predicted, and we definitely have the 45 miles-per-hour (72 km/h) gusts," said Alyssa Mason, a spokesperson assigned to the fire. "So there has been a great increase in the fire activity. We are seeing extreme fire behavior out there with some crown runs and definitely some spotting."

The smoke has been pushing to the east and northeast, meaning air quality at popular vacation spots

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like Zion and Bryce Canyon national parks — located far south of the flames — hasn't been significantly affected beyond some haze in the Bryce area. Still, visitors to Bryce have posted videos on social media showing the giant plume in the distance.

The smoke could be seen for hundreds of miles, all the way to Colorado, as authorities put roughly 1,300 residents in the towns of Marysville, Junction and Circleville on notice that they should be prepared to leave if conditions worsen and the fire pushes further. In Marysville, ash fell from the sky and thick smoke blocked the sun on Friday, making the sky dark as night.

State forester Jamie Barnes had said Thursday that it's like nothing seen in recent memory. She said fires are spreading farther and faster "under conditions that defy historical expectations."

Bruce Brown, 76, accompanied the sheriff on Thursday to find that his cabin and others in the area were gone. He found a burned out moonscape with power poles tipped over along the canyon.

Alyssa Olsen, 27, said her family's cabin also burned. It was the last place they gathered for family photos with her grandmother before she died of cancer. Her brother was planning to get married there in two months.

"That stuff you can't just build back," Olsen said.

Fireworks will be limited in Utah through July 5

Gov. Spencer Cox set the temporary fireworks restrictions through July 5 as the nation prepares to celebrate its 250th anniversary, saying "this year is different."

The weather service in Salt Lake City, for the first time in the office's history, issued a "Particularly Dangerous Situation" warning for five Utah counties, including the area of the Cottonwood Fire. The rare alert was first used to warn of tornado conditions. A red flag warning also was issued for most of the state.

"Prepare now for rapid fire growth," it said.

A similar "dangerous situation" warning had been issued for the 2025 Palisades Fire in Los Angeles. A federal judge declared a mistrial Friday in the arson case against Jonathan Rinderknecht, the man accused of sparking that fire. The jury said it couldn't agree on a verdict.

While the Cottonwood Fire's cause was unknown, Cox's order noted that humans have been the cause of most fires in the state so far this year.

The governor's order gives Barnes power to restrict or prohibit fireworks displays in Utah's cities and towns, instead of leaving those decisions to the communities.

With extreme fire conditions persisting, Rocky Mountain Power issued a public safety power shut-off watch/warning for areas of central, southern and eastern Utah through the weekend.

Crews also were battling the Iron Fire southwest of Salt Lake City. The flames on Thursday forced the temporary evacuation of Eureka, population 1,000.

Wildfire danger prompts concern throughout the West

Red flag warnings, which mean conditions such as low humidity, warm temperatures and strong winds can create an extreme wildfire risk, were in effect Friday and stretched from Idaho to southern Arizona and New Mexico.

The warnings extended into Saturday, with forecasters predicting winds of 25 to 35 miles an hour (40 km/h to 56 km/h) and very low humidity levels. The worst conditions were expected from northern Arizona into central and southern Utah.

Much of Utah already is experiencing severe to extreme drought, while parts of Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico are experiencing severe drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

Tim Brown, a research professor and director of the Western Regional Climate Center, said the potential for extreme fire behavior will remain as long as it's hot, dry and windy.

"I would not be surprised to see a lot of restrictions come out as we get closer to the July Fourth weekend," he said. "People really need to be aware of their surroundings if they're going to be out in the forested campground areas and grassland areas."

Even in Florida, where there have been multiple brush fires, authorities are urging people to skip the personal fireworks and instead leave the pyrotechnics to professionals putting on carefully planned shows.

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In Utah, federal land managers have closed public lands near the Cottonwood Fire as a precaution, and in New Mexico, forest officials closed campgrounds and trails near a wildfire burning in the Jemez Mountains.

Nationally, nearly 3 million acres have burned since the start of the year, pushing the U.S. ahead of the 10-year average. The National Interagency Fire Center said firefighters are making progress on containing fires from Alaska to Florida.

World Cup what to know: Round of 32 to be finalized after final 6 matches of group play

By STEVE REED AP Sports Writer

The World Cup knockout rounds are almost here.

The field for the Round of 32 will be finalized on Saturday following more than two weeks of competition across three countries.

While majority of the field is set, there are still some spots up for grabs with six group-stage matches remaining, leaving some teams jockeying for position and others fighting to advance.

Still others find themselves on the bubble, relying on other teams to determine their World Cup fate.

The knockout rounds begin Sunday.

The expansion to 48 teams in the World Cup has added intrigue — and in some cases, the confusion — over which 32 teams advance, with tiebreakers coming into play. The top two finishing teams from each of the 12 groups and eight third-place finishers move on.

The most intriguing match on Saturday might be Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal against Colombia.

Colombia has already secured a spot in the Round of 32 and can win Group K with a win or draw. Portugal needs a win to take the group, but can also advance with a draw or possibly even a loss.

Portugal coach Roberto Martinez said winning the group would be nice, but it doesn't matter as long as the team advances.

"It doesn't. It doesn't," Martinez said. "My experience, probably in my first World Cup, I would have said yes. You sit down and you are so inexperienced, you want to plan everything ... and then you realize that doesn't happen in competitions."

Martinez said in the end, "you have to be able to beat everybody and anybody."

The match in Miami Gardens, Florida, will be played in typical June conditions, with temperatures expected to hover around 87 degrees Fahrenheit (30 Celsius) with high humidity when the match kicks off.

What to watch on June 27

— Panama vs. England, 5 p.m. EDT in East Rutherford, New Jersey (Fox/Telemundo/Peacock)

— Croatia vs. Ghana, 5 p.m. EDT in Philadelphia (FS1/Telemundo/Peacock)

— Colombia vs. Portugal, 7:30 p.m. EDT in Miami Gardens, Florida (Fox/Telemundo/Peacock)

— Congo vs. Uzbekistan, 7:30 p.m. EDT in Atlanta (FS1/Telemundo/Peacock)

— Algeria vs. Austria, 10 p.m. EDT in Kansas City, Missouri (Fox/Telemundo/Peacock)

— Jordan vs. Argentina, 10 p.m. EDT in Arlington, Texas (FS1/Telemundo/Peacock)

Messi not starting with Argentina having clinched Group F

Lionel Messi, the top scorer in World Cup history, will not start when defending tournament champion and Group F winner Argentina plays Jordan.

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said Friday that Messi will begin on the bench, but also indicated that he "will come in a little bit later."

Messi scored all five goals for Argentina in its first two games of this tournament. He had his first World Cup hat trick in a 3-0 win over Algeria to tie the career scoring record at 16 goals, and broke that mark by scoring both goals in a 2-0 win over Austria on Monday.

England's Reece James to sit vs. Panama

Right back Reece James will miss England's group-stage finale against Panama because of a hamstringing injury, midfielders Declan Rice and Elliott Anderson may play and winger Bukayo Saka could make his first start of the tournament.

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James was hurt during Tuesday's 0-0 draw against Ghana, and coach Thomas Tuchel described the injury as minor. James did not travel to New Jersey, the site of Saturday's match, from England's training camp in Kansas City, Missouri.

England beat Croatia 4-2 and tied Ghana, putting itself in position to reach the knockout rounds for the sixth time in seven World Cups.

Tuchel said his James' status for the Round of 32 was unclear. Panama has already been eliminated.

Congo looks to join African teams in the Round of 32

Congo pulled off one of the surprising results of the World Cup by holding Portugal to a 1-1 draw in its opener, earning a point in the tournament for the first time. Now it hopes to earn its first win and join the wave of African teams advancing to the knockout rounds.

"We are very, very happy to have got this first point and first goal for Congo, but we have a final to play tomorrow," coach Sébastien Desabre said ahead of Saturday's Group K game against Uzbekistan. "I hope that I'll get the Congolese people to dream tomorrow a little bit."

Congo's one previous appearance at the World Cup was under its former name, Zaire, in 1974, when it lost all three games, including a 9-0 rout at the hands of Yugoslavia.

A win gives Congo a chance to advance.

Uzbekistan has never earned a World Cup point.

Croatia and Ghana play for right to advance to knockout round

Separated by one point, Ghana and Croatia both have something meaningful to play for in their Group L match.

Ghana needs only a draw to reach the knockout round. Croatia, however, needs a win to be assured of a spot in the Round of 32.

England and Ghana are tied at four points, and Croatia has three points.

"Everyone's ready, everyone was real happy with the result against England," Ghana midfielder Antoine Semenyo said. "It's going to be a tough game tomorrow, but everyone is excited and ready."

Ghana hasn't made it to the knockout round since reaching the quarterfinals in 2010 in South Africa.

Is Austria better off losing?

By the time Austria and Algeria begin their Group J finale, both will know how the knockout bracket looks, and what the consequences will be for finishing second or third behind group winner Argentina.

This is where things get awkward: It might actually behoove Austria to lose.

The way the bracket is set up, the Group J runner-up faces the Group H winner, which could be reigning European champion Spain. But the third-place finisher would face the Group B winner, which means a potentially easier matchup against Switzerland.

Asked if he wanted his team to avoid winning, Austria coach Ralf Rangnick replied: "No, definitely not."

"Once we start we will know," Rangnick said Friday, "but it will not influence our match. ... If we have a draw tomorrow, we can go on, but we cannot go into a match and just say, 'We'll play for a draw.'"

In 1982, in what became known as the "Disgrace of Gijon," West Germany beat Austria 1-0, a result that advanced both teams over Algeria. Both teams seemed to quit trying after the first goal was scored, leading FIFA to implement simultaneous kickoffs on the final day of group play.

"We go out, we want to win the game," Austria midfielder Konrad Laimer said. "It doesn't matter who we face."

More World Cup news

— 'Pride Match' organizers highlight Seattle's inclusivity amid opposition from Iran and Egypt

— A maple leaf-shaped 'Canadian clapper' sparks a World Cup buzz across Toronto

— Mexico teenager Gilberto Mora impresses in first World Cup start and could see role expand

— Panama striker Cecilio Waterman, midfielder José Luis Rodríguez have training ground confrontation

— Bastian Schweinsteiger says his remarks on Ivory Coast's style at World Cup were not about people

— Day 16 of the World Cup, in photos

Stats of the day

Scoring first in the World Cup is obviously a huge advantage, but doesn't necessarily lead to a win or

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draw. In fact, seven teams have overcome deficits in group play to win. South Korea rallied to beat the Czech Republic 2-1 with two late goals, Algeria battled back from a halftime deficit to top Jordan 2-1 and, most recently, Turkiye stunned the United States with a last-second goal to win 3-2. Egypt, Germany, Morocco and Ecuador have also overcome deficits to win.

Bible stories are approved as required reading in Texas public schools

By JAMIE STENGLE and JOHN HANNA Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Texas' education board on Friday approved a required reading list for more than 5 million public school students that includes Bible stories, widening conservative efforts to bring Christian teachings into U.S. classrooms.

The state-mandated list of assigned reading — which includes Charles Dickens' "Great Expectations" and excerpts from the New Testament — appeared to be among the first of its kind of the nation and will take effect starting in 2030.

The State Board of Education, which is controlled by Republicans, approved the list on a 9-5 vote following weeks of contentious debate that again put Texas at the center of wrangling over the role of religion in public schools. Last year, Texas became the largest state to require teachers to hang the Ten Commandments in every classroom.

The board this week was also considering new social studies curriculum that draws lines between Bible stories and American history.

Beyond objections over Bible readings, the mandate drew backlash from teachers who criticized losing the ability to decide what their students will read, although they are still allowed to assign additional books during the school year.

"I don't have a problem reading about David and Goliath because I believe in those stories," said Alyse Dent, a high school English teacher in the Dallas area. "But if I'm reading to one of my students — they're Muslim or they're atheist — I can say all day long, 'Well, we're teaching a theme, we're teaching symbolism,' but they're hearing, 'This is a Bible story. We're talking about God.'"

Supporters of the changes have argued that Judeo-Christian traditions were fundamental to the nation's founding and that should be reflected in the public school curriculum.

"These timeless works, including biblical passages, have shaped American culture and history, and have influenced generations of thinkers, leaders, and citizens, and they continue to offer valuable lessons about human nature, virtue, liberty, and civic responsibility," said Mandy Drogin, a senior fellow at Texas Public Policy Foundation, a conservative think tank.

Texas has brought more religion into classrooms

Texas, which educates roughly 1 in 10 of the nation's public school students, has been at the forefront of a charge by conservatives to incorporate more religion into classrooms. The state also allows public schools to hire chaplains to counsel students and has approved an optional Bible-infused curriculum.

Brooke Mazel, a retiree from Lubbock, was among a large crowd that packed a meeting of the education board this week in Austin, saying her children and grandchildren grew up with "strong faith and family values" and backed the required titles.

"America should celebrate our 250 years that started as a nation of unwavering Christian values," Mazel said.

A state law passed in 2023 required a mandatory list of at least one literary work be taught in each grade level. The new list contains around 200 texts, including Bible passages, essays and books, far in excess of that requirement.

Antero Garcia, president of the National Council of Teachers of English and a Stanford University professor, said he doesn't know of any other state with a mandatory reading list that includes religious texts. Educators at the district and school level usually choose the texts their students will read, Garcia said.

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Kasey Meehan, director of PEN America's Freedom to Read program, agreed the move was "unique" to Texas.

Popular literary works are also on Texas' required list

Picture-book stories for elementary students including "David and Goliath" and "Daniel and the Lion's Den" are on the required reading list. By fourth grade, students will encounter passages about Jesus in the New Testament. E.B. White's "Charlotte's Web" would be assigned to third-graders.

In middle school, students will be expected to read passages about Jesus, including his most famous sermon and another where he instructs people to cast aside earthly anxiety and seek the kingdom of God.

For high schoolers, the list requires the reading of specific Bible passages as supportive materials for literary works, including works by Dickens and Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice."

Texas law does let parents remove a child from a class or activity that conflicts with their religious or moral beliefs.

Critics say list isn't diverse enough

The list mandates that students reading Shakespeare's "The Tragedy of Julius Caesar" also read a eulogy for President Ronald Reagan written by former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, a staunch conservative.

Chanea Bond, who teaches college and advanced high school English courses in Fort Worth, said having a state reading list can close the gap between what students learn in different areas. Although the list for high schoolers is "pretty solid" for a study of classics, she said, the list is "very old and very white."

"It is very narrow and does not represent what classrooms in Texas look like," she said. "Going through most of high school without ever having much value put into voices that sound like yours kind of sends a message that your voices aren't valuable."

New Mexico opens criminal probe of DEA after agents allowed fentanyl shipments to hit streets

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

New Mexico's attorney general on Friday opened a criminal investigation to determine whether U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agents broke state law by allowing hundreds of thousands of fentanyl pills to reach the streets of Albuquerque.

The extraordinary inquiry comes less than a week after The Associated Press reported that DEA agents repeatedly monitored — but did not seize — shipments of the synthetic opioid in a bid to build bigger criminal cases between 2023 and 2025.

Current and former DEA agents, including whistleblower David Howell, told AP the strategy amounted to a gamble with public safety and may have violated U.S. Justice Department rules intended to safeguard the public.

The fentanyl went unseized amid the deadliest drug epidemic in U.S. history and as the DEA led a public awareness campaign — "One Pill Can Kill" — emphasizing that even a few milligrams of the substance can be lethal.

The criminal investigation turns a debate over enforcement tactics into a question of whether federal agents crossed legal lines while pursuing larger trafficking organizations.

New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez, a Democrat, said federal agents "are not above the law," but they enjoy substantial legal protections when carrying out official duties.

Still, Torrez said he would start "demanding documents and information about the DEA's conduct, in New Mexico and nationally, to determine whether what occurred here reflects a broader pattern of reckless or unlawful behavior."

"If those allegations are accurate, the consequences for New Mexicans were not abstract. They were fatal," Torrez wrote in a letter to Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, who earlier this week called for the inquiry.

"New Mexico already ranks among the states hardest hit by fentanyl overdose deaths," he added, "and

the families who have lost children, siblings and parents to this crisis deserve a full accounting of what the federal government knew, what it did and what it failed to do."

The DEA initially denied Howell's allegations in a statement to AP. But the agency later called upon the Justice Department's independent watchdog to conduct its own investigation.

"Should that review identify areas of improvement, the DEA will of course implement changes to better their practices," the Justice Department said in a statement. "We welcome a partnership with Governor Lujan Grisham, as well as New Mexico state and local leaders, to fight the scourge of fentanyl and keep her constituents safe."

A growing number of local and state leaders in New Mexico have expressed outrage in the wake of Howell's allegations. But those sentiments are not widely held by family members of overdose victims, said Paul E. Martin, founder of United Against Fentanyl, a nonprofit organization fighting the epidemic that represents 5,000 family members of victims.

"Law enforcement makes mistakes," Martin said. "But the DEA are the men and women putting their lives on the line. Their entire business is the removal of illegal and toxic drugs from our streets."

Israel and Lebanon sign framework agreement with US in 'first step' toward peace, Rubio says

By BEN FINLEY, ABBY SEWELL and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Marco Rubio joined Israel and Lebanon's ambassadors to the U.S. Friday to announce a framework agreement that was described as a first step toward peace following months of conflict between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

The agreement does not include Hezbollah and prompted one of the group's officials in Lebanon to warn of civil war. The U.S. State Department said the framework establishes a process for dismantling Hezbollah and for Lebanon to regain territory that was taken by Israeli forces as they battled the militant group.

The U.S. will facilitate a newly created "Military Coordination Group for Lebanon" to implement the framework, the State Department said, while committing \$100 million in humanitarian assistance.

"For Lebanon, this Framework provides a genuine pathway out of a long crisis," the State Department said. "For Israel, it creates a verifiable path to removing the persistent threat on its northern border."

Friday's agreement was signed in front of Rubio in Washington by Yechiel Leiter, the Israeli ambassador to the United States, and Nada Hamadeh Moawad, the Lebanese ambassador to the United States.

Leiter said the final destination of the framework is peace between the two countries.

"Our language is we want to embrace Lebanon," he said. "Our language is we want to get in our car in Tel Aviv and take a drive up to Beirut, and we want Beirut to come down and take a drive to Tel Aviv. That's where we're going. That's where we want to go."

Leiter said that will depend on Hezbollah being disarmed and dismantled, which will allow Israel to withdraw and Lebanon to "regain its full sovereignty."

"So it really depends on the Lebanese army," Leiter said. "It depends on the support the Lebanese army gets from the U.S. And we think it's going to be solid."

Moawad said the framework "is a first step on the road to restoring Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity, securing a permanent and final cessation of hostilities, enabling our people to go back to their land and allowing all Lebanese to live in peace, security and prosperity."

Hezbollah official says group won't give up weapons

The latest conflict began when Hezbollah fired rockets into Israel days after Israel and the U.S. launched their war on Iran on Feb. 28. Israel invaded Lebanon and has expanded its control.

More than 4,000 people in Lebanon have been killed in Israeli strikes since March. At least 37 Israeli soldiers have been killed in Lebanon or northern Israel during the fighting.

Lebanese officials have said that securing a withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon is a top priority for them in the negotiations, while Israeli officials have prioritized the disarmament of the Iran-backed Hezbollah.

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The talks between Israel and Lebanon were separate from the interim deal that was signed last week by the leaders of the U.S. and Iran to end the fighting in the Islamic Republic. That agreement set a 60-day period for negotiations on key issues, including the future of Tehran's nuclear program amid concerns that Iran wants to use it for military purposes, a claim the country denies.

The Lebanese government had been wary of having Iran negotiate on its behalf, and Lebanon launched its own direct negotiations with Israel after the outbreak of the latest Israel-Hezbollah war. Hezbollah was not part of the talks, which resulted in several ceasefire agreements that were never implemented on the ground.

Hezbollah is unlikely to agree to any plan that would include its disarmament throughout the country. The group has maintained that it is only required by previous agreements and U.N. resolutions to disarm in the area south of the Litani River, near Lebanon's border with Israel.

Hassan Fadlallah, a member of Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc, reiterated the group's stance on Beirut-based pan-Arab Al-Mayadeen TV that it rejects Lebanon's direct negotiations with Israel and that it will not give up its weapons.

Fadlallah said Lebanese authorities "will not be able to enforce the agreement signed in Washington unless they go, with American support, to civil war." He also called the agreement in Washington "an attempt to derail the Islamabad process," referring to the U.S.-Iran negotiations.

Israel establishes 'pilot zones' for Lebanon

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam said in a statement that the agreement "aims to achieve an Israeli withdrawal from all Lebanese territory, restore state sovereignty over it, and facilitate the return of its citizens" and that under it Lebanon is obligated to "extend the authority of the Lebanese state, through its armed forces, over all its territory."

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun had told a visiting British parliamentary delegation on Wednesday that a proposal for "pilot zones" where the Lebanese army is supposed to take exclusive control of the territory as Israeli troops will withdraw was "under discussion pending approval from the Israeli side."

Israel's direct negotiations with Lebanon include discussions about the redeployment of Israeli forces after southern Lebanon is cleared of Hezbollah infrastructure and Hezbollah has disarmed, said an Israeli official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a video on Friday that the framework is a "great achievement" for Israel.

"The most important thing, first and foremost, is that Israel will remain in the security zone in southern Lebanon," he said. "This is a major achievement, and we will maintain it as long as Hezbollah has not been disarmed and as long as it continues to pose a threat to the State of Israel."

Netanyahu said that Israel is allowing the Lebanese army to begin preparing to take control of territory, while the Israeli military is establishing two pilot zones.

"A small part of it is within the expanded security zone that we secured over the past two weeks and which, the IDF has made absolutely clear, it does not need," Netanyahu said. "In other words, we are maintaining the original security zone at all times, outside the range of anti-tank missiles."

Fear grips Haitian communities after Supreme Court ruling unwinds protection from deportation

By GISELA SALOMON, PATRICK AFTOORA-ORSAGOS and CLAIRE GALOFARO Associated Press
MIAMI (AP) — A 35-year-old nurse in Kentucky prepared her will. The single mother named a legal guardian for her four children and transferred her properties into their names.

She felt like she needed to prepare for death — in case she gets deported back to Haiti, a country she fled at 9 years old.

After the Supreme Court decided Thursday to allow the Trump administration to end legal protections for migrants fleeing violence and natural disasters in Haiti and Syria, fear ricocheted through those communities across the United States. Hundreds of thousands of people now face the prospect of deportation.

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"I have been living with this internal fear, it's like preparing for a funeral, just in case I die when going to another country," said the nurse, who asked not to be identified for fear of being targeted for deportation.

She is among about 350,000 Haitians granted Temporary Protected Status, many of whom have legally lived and worked in the U.S. for decades and have children who are U.S. citizens. Thursday's decision, which is expected to take effect July 27, also applied to around 6,000 Syrians. It could also open the door to the administration unwinding protections for 1.3 million people from 17 countries.

Temporary Protected Status allows people to live and work in the US

Congress created Temporary Protected Status in 1990 to prevent deportations to countries deemed dangerous, because of disasters, civil war or other violence or instability. It permits people to work legally in the U.S. but does not provide a path to citizenship. It can be renewed in increments of up to 18 months if the homeland security secretary deems conditions unsafe for return.

The Biden administration roughly doubled the number of people covered by TPS. The Trump administration ended those protections, insisting it was meant to be temporary, the countries are now safe and that President Joe Biden's administration expanded the destination and poorly vetted its recipients.

TPS beneficiaries have, by definition, been living in limbo and their futures have been especially precarious under President Donald Trump, but the Supreme Court ruling delivered what could be a crushing blow to living and working legally in the United States.

Haitians in Ohio have been in the spotlight before

The Haitian community in Springfield, Ohio, became a particular target of the administration during the 2024 campaign, when Trump spread fictional rumors that Haitians there were eating people's cats and dogs. There is no evidence to support those claims.

Still, the community has been under intense pressure ever since, said Viles Dorsainvil, the executive director of the Haitian Community Help and Support Center in Springfield.

Thursday's ruling added to the panic and chaos. People don't know if they should withdraw all their money from the bank, Dorsainvil said. They don't know if they can work, if their kids can go to school. Many are making preparations to leave their children who are U.S. citizens behind if they are sent away.

"As a Haitian, I always say that life has not been easy for us, nothing has been easy for us and this is another chapter in our life. And we've been in that type of situation since after the presidential campaign when they came up with that type of conspiracy theory of us eating cats and dogs," he said. "We've been targeted. We've been in the spotlight for their political agenda."

Dorsainvil said he's focused on trying to keep people calm, telling them not to panic, not to feel hopeless or make desperate decisions that could further jeopardize them and their children.

Many TPS holders work in caregiving roles

On Thursday morning, a Haitian mother of a 17-month-old baby boy who lives in Florida woke up to the news.

"I was reading it and I just for a moment there I just felt like I couldn't breathe, like as if something was just sitting on my chest, like my lungs couldn't extend," the 37-year-old said, her voice breaking.

She asked not to be identified for fears of being detained and deported.

"I did not expect this. It is so hard to accept. Maybe I am in denial but I think this can't be real," she said. "I had so much hope."

She arrived in the U.S. in 1995 when she was 7 years old and graduated from high school here. But she could not go to college because she did not have legal status.

But in 2010 everything changed, when the U.S. granted Haitians protection after a catastrophic earthquake. The U.S. repeatedly extended that amid the gang violence that has consumed the country and displaced more than a million people.

The Florida woman applied, and she was able to go to school and become a nurse.

She was supposed to begin a new job in two weeks. Now she doesn't know if she's authorized to work.

TPS holders are overrepresented in caregiving roles, and the long-term care industry, like nursing homes and facilities for disabled people, industry groups said, could be hit particularly hard as fear and uncer-

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tainty ripples across America.

The nurse in Kentucky said she's trying to focus on her work taking care of disabled people. But it's hard to not think of the worst-case scenario, imagining being separated from her children, who are ages 13, 12, 8, and 2, and being sent to her home country that she left more than two decades ago. She reads in the news that there are gang wars, kidnappings, killings.

"I don't want to go there. I am very Americanized," she said. "It's like someone saying, hey, do you want to go live in a horror movie? Like, you know, no, I don't."

Most of Wall Street rises, but sinking AI stocks send it lower for the week

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Most of the U.S. stock market rose Friday after oil prices eased back to where they were before the war with Iran, but drops for stocks swept up in the mania around artificial-intelligence technology kept the market in check.

The S&P 500 finished nearly flat and slipped less than 0.1% to close out just its second losing week in the last 13. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 44 points, or 0.1%, and the Nasdaq composite fell 0.2%.

Stocks got a boost as the price of Brent crude oil, the international standard, dropped 3.8% to \$72.60. That's lower than it was the day before the United States and Israel attacked Iran, which eventually led to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and the curtailment of oil shipments worldwide.

The easier oil prices helped stocks of companies with big fuel bills, and American Airlines Group climbed 1.7%.

Health care stocks, meanwhile, were some of the strongest forces pushing upward on the market after a committee of the European Medicines Agency recommended several medicines for approval and the extension for another dozen of their therapeutic indications. That included one for Eli Lilly, whose stock jumped 7.1%.

Besides Lilly, nearly two out of every three stocks within the S&P 500 rose. But more drops for AI stocks helped to overshadow them.

After soaring to tremendous heights and leading the market for years, AI stocks have been under pressure recently because of worries their profits can't possibly keep pace with the tremendous rallies for their stock prices. And those drops have an outsized effect because AI stocks have become Wall Street's largest and most influential, giving movements for their stock prices more weight on indexes than others.

Micron Technology's drop of 6.7% was the heaviest weight on the market, for example. The maker of memory for computers has been a big winner this year, with its stock roughly quadrupling, because the AI boom has created a surge of demand for its products.

But investors saw the downside of that surge Thursday, when Apple said it had to raise prices on laptops and other products by significant percentages to make up for the increases in memory prices. The worry is that such higher prices could ultimately lead to lower demand.

Highlighting the roller-coaster ride that AI stocks have been on, SpaceX briefly dropped 2.9% in the morning and fell below \$149. It then erased the loss to swing to a gain of 3.5% before finishing with a modest rise of 0.2%.

After initially selling its stock at \$135 apiece in its ballyhooed initial public offering earlier this month, SpaceX's price briefly soared above \$225 within its first few days of trading. Besides rockets, Elon Musk's company also owns the xAI artificial-intelligence business.

The day's largest loss in the S&P 500 was a 23.7% drop for ON Semiconductor, which said it agreed to buy Synaptics in an all-stock deal valued at roughly \$7 billion.

All told, the S&P 500 slipped 3.47 points to 7,354.02. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 44.51 to 51,876.11, and the Nasdaq composite fell 60.99 to 25,297.62.

In the bond market, Treasury yields eased with oil prices. The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.37% from 4.40% late Thursday.

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It fell after a report showed expectations for inflation in the coming year inched down among U.S. consumers to 4.6% from 4.8% in May. That's still high, but moves downward mean less chance of a vicious cycle where expectations for higher inflation drive changes in behavior that create higher inflation.

High yields in bond markets worldwide caused by worries about inflation have been threatening to slow economies, and they have already sent rates higher for mortgages and other kinds of loans. High yields also hurt prices for investments, particularly those seen as the most expensive. That raises the pressure on AI winners.

Asian stock markets began Friday with sharp drops because of losses for AI winners.

In Japan, a 12.5% plunge for Softbank Group Corp. helped pull the Nikkei 225 index down by 4.2%. The company is a major investor in OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT, and a report in The New York Times suggested OpenAI is considering delaying an initial public offering of its stock to next year from the second half of this year.

Such an IPO would give OpenAI the chance to raise more cash to spend on data centers, as well as the opportunity for early investors like Softbank to cash out some of their holdings. But the recent stumbles for SpaceX's stock and for AI stocks broadly may be a signal of less appetite for big AI stocks among investors.

In South Korea, SK Hynix fell 8.4%, and Samsung Electronics sank 5.3%. That helped pull the Kospi 5.8% lower and trim its gain for the year so far to 99.6%.

Lawmakers subpoena billionaire Leon Black after contentious interview on Epstein payments

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Oversight Committee served subpoenas to billionaire investor Leon Black on Friday after lawmakers say he refused to answer some questions about his yearslong relationship with Jeffrey Epstein, a time in which he paid the disgraced financier at least \$158 million.

Black is the co-founder and former chief executive of the private equity firm Apollo Global Management who stepped down in 2021 amid fallout over his ties to Epstein. He became the 16th person to appear before the committee as part of their broader investigation into the web of wealth and influence around Epstein.

Lawmakers emerged from the closed-door voluntary interview with Black saying he refused to answer questions about non-disclosure agreements, prompting the committee to issue a subpoena about the NDAs. A second subpoena was issued for Black to testify under oath on July 16.

"This is a result of refusing to answer specific questions," Rep. James Comer, R-Ky., the committee chairman, told reporters after Black's interview.

Susan Estrich, the lawyer representing Black, said the decision to serve the subpoenas was a "premeditated political decision." She called it a "planned political stunt."

Democrats emerged from their hour of questioning Black saying he had not answered questions, and they praised Comer's decision to subpoena him.

Rep. Robert Garcia, the top ranking Democrat on the committee, told reporters that "it was clear from the moment this interview started that Leon Black was not going to answer critical questions."

Black was featured prominently in the Epstein files

Black is mentioned repeatedly in files that the Department of Justice has released related to the Epstein investigation. He also appears in a collection of birthday messages sent to Epstein that were released by the House committee last year, including a poem attributed to him that refers to "Blond, Red or Brunette, spread out geographically."

Black maintained Friday that he was not aware of Epstein's "nefarious activity" until 2019 and that he paid Epstein for legitimate purposes, in part due to his "unrivaled network of relationships" with influential figures.

"I knew Jekyll. I didn't know Hyde," said Black.

A 2021 review commissioned by Apollo found that Black paid Epstein \$158 million from 2012 to 2017,

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after Epstein pleaded guilty in 2008 to soliciting prostitution from a minor. The review said the payments were for "bona fide tax, estate planning and other related services."

"I gave Epstein a second chance, as did many others. I wish I had not," Black said.

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

Comer said earlier this year that Epstein's former accountant, Richard Kahn, told lawmakers in his testimony that Epstein received significant sums of money from a number of high-profile individuals, including Black.

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., this month referred findings from a nearly four-year investigation into Black to the House committee. In a statement, Wyden said, "Epstein even appears to have acted as a middleman for Black to pay women on Black's behalf."

Black broadly denied the allegations in his opening statement, calling them "rank speculation."

"I have never abused a woman. I have never been with an underage woman. I have never engaged in sex trafficking. I have never paid Epstein for access to women. I was never blackmailed by Epstein."

Many high-profile figures have been summoned to testify about Epstein

Other figures to have appeared for the investigation include former Democratic President Bill Clinton, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, former Attorney General Pam Bondi and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates.

Gates testified earlier this month and said he had made a "grave error in judgment" by meeting with Epstein.

Black said Epstein's network included SpaceX founder Elon Musk, Google co-founder Sergey Brin and Peter Thiel, the co-founder of PayPal and Palantir.

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

Comer has said he has been in touch with the Justice Department about acting Attorney General Todd Blanche coming in for questioning soon.

Bondi, in her testimony, stressed that Blanche had overseen the chaotic release of the federal Epstein files, which included the unintentional release of victim information.

Disagreements between Supreme Court justices bubble into public view as major rulings loom

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is handing down major opinions at a rapid clip, but even with some of the biggest decisions yet to come, there are signs of tension as the justices near the end of the term.

A misunderstanding led to a highly unusual exchange for the restrained and traditional atmosphere after the nation's highest court took the bench Thursday to hand down their decisions. Those rulings included two major immigration wins for President Donald Trump.

After conservative Justice Samuel Alito finished his reading of the majority's ruling limiting how people can seek asylum at the southern border, liberal Justice Sonia Sotomayor spoke up to read from her biting dissent.

She traced the difficult journey many asylum seekers face and outlined a painful chapter in the country's history: When the U.S. and other countries turned back a ship full of Jewish refugees attempting to flee persecution in Nazi Germany in 1939. About 250 of those passengers later died in the Holocaust.

Sotomayor, the first Latina justice, said the majority's opinion would allow the Trump administration to block people from applying for asylum at the border, which would result in more deaths. The decision

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"regrettably and tragically extinguishes the light of the torch of the Statue of Liberty."

Justice Brett Kavanaugh watched her intently as she spoke, while Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson looked straight ahead.

Majority opinions are always read from the bench and dissenters can speak up as well to underscore their objections, which typically happens in few cases every term. Additional rulings are expected on Monday.

Sotomayor's spoken dissent, however, appeared to be a surprise for Alito. In a very rare move, he spoke off the cuff. He sounded surprised and frustrated, saying he would have added more detail to his summary if he'd known about plans to speak.

The confusion turned out to be a misunderstanding on Alito's part; Sotomayor's chambers had passed along word of her plan.

For the conservative majority, the case was about whether the law allows border officials can delay asylum seekers' entry into the U.S. "until they can be processed in a safe and orderly way," not about the wisdom of the policy itself.

Out loud, Alito defended his opinion by noting that the policy at the center of the case had been used under both the Obama and Trump administrations. "I won't add anything more to that," he said.

The exchange comes during the court's busiest time of the year, as the justices prepare to release opinions next week on some of the biggest issues of the term, and Trump's presidency so far. Those include his push to restrict birthright citizenship and expand the president's power to fire board members at independent agencies.

Supreme Court justices have spoken publicly about their cordial working relationships and regular lunches as a group where they set aside cases to talk and share each other's company. And while there are ideological splits between the court's conservative majority and its liberal wing, they also decide many cases unanimously, including one this month about the Second Amendment rights of marijuana users.

Still, it isn't the first time unusual tensions have surfaced this term. Sotomayor issued a rare public apology in April to another justice, Brett Kavanaugh, for what she termed "hurtful comments." She had said during a law school talk that a colleague "probably doesn't really know any person who works by the hour."

In another public appearance in March, Kavanaugh and Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson sparred over the many emergency orders the court had issued allowing Trump to move ahead with key parts of his agenda.

Venezuelans hope online posts will bring news of missing after devastating earthquakes

By MEGAN JANETSKY and ELÉONORE HUGHES Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — A father holds the hand of his daughter dressed as a fairy. A 24-year-old man in a pilot uniform stares proudly at the camera. A family embraces on a soccer field.

They are among the images posted by relatives within Venezuela and abroad desperately searching for their missing loved ones following two powerful, back-to-back earthquakes on Wednesday evening.

Hundreds have been killed and thousands injured. The number of casualties is expected to climb after the 7.2- and 7.5-magnitude quakes that caused widespread damage and were among the strongest to strike Venezuela in more than a century.

With communication patchy, social media and online registries have become a crucial tool for many Venezuelans seeking information and resources beyond sparse government statistics. One independent online registry documented 51,000 people missing, while another listed 24,000 people unaccounted for, reflecting the lack of official data or information on those missing.

While some rushed to search beneath the rubble of collapsed buildings, others created digital flyers on WhatsApp, Facebook and X with their relatives' details.

Searching for relatives

Among them was Vanesa Marcano, 31, who posted photos from Madrid of her uncle and aunt, who live in La Guaira state, north of the capital Caracas, which suffered some of the heaviest damage and casualties.

Marcano posted the images in the hopes that they were only unreachable due to damaged communica-

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tion lines. Her uncle's daughter and his 7-year-old grandson were visiting from the United States and also are missing.

"It's a feeling of impotence and uncertainty," Marcano said by phone. "I know you must stay calm and focus on the actions you can take. But it's very easy to fall into despair."

Jhoyser Concalves, a Venezuelan from the northern coastal city of Catia La Mar, was talking to his partner and her daughter just minutes before the shaking. It was the last he heard from them.

When the earthquake stopped, Concalves ran out of his house to their apartment building, where they lived on the sixth floor. There was only debris and people desperately trying to rescue neighbors from the rubble.

Concalves posted a flyer reading "MISSING" on X and Facebook in a desperate attempt to find them.

"They are pulling people out of the building alive. So I still have hope that they are in there alive," he said.

United Nations calls for restored social media access

The search was complicated by the country's restrictions on social media and messaging platforms.

On Thursday, the U.N. human rights mission in Venezuela issued a statement calling on the government to lift local restrictions on social media and saying timely access to reliable information can save lives.

Sites including X and messaging app Signal were blocked in August 2024 by then-President Nicolás Maduro in an attempt to suppress communication among those who rejected his claim of victory in the presidential election. Former Vice President Delcy Rodríguez became the acting president in January after the U.S. captured and removed Maduro from power.

Shortly after the U.N.'s request Thursday, Venezuelans in the country were able to access X.

Search from abroad

Outside the country, such sites have become even more important for many of the 8 million people who have migrated from Venezuela in recent years and were unable to check on their loved ones.

Elibel Tovar's 70-year-old father moved to Brazil more than 20 years ago but was in La Guaira for business. Félix Ramón Tovar Hernández was planning to travel Friday to Chile for his first reunion with his son in more than a decade. But Tovar, 38, said he hasn't heard from his father.

"I feel powerless because I don't know how this is affecting him: the shock, the decisions he's having to make, whether he is physically okay, or even whether he is still alive," said Tovar, who registered his father on the website for the missing.

"Being in Chile makes it very difficult to get information, and everything we see feels confusing," he said via WhatsApp.

In Madrid, Marcano said she was trying to stay calm for the sake of her 1-year-old daughter.

"You keep hoping someone will organize a fundraiser or some kind of initiative where you can help," Marcano said. "But the truth is, from far away, there is very little you can do."

Trump threatens 100% tax on European imports if countries impose tax on digital services

By COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Friday threatened a 100% tax on imports from any country that imposes a tax on digital services from United States companies.

In a post on social media, Trump took aim at European countries that he said are discussing "imminent" implementation of taxes on American companies. The U.S. president has repeatedly sought to use tariffs as way to deter such taxes, but many countries are looking for revenues as their economies increasingly operate in digital realms that are dominated by American companies.

"Please let this statement serve to represent that any Country that imposes such a Tax will immediately be met with a 100% TARIFF on any and all Goods sent to the United States of America," Trump wrote.

He added that the new tax would supersede any previously negotiated trade deals. Trump said the penalty would apply to any country that moves forward with such a tax, but he singled out European nations in his post.

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The move could lead to a larger showdown that could increase prices and hinder economic growth, possibly setting off a larger trade war if the 27-member European Union was compelled to retaliate.

"Unilateral measures targeting such legitimate policies are unjustified. If pursued, the EU will respond swiftly and decisively to defend its rights and regulatory autonomy," said Olof Gill, a spokesperson for the European Commission on Friday.

He defended taxation on technology companies as "non-discriminatory" and applied equally to "all large companies, regardless of their origin."

Trump has repeatedly pushed against foreign efforts to tax or regulate American tech giants. Last year, he threatened new tariffs on any country that moved to do so. A post from last August said that digital taxes and regulation "are all designed to harm, or discriminate against, American Technology."

The threat comes ahead of Trump's July 4 deadline for the European Union and the United States to start implementing a tariff deal that caps tariffs on most EU exports at 15%.

The European Union in May finalized a trade deal with the United States that caps most tariffs on EU exports at 15%. The deal followed months of debate within the EU after European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen tentatively struck the deal last year while visiting Trump's golf course in Scotland.

Digital taxes were not part of the agreement and have remained a sticking point between the U.S. and the European bloc.

The U.S. government has previously conducted tariff investigations into digital services taxes under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974. But it was unclear how Trump would carry out his threat and whether he would apply the tariffs broadly or initially target certain nations.

Britain, which is no longer part of the EU, has since 2020 levied a 2% digital services tax on revenues earned by search engines, social media sites and online marketplaces that "derive value" from U.K. users.

The British government said in a policy document at the time that corporate tax rules for digital businesses had "led to a misalignment between the place where profits are taxed and the place where value is created."

The U.K. tax includes thresholds, so mainly large international companies will pay it. The tax was designed to "ensure the large multinational businesses in-scope make a fair contribution to supporting vital public services," the document said.

Ukraine unleashes one of its heaviest drone bombardments of Russia

By The Associated Press undefined

Ukraine launched a major nighttime attack on a dozen Russian regions, Russian-held Crimea and the surrounding seas, Moscow's Defense Ministry said Friday, in what appeared to be one of Kyiv's biggest drone assaults since the Kremlin's full-scale invasion more than four years ago.

Russian air defenses intercepted 660 Ukrainian drones, Russia's Defense Ministry said. The previous biggest Ukrainian attack over the past year, as Ukraine has accelerated its drone development, involved 556 drones on May 17.

In an effort to turn the tables on Russia's grinding war of attrition, Ukrainian long-range drones have been battering oil production and energy facilities behind the front line and deep inside Russia.

The campaign has choked Russian fuel supplies and military deliveries, stalling Moscow's efforts on the battlefield, Western officials and analysts say, and has heaped pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin.

A Russian chemical plant is reportedly hit

Initial damage reports from Russia after the overnight attack provided scant information. Russia's Defense Ministry usually doesn't say what was targeted in Ukraine's drone attacks, nor does it detail any damage.

Russian independent online outlet Astra reported that a chemical plant and a hydroelectric plant in Novomoskovsk were attacked and caught fire. The Associated Press couldn't independently verify the report, and there was no official confirmation.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin reported that 47 Ukrainian drones were downed as they flew toward

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the Russian capital. He did not report any casualties or damage.

Ukraine's Security Service said it used drones to strike Russian navy ships and air defense radars in Kerch, an important port city in Crimea.

The targets were two reconnaissance and minelaying ships, the Volga and the Vyatka, and the cargo-passenger ferry Petropavlovsk, the agency said, claiming that the strikes started a large fire. The claim could not be independently verified.

Zelenskyy hints at a 40-day blitz of Russia

The major attack came hours after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on X that he had ordered "a 40-day influence operation," believed to mean an escalation of attacks, aimed at "compelling (Russia) to end the war" after U.S. peace efforts over the past year yielded no breakthrough.

Still, as they have occasionally in the past, Russia and Ukraine exchanged prisoners of war, with 160 from each side returning home on Friday, officials said.

Ukraine has racked up a list of successful strikes, including hitting targets in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Zelenskyy said he got further promises of foreign support when he attended a recent summit of G7 leaders, including from U.S. President Donald Trump, and that the promised aid will help Ukraine step up its effort to force Putin to the negotiating table.

A NATO summit next month could be another key moment in beefing up Ukraine's military.

Russian attacks killed 3 civilians and wounded 29, Ukraine says

Two people were killed and seven were wounded in Russian attacks on the northeastern Kharkiv region over the previous 24 hours, regional head Oleh Syniehubov said Friday.

Russian forces struck the city of Kharkiv and 16 other settlements across the region, Syniehubov added.

On Friday morning, another Russian drone attack on downtown Izium, a city in the Kharkiv region, killed a woman and wounded three other people, emergency services said.

Attacks in the capital, Kyiv, the southern Odesa and Zaporizhzhia regions, and Sumy in the northeast, also left at least 19 people wounded, including a 9-year-old, according to authorities. Some of the Russian attacks used powerful glide bombs and also targeted gas stations.

Ukraine's defenses overnight stopped 174 of 189 Russian drones, the Ukrainian air force said. However, four of seven Iskander-M ballistic missiles that were fired got through air defenses and struck various locations, it said.

No Russian military buildup seen on border with Belarus, Ukraine says

Russia is expanding several of its military sites deep inside Belarus, but there is no buildup of forces near the Ukrainian border, a State Border Guard Service spokesman said Friday.

Russia launched its 2022 invasion of Ukraine from Belarus, which borders both countries, and Kyiv has kept a close watch on developments there during the war.

Ukrainian intelligence units have detected no grouping or reinforcement of Russian units, equipment or personnel close to the border, spokesman Andrii Demchenko said in remarks to Ukrainian television.

However, Russia has a growing number of training grounds, bases and other sites deeper inside the country, according to intelligence units.

AP Exclusive: NATO deputy commander wants Turkey summit to spur more defense spending and show unity

By EMMA BURROWS AP European Security Correspondent

LONDON (AP) — NATO's deputy commander told The Associated Press that he wants a summit in Turkey to spur member countries to spend more on defense, reaffirm support for Ukraine and underline the unity of the alliance.

Air Chief Marshal John Stringer, NATO Deputy Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, spoke to AP in London less than two weeks before the crucial Ankara summit on July 7-8 tests the cohesion of the 77-year-old alliance.

U.S. President Donald Trump has sent conflicting signals over America's force posture in Europe and has

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threatened to leave the alliance. He has also unnerved European leaders with his push to annex Greenland and his flattery of NATO adversary Russian President Vladimir Putin. U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth lambasted NATO allies last week for not allowing use of their bases to attack Iran, as he announced a surprise six-month review of American forces in Europe.

Meanwhile, in the U.K. — the country which holds the position of NATO deputy supreme allied commander — government ministers quit recently over what they said were military spending plans that fail to keep Britain safe.

Summits are “highly political events and they are a demonstration of any organization’s unity,” said Stringer, a senior British air force officer. It would be strange if there weren’t moments of turbulence over decades of NATO expanding, he said.

“Are we in one of those moments at the moment? Yes, we are,” Stringer said during a military conference in London where AP also interviewed other senior European military officials about their hopes — and fears — for the summit.

NATO’s European members step up on defense

Trump has long urged European allies to take more responsibility for their own defense, and with the notable exception of Spain they have largely heeded with an unprecedented effort to spend more on their armed forces.

Russia is increasingly threatening Europe, so allies should boost their own militaries while helping Ukraine degrade Russia’s fighting power, said Maj. Gen. Indrek Sirel, a commander in Estonia’s armed forces.

“Europe as a whole has a lot to do in order to be credible against Russia,” said Brig. Gen. Jyri Raitasalo of Finland, which shares NATO’s longest border with Russia.

Stringer said European nations are investing to generate a “really credible force,” citing as an example how some countries are quadrupling production of 155 mm artillery shells. The summit will discuss ramping up production in ways the alliance has not had to do in decades, Stringer said.

European military chiefs wait for clarity on US plans

The outcome of Hegseth’s six-month review of forces will determine how fast Europeans must take responsibility for their own security. The U.S. military in Europe had said earlier in June that Washington would be withdrawing some capabilities from Europe and expecting other allies to fill the gaps.

The Trump administration says that troop reductions in Europe have long been planned and coordinated with allies, but Sirel said it’s still not clear how U.S. forces will be positioned in the Baltic states. That includes some U.S.-led deterrence of Russia on NATO’s eastern flank.

Sirel said he was “confident” he could rely on a U.S. presence, though the Estonian military is finding ways to react to sudden changes.

Stringer said it would be difficult to replace U.S. long-range strike and surveillance capabilities, but he was confident allies could bridge the gap — not always with the same equipment, but by mixing a “cocktail” of capabilities.

Only the U.S. operates B1 and B52 bomber aircraft, but Stringer said that, in theory, a loss of their capabilities might be offset by firing missiles from a variety of other systems including from the ground, sea and smaller aircraft.

Changing plans suddenly is not good for defense

NATO allies were bewildered in May when Trump said he would send 5,000 U.S. troops to Poland just weeks after ordering the same number pulled from Europe.

Such sudden changes are challenging because military planning requires long-term strategy, said Raitasalo, the Finnish military’s logistics chief. “If you change your mind, or change your plan, every week or every month or even every year, you will not get very good results,” he said.

Raitasalo said the allies need to make clear pledges of capabilities, rather than just promise spending.

Sweden’s army chief, Maj. Gen. Jonny Lindfors, said a good outcome from the summit would be “a common picture of how to realign when it comes to deterrence and defense.”

Lindfors said he would like at least an outline — if not a “clear vision” — on how defense burdens should

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shift so that he knows what "NATO 3.0 is starting to look like."

Britain needs to commit to defense

British Defense Secretary John Healey resigned earlier this month, along with another minister, saying the government was unable and unwilling to commit the resources Britain needs to "defend the country at this time of rising threats."

At last year's NATO summit, members agreed to spend 3.5% of their gross domestic product on core defense. The U.K. committed to meeting that target by 2035, but Healey said the proposed defense investment plan would see spending rise to just 2.68% of GDP in 2030.

The new defense secretary, Dan Jarvis, has said Britain will keep its commitments, and the British government has committed to publishing the spending plan.

By the summit, NATO expects nations to have a "credible path" to 3.5%, and the U.K. is "as beholden to that as anybody else," Stringer said.

He said the U.K. cannot presume that "thought leadership" in NATO is enough, and that it must match its "forces and resources."

NATO's credibility is at stake

At last year's summit, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte kept Trump on board by telling him he would achieve "BIG" success at getting allies to spend more on defense.

"It's a tricky question," said Lindfors, the Swedish commander, when asked if a key goal for this summit is to avoid a situation where the U.S. president slams his allies.

Stringer said that at this year's summit it's important to display "cohesion and unity" among the alliance's 32 members but also to have "honest" conversations and deliver "credible" plans.

Raitasalo of Finland said the meeting must go beyond traditional "communiqués, road maps and action plans" and demonstrate deterrence through deeds. He said if NATO members don't step up and translate promises into action, the "credibility" of the alliance is at stake.

Today in History: June 27, Hurricane Audrey makes Gulf Coast landfall

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, June 27, the 178th day of 2026. There are 187 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On June 27, 1957, Hurricane Audrey slammed into coastal Louisiana and Texas as a Category 4 storm, causing as many as 600 deaths.

Also on this date:

In 1844, Mormon leader Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum, were killed by a mob in Carthage, Illinois.

In 1950, the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution calling on member nations to help South Korea repel an invasion from the North.

In 1967, Barclays Bank unveiled the first automated teller machine (ATM) in the town of Enfield, north London.

In 1991, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, the first Black jurist to sit on the nation's highest court, announced his retirement.

In 2005, BTK serial killer Dennis Rader pleaded guilty to 10 murders that had spread fear across Wichita, Kansas, beginning in the 1970s. (Rader was sentenced to 10 consecutive life terms in prison.)

In 2006, a constitutional amendment to ban desecration of the American flag died in a U.S. Senate cliff-hanger, falling one vote short of the 67 needed to send it to states for ratification.

In 2011, former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich was convicted by a federal jury in Chicago of a wide range of corruption charges, including the allegation that he'd tried to sell or trade President Barack Obama's U.S. Senate seat. (Blagojevich was later sentenced to 14 years in prison; his sentence was commuted by President Donald Trump in February 2020, and he received a full and unconditional pardon from Trump

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in February 2025.)

In 2018, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, whose vote often decided cases on abortion, gay rights and other contentious issues, announced his retirement.

In 2022, in Kennedy v. Bremerton School District, the Supreme Court ruled that a high school football coach who sought to kneel and pray on the field after games was protected by the First Amendment.

Today's Birthdays: Musician Bruce Johnston (The Beach Boys) is 84. Fashion designer Norma Kamali is 81. Fashion designer Vera Wang is 77. Actor Julia Duffy is 75. Actor Isabelle Adjani is 71. Cinematographer Janusz Kamiński is 67. Country singer Lorrie Morgan is 67. Actor Tony Leung Chiu-wai is 64. Writer-producer-director J.J. Abrams is 60. Actor Tobey Maguire is 51. Actor Sam Claflin is 40. Actor Ed Westwick is 39. NFL linebacker Bobby Wagner is 36. Actor Madylin Sweeten ("Everybody Loves Raymond") is 35. Singer-songwriter H.E.R. is 29. Actor Chandler Riggs ("The Walking Dead") is 27.