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Saturday, July 4

Firecracker Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course, 10 a.m.

Sunday, July 5

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.

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

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

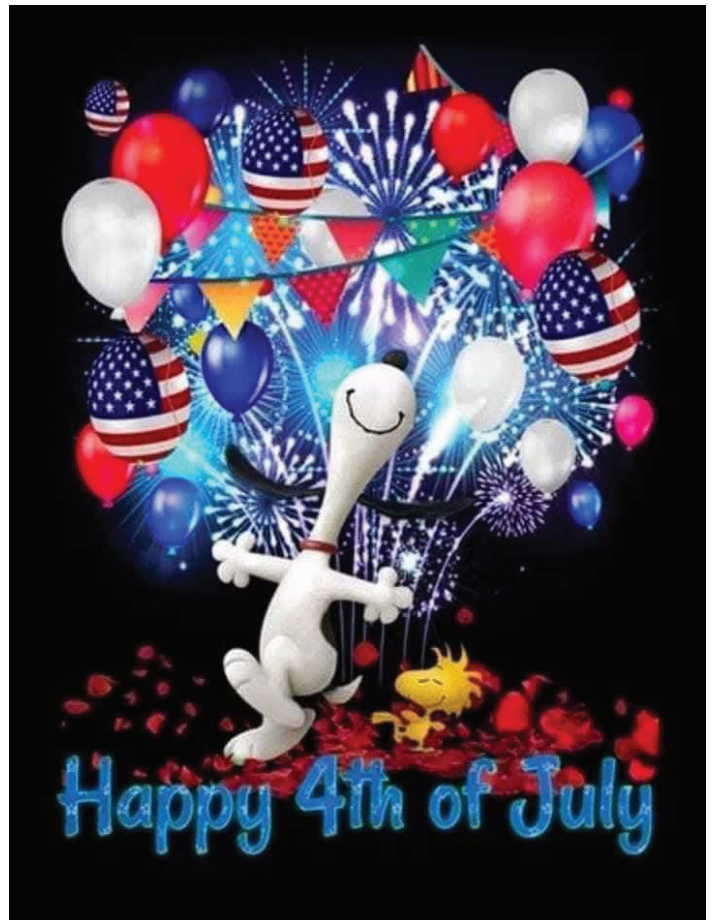
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

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.

Groton Daily Independent
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Monday, July 6

Senior Meal: Chef salad with deli ham, tomatoes and cucumbers, fruited Jell-O.

Groton Legion at Sisseton, 5:30 p.m. (DH)

Groton 14U Legion at Webster, 5:30 p.m. (DH)

U12 Baseball at Webster, 5:30 p.m., (DH)

U12 Softball (G&B) hosts Sisseton, 6 p.m. (DH)

BBB Open Gym, 6 p.m., Arena

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Tuesday, July 7

Senior Meal: Sloppy Joe on bun, baked potato, baked beans, fruit.

Council meeting, 7 p.m., City Hall

Groton Legion hosts Aberdeen Smitty's, 5:30 p.m.

Groton 14U Legion at Clark, 5:30 p.m. (DH)

U18 Baseball (blue) at Britton, 5:30 p.m. (DH)

U14 Softball at Mellette, 5:30 p.m.

U10 Softball hosts Webster, 6 p.m. (DH)

T-Ball: at Columbia, 5:30 p.m.

Tiger Skills Workouts, 7:30 a.m., Arena

JVT Practice, 6 p.m., Arena

United Methodist Bible study, 10 a.m.

Olive Grove: Ladies Bridge/noon League, 6 p.m.

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Newsweek The Bulletin

July 4, 2026

* China's Ethnic Unity law: A sweeping new Chinese law aimed at strengthening "ethnic unity" is drawing sharp criticism for accelerating the assimilation of ethnic minorities—most notably through expanded Mandarin-language requirements imposed on young children. Know what it is.

* July Fourth weather update: A starkly divided weather pattern is shaping up across the United States for the Fourth of July, with a sprawling heat dome threatening to scorch the West and Texas. Find out what the forecast looks like in your state.

* Officials arrested for looting after Venezuela quakes: Four Venezuelan police officers have been arrested after being accused of taking valuables from the ruins of a collapsed building following the powerful twin earthquakes that struck the South American country last week. Get more details.

* Is Cristiano Ronaldo retiring? Cristiano Ronaldo is playing in his record sixth World Cup at the 2026 FIFA men's World Cup, and it will reportedly be his last time representing Portugal on the pitch. Find out more.

Immigration

How Immigration Could Shape the Future of America: Three Scenarios

The rundown: The United States is "a nation of immigrants," as John F. Kennedy said in a famous 1963 speech, shaped by the waves of foreign-born individuals who, through its 250 years of history, reached its land and made it their home. Here are three possible scenarios for how it could reshape the nation in the decades to come.

Why it matters: In the lead-up to the 2024 presidential election, illegal immigration was seen as a "very big problem" in the country by 51 percent of voters, including 78 percent of Republicans and 27 percent of Democrats, according to a Pew Research Center's survey—proving how partisan an issue this is. Trump vowed to fight what he warned was an "invasion" of illegal migrants to the U.S., promising the largest mass deportation in the nation's history. As a result of the Trump administration's crackdown on illegal immigration and a perceived sense of hostility toward migrants, including those who may have been living in the U.S. for a long time, immigration to the U.S. has slowed down dramatically. As immigration helped to mold the U.S. into what it is now, its absence—or significant drop—could also influence the future of the country, according to some experts. Demographer William H. Frey, a senior fellow with Brookings Metro, argues that the country should continue welcoming migrants to avoid the rapid aging of the U.S. workforce and reverse an impending population decline.

What happens next? Ultimately, American voters will decide the future of immigration—and the nation's in general—at the ballot, including the upcoming midterms in November and the 2028 presidential election. "The election of Donald Trump suggests some fraction of the population was dissatisfied with the level of immigration, certainly illegal immigration. So, you have to take that into account," Immigration researcher and director of Research for the Center for Immigration Studies Steven Camarota said.

Economy

From \$71 Million to \$39 Trillion—U.S. National Debt's 250-Year Climb

The rundown: America's national debt has always reflected the trajectory of the nation itself—one rising as the other, at least economically, wavers—but rarely has that story been as stark as it is today. Read more.

Why it matters: From a mere \$71 million in the country's early days to now more than \$39 trillion on the eve of its semiquincentennial, the scale of U.S. borrowing has expanded exponentially and to a level almost beyond comprehension over two and a half centuries. This 55,000-percent rise has been punctuated by wars, financial collapses and global shocks, before settling into periods of relative stability, only

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to climb again. And the history of U.S. debt displays a familiar pattern: spending in times of need and expansion, enabled by the country's economic strength and its increasingly central position in the global financial system. America's \$39 trillion debt far outsizes any other nation, the next closest being China at an estimated \$19 trillion.

What happens next? As concern rises among lawmakers as well as the public, and more of Uncle Sam's budget goes toward paying interest on a ballooning balance sheet, questions are mounting over how long this economic strength can postpone an economic crisis. Steve Hanke, a professor of applied economics at Johns Hopkins University and a member of the Board of Directors at the Federal Fiscal Sustainability Foundation, said: "The \$39 trillion in national debt is an economic burden because it must be serviced."

Politics

Abdul El-Sayed Chances of Winning Michigan Senate Race With AOC Endorsement

The rundown: Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has endorsed progressive Abdul El-Sayed in Michigan's Senate race, a must-win seat for Democrats hoping to flip control of the chamber, as polls show a tight race against Republican Mike Rogers in November. [Learn more.](#)

Why it matters: Progressive Democrats are riding high after a series of primary victories in New York and Colorado over the past few weeks, but the Michigan Senate race will be a major test for the left. El-Sayed's candidacy will gauge whether progressives can win statewide in a competitive, purple state carried by President Donald Trump in the 2024 election—or whether the so-called Democratic Tea Party is confined to safer seats. The Michigan Senate race will also be high-stakes for Ocasio-Cortez, a New York Democrat who has been floated as a potential 2028 presidential candidate. If El-Sayed, a public health official, wins in November, that could bolster her possible aspirations for higher office and signal that the left can do well in swing states. But a defeat could call into question her political influence.

What happens next? Marjorie Sarbaugh-Thompson, a Wayne State University political scientist, told Newsweek that Ocasio-Cortez's endorsement could help "a little," but noted that there has "already been a lot of coverage about Bernie's endorsement and others outside the state." Michigan's primary is set for August 4, 2026, so candidates still have more than a month to make their cases to voters and convince their supporters to vote. Polls will continue to be watched as a critical gauge of the electorate's mood.

Maps Show Data Centers in Areas Where Power Grids Struggling

The rundown: As a dangerous summer heat wave pushes electricity demand toward record levels, some of the nation's largest data center markets are clustered in places where power grids are already under strain or facing warnings of future stress. [Find out which regions are most vulnerable.](#)

Why it matters: The pressure is most immediate in the Mid-Atlantic grid operated by PJM Interconnection, where recent federal emergency orders gave grid operators authority to call on backup generation and, as a last resort, curtail large users such as data centers with backup power. In Texas and Illinois, the picture is less immediate but still significant: grid officials say they expect to manage near-term demand, while regulators, reliability monitors and consumer advocates have pointed to fast-growing data-center loads as a source of future grid and cost pressure. Perhaps the clearest example is the PJM region, which serves all or parts of 13 states and Washington, D.C., including Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, Delaware, Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia.

What happens next? PJM said this week it had issued hot-weather, maximum-generation and load-management alerts as extreme heat pushed forecast demand close to—and potentially above—its all-time summer peak.

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Trump Admin Says ICC Cannot Extradite From the U.S.

The rundown: The United States will no longer honor extradition requests from the International Criminal Court (ICC) or participate in any of its investigations, acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said Thursday. Know more.

Why it matters: Blanche's letter to the president of the ICC appeared to be about the Trump administration restating and potentially hardening a longstanding U.S. position at a moment when the ICC has become increasingly active in politically sensitive conflicts, including the war between Israel and Hamas. "Notwithstanding these well-established principles, the ICC has acted in an increasingly lawless and illegitimate manner," Blanche wrote. "The U.S. Department of Justice said the ICC has no jurisdiction over any U.S. citizens, wherever they are in the world. "The U.S. has long taken this position that the international criminal court does not have jurisdiction over U.S. nationals, so while the sending of the letter is new, the position really isn't," Jennifer Trahan, a clinical professor at NYU's Center for Global Affairs, told Newsweek.

What happens next? The court and its supporters counter that crimes committed on the territory of member countries can fall under its authority regardless of a suspect's nationality, creating one of the most contentious legal debates in international law. "I'm not particularly sure why this has come up because the earlier investigation into US crimes in Afghanistan has been deprioritized and to my knowledge is not moving forward," Trahan said.

Life is messy,
wear an apron ♥

“Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

Psalm 34:8

❖ Ladies Luncheon ❖

Bethesda Lutheran Church, Bristol

Wednesday, July 15, 2026

By Bethesda Women of the ELCA



Silent Auction opens at 10:30



Guest Speaker: Tiffany Hoeft, Bristol
Graduate and owner of “Minds Matter”



Luncheon at Noon

TICKETS
\$15.00

Deadline to purchase
tickets is Friday, July 10



Kay Espeland 605-492-3507



Jane Goehring 605-290-1420



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The Northern Lights put on a spectacular show on the eve of our country's 250th Anniversary. (Picture taken at Pickerel Lake by Bruce Babcock)

GROTON SENIOR NUTRITION PROGRAM = RELOCATION NOTICE =

The Groton Senior Nutrition Program is moving
to the **Groton Community Center**
beginning **July 1, 2026**.



Meal Pick-Up:

10:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
at the Community Center



Home Delivered Meals:

No changes to delivery service



Suggested Donation:

\$6 per meal



Congregate Dining:

Temporarily suspended
during the transition



For reservations call

Barb Pohlkamp at 612-388-2099

Thank you for your patience and support!



GROTON 1912 ★ HISTORICAL JAIL

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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.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Trump uses Mount Rushmore speech to allege 'mortal threat' from communism

With US Senate Majority Leader Thune in audience, president also calls for change of rules to pass voter citizenship and ID legislation

BY SETH TUPPER AND MEGHAN O'BRIEN

On the eve of the nation's 250th birthday, President Donald Trump used his address Friday night at Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota to allege that there is "a resurgence of the communist menace in our land."

"Communism is a mortal threat to American liberty," Trump said. "It is the greatest threat to our country, including World War I, World War II, Pearl Harbor or even 9/11."

Though he did not directly link Democratic socialists to communism in the speech, the rhetoric continued a recent theme of criticism by Trump alluding to electoral successes by Democratic socialist candidates. That includes New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani and Darializa Avila Chevalier, who upset a Democratic New York City congressman last month in a primary election.

Democratic socialists advocate for expanding parts of the social safety net, such as health care coverage, through democratic means. Communist tenets include central economic planning and abolishing private property.

In Trump's speech, he pivoted from communism to Republican chances in the November midterm elections.

"America will never be a communist country," Trump said, adding "we can only lose the midterms" if "we are foolish, stupid and unwise."

He then said Republicans will "not lose an election for a hundred years" if they terminate the filibuster and pass the SAVE America Act. The filibuster is a U.S. Senate rule that requires the votes of at least 60 senators to limit debate on most bills. The SAVE America Act would require all voters to prove their U.S. citizenship when they register and show identification at the polls.

Trump made those remarks with U.S. Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-South Dakota, in the audience. Thune has pledged to protect the filibuster, which he's called "a critical protection that ensures representation of the minority party in the Senate."

Last week, Trump canceled a signing ceremony for a bipartisan housing bill and said he wouldn't sign that legislation until Congress sends him the SAVE Act.

Thune, who did not deliver a speech Friday night, responded last week by saying "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. Those are just hard realities and I think people at some point have to come to grips with that."

Earlier in Trump's speech, he called Thune "a good friend of mine and all of us." Thune met Trump earlier at Ellsworth Air Force Base near Rapid City when Air Force One landed there.

Trump's keynote address was preceded by brief remarks from South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden and Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, who formerly served as governor of North Dakota. A fireworks display followed the speeches.

Rain dampens afternoon ceremonies

Entertainment at the memorial began hours earlier for 4,800 people who obtained tickets months ago

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in an online lottery. The lineup included the U.S. Air Force Academy Band.

Ron Emerson, 60, planned his Fourth of July weekend trip to the mountain carving before he had tickets. He drove 28 hours from Willis, Texas, to western South Dakota earlier this week.

Before Trump's speech, Emerson said he's concerned about the spread of socialist and communist ideas. "It's a capitalist country and it should stay that way, I think," Emerson said.

His mother, Mary Lou Emerson, 84, hadn't visited Mount Rushmore since she was in fifth grade. She's been "very sad to see a lot of things that are happening" since then, she said, "but we still have hope for America."

The fireworks display was a signature event of Trump's Freedom 250 planning group, which he created with an executive order. Another group coordinating events celebrating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, America 250, is a bipartisan committee created by Congress in 2016.

A nearby lightning storm Friday afternoon pushed people indoors before the programming started, with hundreds cramming into the memorial's cafeteria. After a momentary reprieve from the weather, heavy rain began to fall, prompting a second call from event officials for people to head indoors. Thunder, hail and heavy rain continued for over an hour.

Many ticketholders came dressed in patriotic garb, including red, white and blue apparel and hats, pins and shirts supporting Trump.

Toby Doeden, who faces Rhoden in the July 28 runoff election for South Dakota's Republican nomination for governor, was in attendance Friday night as an audience member.

A few dignitaries received recognition from Trump during his speech. Those included Thune, U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, R-South Dakota, Rhoden, Republican South Dakota Lt. Gov. Tony Venhuizen, Burgum and Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Environmental concerns about fireworks

Trump also spoke at the last iteration of Mount Rushmore fireworks in 2020. That year, his address criticized efforts across the country to remove statues of Confederate Civil War leaders. Those efforts came amid a broader racial justice movement after a police officer's murder of a Black man, George Floyd, in May 2020 in Minneapolis.

The 2020 fireworks show was the first in 11 years. Fireworks displays were approved at the memorial in the 1990s and early 2000s, but disallowed by the National Park Service beginning in 2010.

Internal assessments and environmental studies reflected concerns about embers falling in the surrounding Black Hills National Forest and sparking wildfires, chemicals from fireworks polluting local water sources, and litter from exploded fireworks lingering on the grounds.

The fireworks shows have also been opposed by Native American tribes that formerly controlled the Black Hills and still use the area for spiritual ceremonies. During the 2020 event, a Native American-led protest blocked the road leading to Mount Rushmore, resulting in a clash with law enforcement that ended in arrests. Charges were later dropped.

Trump reinstated the fireworks in 2020 at then-Gov. Kristi Noem's request. He said then that "nobody knew why" the fireworks shows had ended. Trump's Department of the Interior, which includes the Park Service, approved the fireworks again this year after the Biden administration had discontinued them.

No protesters showed up this time in a First Amendment zone designated by the Park Service. The area was about 2 miles below Mount Rushmore along a highway on the edge of the town of Keystone, in the

same area as the 2020 protests.

New concerns, costs

Environmental and cultural concerns remained this year. Parts of Pennington County — where Mount Rushmore is located — are in severe or extreme drought conditions, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

The Park Service relied on a six-year-old environmental assessment, updated with some new information, when considering whether to approve the fireworks display this year.

The new information included a potential for negatively affecting northern long-eared bats, an endangered species, and tricolored bats, which have been proposed for listing as endangered. Both species live near the mountain and have experienced severe population declines from a fungal disease known as white-nose syndrome.

Impacts of fireworks noise on bat pups who recently learned to fly could range from temporary stress to separation from their mothers and even death, the environmental assessment said.

South Dakota's Department of Tourism entered into a \$700,000 contract in April with California-based Pyro Spectaculars to produce the fireworks show. Local, state and federal authorities will pay additional costs related to traffic control, security, wildfire prevention and other aspects of the event.

A Government Accountability Office report estimated that the total cost of the 2020 event was about \$4 million, with the state's share surpassing \$1 million.

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.

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.

No protesters appear for Trump's Mount Rushmore fireworks six years after clash resulted in arrests

BY JOSHUA HAIAR

KEYSTONE — Six years after authorities arrested demonstrators blocking a road leading to a fireworks display featuring President Donald Trump at Mount Rushmore, the same area stood empty as he returned.

The National Park Service reserved a 100-foot-long zone for First Amendment activities Friday along the highway leading out of the town of Keystone and toward the mountain carving in western South Dakota's Black Hills.

By the late afternoon, nobody had showed up to protest amid a military and law enforcement presence that was keeping an eye on the area. Trump was scheduled to speak later in the evening before the fireworks.

Nick Tilsen, CEO of the Rapid City-based Indigenous advocacy group NDN Collective, led the 2020 protest and was one of the people arrested that year following a physical clash with law enforcement. Charges were later dropped.

Several months ago, Tilsen told South Dakota Searchlight "my guess is that Lakota people all across the homelands from this area won't sit on the sidelines" of this year's fireworks show. Lakota tribes formerly controlled the Black Hills under treaties violated by the federal government, and the tribes still assert those treaty rights. There are also numerous sites of Lakota spiritual significance in the Black Hills.

In recent days, Tilsen told Searchlight that NDN Collective was "boycotting" this year's Trump visit.

"Quite frankly, we don't need to feed into his narrative," Tilsen said.

He cited a desire to focus on community organizing, which he said has produced numerous wins since 2020. He pointed to a jury trial victory in a lawsuit against owners of a Rapid City hotel who were accused of discriminating against Native American guests, a company's withdrawal from an exploratory graphite drilling project in a Black Hills meadow used for spiritual ceremonies, and a 20-year-ban on mining activity in the Black Hills' Rapid Creek watershed.

Tilsen is separately helping to launch the Day One Movement, which is described as "the beginning of

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a new future" on Sunday, the day after the nation's 250th birthday. The movement includes advocacy for returning lands taken from Native Americans and providing reparations to African American people for slavery, among other goals.

Another local group, Indivisible Rapid City, which has been involved in past anti-Trump protests, issued a statement later Friday saying it had chosen "to follow the lead of local Indigenous leaders" by not demonstrating against the president during observances of the nation's founding anniversary.

"We have no interest in centering him or any one political figure in a celebration that belongs to all who call this place home," the group's statement said, in part.

With no protesters along the highway Friday, people clothed in red, white and blue trickled into and through Keystone to celebrate Trump and the nation's 250th birthday.

Rob Wills of Rapid City said he was "looking forward to seeing something that hasn't taken place in the last six years over a beautiful monument."

Lynda Boepple and her husband traveled from Whitefish, Montana. A relative came from Northern California to join them.

"We love President Trump," Boepple said.

They had unsuccessfully entered the online lottery for the 4,800 tickets awarded to view the fireworks show from the Mount Rushmore amphitheater. They planned to watch from Keystone, about 2 miles below Mount Rushmore, and hoped to find a livestream of Trump's speech.

"The 250th is just a wonderful celebration of our amazing country and the freedoms that are afforded to us," Boepple said.

Boepple and her husband were also in Keystone during the 2020 event. She recalled seeing a convoy of law enforcement vehicles travel toward the protesters' blockade and protesters being transported back through town.

"There was stuff going on up there, but overall, the vibe of love of country and patriotism overshadowed all of that," she said.

Boepple attributed the lack of a similar protest this year partly to the different political climate. She and her husband said the COVID-19 pandemic, Black Lives Matter movement and controversies over the removal of Confederate statues had contributed to heightened tensions ahead of the 2020 event.

South Dakota Searchlight's John Hult contributed to this report.

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.

America's 250th birthday is on sale. Where's all that merch money going?

BY ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — What's more American than apple pie? Capitalism. And an array of merchandise and influence is on sale for the 250th birthday of the United States.

An America250 \$275 Liberty Lux American Prosperity decorative throw pillow, anyone? How about a \$25 Freedom 250 youth tee?

America250, a commission created by Congress a decade ago, and Freedom 250, President Donald Trump's entity formed last year, each operate on their own respective tracks as a nonprofit and as a limited liability company. Both are employing staff, soliciting corporate donors and spending taxpayer funds.

That means people, businesses and nonprofits are getting a slice of the semiquincentennial pie, some bigger than others. But there is no clear accounting of which entities are getting the bigger shares and no one associated with either organization offered a full explanation to States Newsroom. Reports also show at least \$10 million in taxpayer money flowing from America250 to Freedom 250, and some Democratic lawmakers claim more has been redirected.

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The commission's nonprofit arm, America250.org, lists 850 items available from its official online store: apparel, toys, games, eyewear, housewares, challenge coins, holiday ornaments, and a premier collectible line including an \$8,000 painting by Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania-based "speed painter" Cody Sabol.

America250 Chair Rosie Rios said the nonprofit arm receives a portion of the profits.

"It's a licensing arrangement, so we get a percentage of the merchandise sold," Rios told States Newsroom during a June 22 interview.

When asked how to differentiate between America250 the commission and America250 the nonprofit, Rios said "Think of it as one entity. America250 is one entity working together on the planning side and the implementations."

An America250 spokesperson declined to specify what percentage of funds from merchandise that America250's nonprofit arm received in 2025 and 2026, but provided a written statement.

"America250 is proud to be partnering with numerous household brands to bring the America250 logo and merchandise to communities across the country. These partnerships and merchandise are designed to help expand public awareness of the commemoration and give Americans additional ways to participate in the Semiquincentennial," according to a spokesperson, adding the list of merch has grown in recent months.

"Our partners help bring the celebration to Americans through the brands they know and trust, advancing our goal of reaching all 350 million Americans as part of our '350 for 250' initiative," the statement continued.

In its 2025 legally mandated annual report to Congress, the America250 commission touted "a strong portfolio of strategic licensing agreements" that generated new revenue.

States Newsroom reached out to the offices of bipartisan members of Congress who currently serve as commissioners, and several staff replied they did not have information about how much money is being generated by merchandise.

The commissioners include Sens. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, Alex Padilla, D-Calif., and Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., as well as Reps. Robert Aderholt, R-Ala., Maria Salazar, R-Fla., Dwight Evans, D-Pa., and Bonnie Watson Coleman, D-N.J.

Freedom 250, the Trump entity, offers 62 branded products for sale on its website store, including shirts, hats, can koozies, stickers, pins and a colonial model flag with "250" featured inside the circle of the 13 stars.

At least two booths selling merchandise are open at the Great American State Fair on the National Mall, one of Freedom 250's main events.

Freedom 250 press officials did not respond to States Newsroom regarding where merchandise profits are directed.

Merchandise representing both America250 and Freedom 250 has been spotted in tourist shops in Washington, D.C., and Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, just over the Virginia border.

Millions in spending

Congress initially appropriated \$79.8 million over several years to the America250 commission, beginning in 2019, according to the entity's annual report.

Most of its spending in 2025 — \$17 million — went to America250 programs, according to the report.

That included field trips for roughly 550 students, \$250,000 in grants for young entrepreneurs, an America250 time capsule to be buried in Philadelphia on July 4, a "Giving Forth" initiative to raise awareness about mid-year donations to nonprofit organizations, and New Year's Eve-style ball drops to ring in Independence Day in every U.S. time zone and territory, among other initiatives.

"We are driven by purpose, not politics and our bipartisan Commission focuses on serving the interests of all Americans as mandated by our legislation. If the 250th anniversary is going to mean something to all Americans, it needs to be nonpartisan and belong to every American," an America250 spokesperson said.

The organization awarded \$935,000 in grants to state and local entities between 2021 and 2025, according to the report. A 990 nonprofit tax filing for 2025 was not yet available on the website.

The report also showed the White House Task Force 250 — the precursor to Freedom 250 — spent roughly \$31 million of the America250 funds last year, with most, \$22 million, paying for the June 2025 military parade that occurred on Trump's birthday, to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Army.

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An America250 spokesperson said a comprehensive list of private donors was not readily available, but the annual report identified new private-sector sponsors as The Coca-Cola Company, Starbucks, Walmart, Kraft Heinz, JPMorgan Chase, General Mills, Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep and RAM, BNY, and Leidos.

According to America250.org's most recent 990 tax filing, the entity ended 2023 with just under \$14.6 million in revenue — \$11.1 million of which was program service revenue, and roughly \$3.3 million of which came from other gifts and contributions.

The organization spent \$12.2 million for the year. A category labeled as "other" clocked in at around \$8.3 million. Salaries amounted to just over \$1 million, not including employee benefits. Information technology and conferences each amounted to \$469,000 and fundraising expenses were nearly \$343,000, among other smaller line items.

Nine employees, and one former, are listed on the 990, with salaries ranging from \$101,185 to \$285,690, including incentive bonuses, the highest of which reached \$43,800.

The nonprofit gave out \$175,000 in grants to organizations and local governments in 2023, according to the filing. Most of the 16 individual grants were doled out as \$10,000 in seed money for state governments, and nonprofit historical societies and foundations, including those in Arizona, Arkansas, Louisiana, Montana, Nebraska, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington and West Virginia.

Congress allocated \$150M

In 2025, as part of the "big, beautiful bill," the Republican-led Congress approved another \$150 million for "events, celebrations, and activities surrounding the observance and commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States, to remain available through fiscal year 2028."

The lawmakers directed the money to Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum "acting through the director of the National Park Service." Burgum is an ex officio member of the America250 commission as well.

According to commissioners Coleman and Padilla's offices, America250 was promised \$100 million of the "big beautiful bill" funds.

The commission has only received \$25 million to date, according to Padilla's and Coleman's offices.

"Freedom 250 siphoned off funding but the details are murky due to their lack of transparency," a spokesperson for Coleman's office said.

According to an America250 spokesperson, "The final mix of funding cannot be known at this point as our programs are still in various stages of development and execution, and our fundraising for them continues."

"However, Chair Rios' commitment to Congress has been to engage the private sector for a true public/private partnership to engage all Americans and not rely on federal funding only," according to the spokesperson.

The Department of the Interior did not provide to States Newsroom, as requested, a breakdown of how the funds have been allocated so far, but offered a written statement.

"As with all of our signature 250 events, resources have been made available to ensure these historic occasions are a success. The Memorandum of Understanding signed with all 250th related entities made that clear and we are proud to be partners in celebrating these iconic events honoring our 250th thanks to the bold leadership of President Donald J. Trump," according to the statement from a department spokesperson.

Freedom 250 was formed as a limited liability company in late October 2025, according to division of corporation records in Delaware, where it is registered.

The National Park Foundation, a congressionally chartered fundraising arm for the National Park Service, created Freedom 250 as a separate LLC "to help NPS with the execution of these events, while keeping this effort distinct and separate from the day-to-day work NPF does to support our national parks."

'From Vanity to Insanity'

U.S. House Democrats slammed Freedom250 in a new report on July 2, calling it "a shadow organization capable of infiltrating the celebrations and injecting America's 250th with Trump's extreme, partisan agenda."

The 55-page interim report titled "From Vanity to Insanity: How the White House Cheated the American People Out of their 250th Birthday," said the administration "hijacked" the celebrations.

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"Significant questions remain unanswered, beginning with the complete donor lists and the ultimate disposition of the funds that Freedom 250 has raised and spent. But the record already assembled supports a conclusion that should alarm the American people," according to the report.

A spokesperson for Freedom 250 dismissed the report Thursday as "categorically false" and "disheartening."

"This so-called 'report' is nothing more than a partisan smear from politicians who would rather manufacture division than celebrate America's 250th birthday alongside the rest of the country. Congressional members should be ashamed they are spending countless hours fabricating a report instead of joining Americans in creating an absolutely beautiful celebration," according to a statement provided to States Newsroom by Freedom 250 spokesperson Danielle Alvarez.

Alvarez criticized America250's use of money, saying they had "nothing to show for it."

"Freedom 250 was created because the American people deserved better. We stepped in to rescue our nation's 250th birthday from years of wasted time, wasted money, and failed planning. We are unapologetic about celebrating the greatest nation on earth, and we are delivering the historic celebration Americans deserved," Alvarez said.

Mobile exhibits funded

According to USAspending.gov, a \$10 million grant originally given to America250.org was transferred to the National Park Foundation in late 2025, via the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and directed to Freedom 250 to fund "Freedom 250 Trucks," six mobile exhibits stopping at libraries and community events.

The trucks provide curriculum resources from the private, Michigan-based Hillsdale College, a Christian institution led by Trump ally Larry Arnn, who spoke at Freedom 250's "Rededicate 250," a faith-based, Christian-oriented event held on the National Mall in May.

Freedom 250 did not respond to State's Newsroom's request for a comprehensive list of donors and amounts pledged to the LLC.

The watchdog organization Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington published an investigation of sponsorship money for Freedom 250 in May. Sponsors mentioned in their report included January AI, SAP, United Airlines, Ultimate Fighting Championship and Mosaic.

The New York Times reported in February that a donor solicitation obtained by the news organization revealed promises of special access and preferred seating for those who gave \$500,000. A private Freedom 250 reception invite was offered, where sponsors who give \$1 million can get a photograph with Trump, and the level of \$2.5 million reportedly included possible speaking roles at the president's July 4 program.

Freedom 250 did not respond to a request to confirm the Times' report.

Freedom 250 also did not respond to questions about staffing. A quick LinkedIn search puts the range of Freedom 250 employees between two and 10.

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

China resumes US soybean purchases, but future for farmers remains 'daunting'

Exports to United States' largest bean buyer still lag previous years

BY CASSANDRA STEPHENSON

Crops are in the ground, the weather is cooperating, soybean prices are up slightly from 2025, and China — the biggest buyer of U.S. soybean exports — is once again placing orders after a trade agreement ended the country's purchasing freeze last fall.

But while morale is higher among soybean farmers as the 2026 growing season gets under way, the cost to plant crops remains high, and U.S. Department of Agriculture data shows there is still a long way to go before China's purchases reach pre-trade war levels.

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"There have been some positive movements in trade relations with China, specifically with soybeans, that have caused markets to improve over last year," said Stefan Maupin, executive director of the Tennessee Soybean Promotion Council. "However, we are definitely not where we were in years past. For most farmers out there, the big question in front of them is, will it get back?"

Soybeans are a major agricultural product nationwide, covering about 10% of all U.S. farmland. Roughly 40% of U.S. soybeans are exported, and in recent years, around half of exported beans went to China.

China stopped purchasing U.S. soybeans in 2025 during tariff negotiations with the Trump administration, leaning instead on soybeans from South American trade partners. China ultimately agreed to purchase 12 million metric tons of soybeans in 2025 and at least 25 million metric tons each year through 2028.

USDA Deputy Secretary Stephen Vaden said he is confident that China will meet those numbers.

"They have the entire marketing period to meet the 25 million metric ton commitment for this year," Vaden told Brownfield, an agriculture-focused news outlet.

The current marketing period runs from September 2025 to September 2026.

Exports to China from January through March were up 57% compared to last year, USDA data shows. That's explained by an increase in sales to China during the off-season in response to the trade agreement, said Andrew Muhammad, a professor of agricultural and resource economics at the University of Tennessee.

In other words, China is now buying the soybeans that U.S. producers stored in fall 2025, when China halted its usual buys. Typically, China purchases most of its American soybeans in the fall, turning instead to Brazil and Argentina for soybeans during the South American harvest season in the spring.

"But if we look at the accumulated total for the actual marketing year, going back to September, exports to China are still lagging what we did in years past," Muhammad said.

From the start of September through March, China accounted for less than 30% of U.S. soybean exports — about half of their volume in previous years.

"We won't really know until the end of this year whether or not China is able to keep up with these commitments," Muhammad said.

Asked about China's total soybean purchases lagging behind previous years, a USDA spokesperson stated that President Donald Trump "has made clear he will hold China to its commitments."

"President Trump executed another historic deal with China after the previous administration refused to hold them accountable to its future purchase of American soybeans, sorghum, beef, and other commodities," the spokesperson stated.

Long-term outlook still 'daunting'

"The farmers and everybody with whom they do business feel better about that positive movement in the negotiations, but they're not naive," Maupin said of Tennessee soybean farmers. "They know ... there is that potential that (China) will not fully buy what they have committed to buying."

What really matters is whether commodity traders believe that China will fulfill those commitments, Maupin said. Market prices are currently stronger this year, but "the jury is still out on that."

And despite improved prices compared to 2025, University of Tennessee data predicts that the price of soybeans at average yields still won't be high enough for farmers to break even.

"(Farmers) are now in their third year of the question, how much money will they lose on this crop?" Maupin said.

The University of Tennessee estimated total losses of nearly \$110 million for soybean farmers last year, on top of multimillion-dollar losses in 2024.

Those who are still farming this year likely made "major adjustments" to try to lower their expenses and input costs as much as possible to weather the financial hardships of the last two years, Maupin said, but trying to just break even is not sustainable, particularly when many farmers depend on financing tied to their property and equipment.

Government stockpiles and growing global markets

Muhammad said this type of trade deal also means governments are involved in agricultural markets.

"When you say to China, 'We need you to buy so many soybeans,' the only reason they could pull that

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off is because we're not talking about capitalistic market purchases, we're just talking about government stockpiling," Muhammad said.

While the trade deal may appeal to U.S. producers, "once tensions die down, they'll just start using what they've stockpiled. It almost comes across as a Band-Aid for a much more serious problem ... the trade tensions between the U.S. and China," he said.

Vaden said Trump sets targets in his trade deals, making outcomes measurable. The USDA did not respond to questions about the long-term effectiveness of trade targets.

Maupin said China has been known to stockpile goods and then cease purchasing or put excess goods back out on the world market.

It's this market instability that encourages farmers to develop relationships with other countries and find domestic uses for soybeans, Maupin said. Commodity farmers pay a percentage of the sale price of their products — called "checkoff dollars" — toward research and new market development.

Vaden said that while China is an "important market" for the U.S., Canada and Mexico buy more U.S. agricultural products overall.

"We're not just focused on China," he said. "We're focused on our larger trading partners here in North America, as well as the many other markets that we need to open, because ultimately this is a game of addition. If we focus too much on any one country, we're not keeping our eye on the overall ball, which is increasing sales worldwide."

Maupin said representatives from the European Union visited Tennessee last growing season to see if the state's soybean production meets their sustainability goals. Their feedback was positive, Maupin said.

The U.S. is also looking to develop relationships with nations that could use soybean meal to feed livestock, or as a protein source for human consumption.

The country has exported more soybeans to Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan and Japan since September, partially offsetting the decrease in sales to China, Muhammad said.

"At the end of the day, worldwide, the demand for soybeans as an ingredient, mostly in animal feed, remains high, whether it's in China or Mexico, the EU, or Egypt," Maupin said.

This story is a product of the Mississippi River Basin Ag & Water Desk, an independent reporting network based at the University of Missouri in partnership with Report for America, with major funding from the Walton Family Foundation.

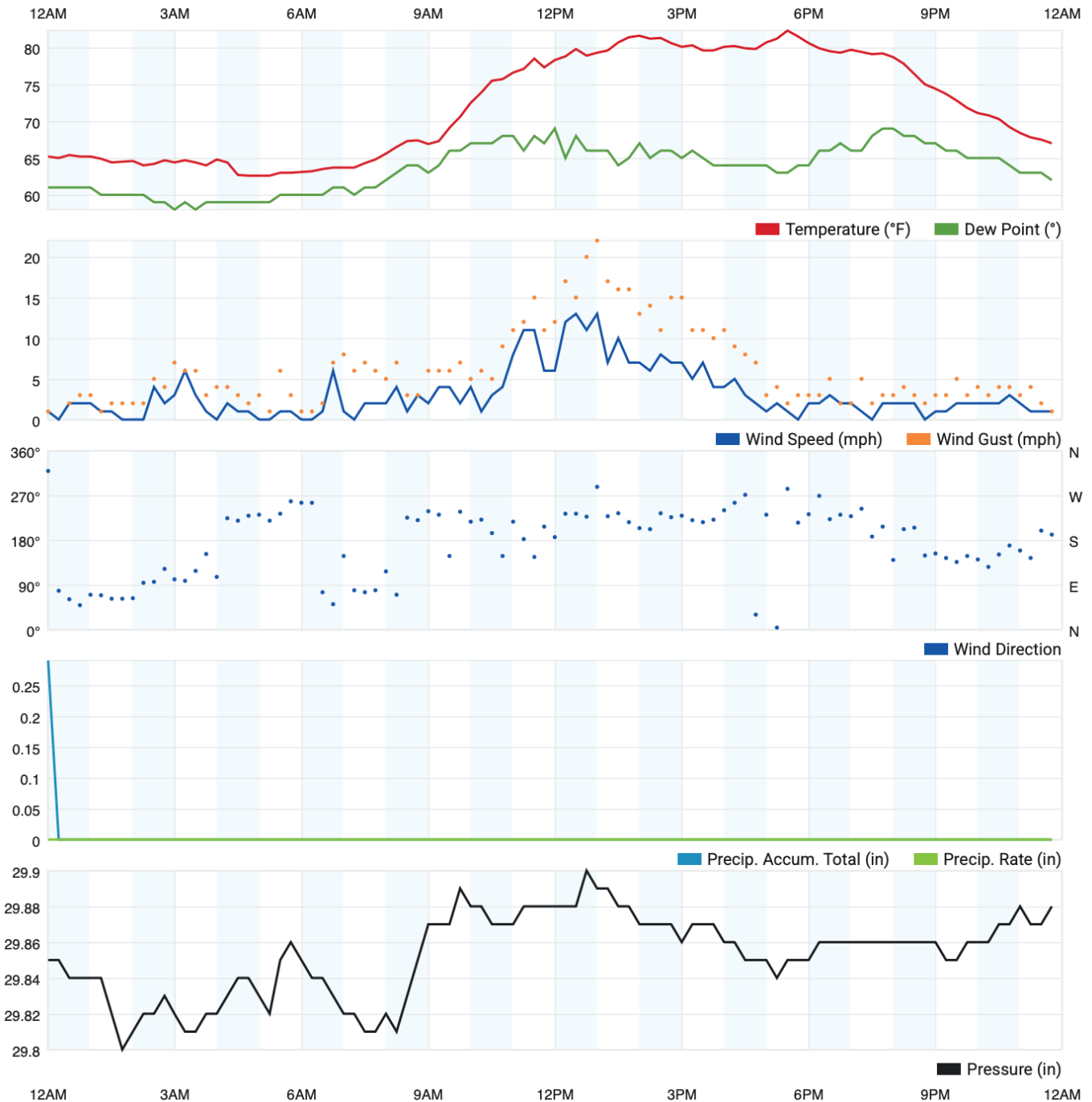
Cassandra Stephenson covers issues impacting rural West Tennessee as a Report for America corps member at The Tennessee Lookout.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

July 3, 2026



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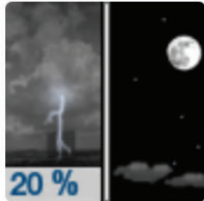
Independence Day



High: 89 °F

Slight Chance
Showers and
Patchy Fog
then Mostly
Sunny

Tonight



Low: 61 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms then
Mostly Clear

Sunday



High: 91 °F

Hot

Sunday Night



Low: 66 °F

Mostly Clear

Monday



High: 94 °F

Hot



Marginal Risk For Severe Weather

July 4, 2026
2:19 AM CDT

Thunderstorm Timing

Probability of Precipitation (%) Forecast

Key Messages:

- Heat of the day showers and thunderstorms expected, mainly over northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota.
 - Storm threat:
 - Hail up to 1"
 - Winds up to 60 mph
- Uncertainty:**
 - When thunderstorms will initiate (between 1pm and 3pm?)
 - Thunderstorms could develop anywhere in the forecast area: strongest signal is for northeast SD/west central MN

NEW

Important Updates:

- Slow moving storms this afternoon and evening could result in locally heavy rainfall, in addition to the hail and wind threat.



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

	7/4 Sat											
	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm
Aberdeen	5	10	10	10	10	15	15	10	10	10	5	5
Britton	10	15	15	20	25	15	20	20	15	15	5	0
Chamberlain	10	15	15	15	10	15	15	15	10	10	5	5
Clark	10	15	20	20	20	10	20	15	25	30	30	10
Eagle Butte	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	5	5	5	0	0
Eureka	10	5	10	15	15	15	10	5	0	0	0	0
Gettysburg	15	10	15	15	20	25	20	5	0	5	5	0
McIntosh	5	0	0	5	5	5	10	0	0	0	0	0
Milbank	15	30	20	25	30	30	35	20	20	25	25	15
Miller	10	20	15	15	15	10	20	30	20	10	5	5
Mobridge	5	5	5	5	5	10	10	10	0	0	0	0
Murdo	15	25	20	20	20	20	20	5	5	5	0	0
Pierre	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	5	5	5	0	0
Redfield	10	15	10	10	10	15	10	15	10	15	10	5
Sisseton	20	20	20	25	30	20	25	20	20	15	15	10
Watertown	25	25	30	25	20	20	25	20	20	30	30	10
Webster	15	25	25	25	20	15	20	15	25	25	15	5
Wheaton	15	20	20	20	25	25	30	20	10	10	15	10

Probability of Precipitation Forecast (%)

Showers and thunderstorms are possible this afternoon and evening. Main threats include hail up to one inch in diameter and thunderstorm wind gusts up to 60 mph. Heavy rain is also possible. Best timing for this will be between 2 and 10 PM CDT.

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THREAT ASSESSMENT

HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

1

Isolated Severe Weather Expected

Timing:

3 PM through 10 PM
Northeast SD/ West Central MN

PRIMARY THREATS

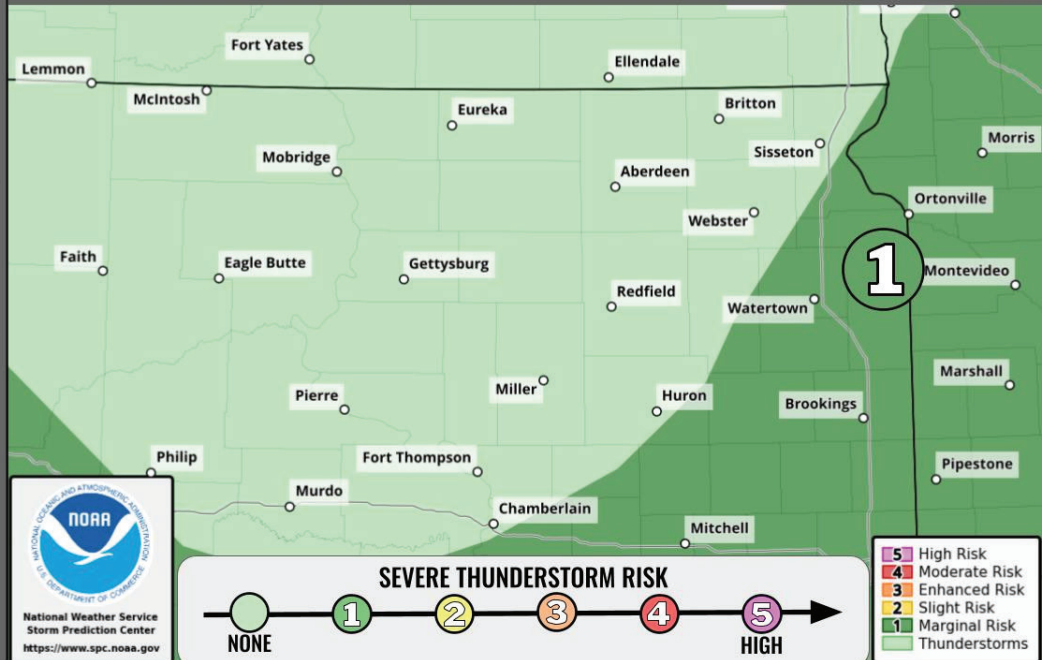


DAMAGING
WIND GUSTS
Up to 60 mph



HAIL up to 1"
diameter

Marginal Risk For This Afternoon/Evening



There is a Marginal Risk (level 1 out of 5) for severe weather this afternoon and evening, mainly east of a line from Carpenter to Wallace to Peever to White Rock. Forecast movement of storms could be slow enough to result in localized heavy rainfall.



Independence Day Temperature Forecast

July 4, 2026
2:26 AM CDT

	3 PM	6 PM	9 PM	12 AM (Midnight)
Aberdeen	85	86	79	69
Pierre	86	87	79	69
Mobridge	87	88	81	71
Watertown	83	82	76	69
Sisseton	83	83	76	68



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 82 °F at 5:28 PM

Low Temp: 62 °F at 5:05 AM

Wind: 24 mph at 12:50 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 105 in 1988

Record Low: 40 in 1967

Average High: 84

Average Low: 59

Average Precip in July.: 0.47

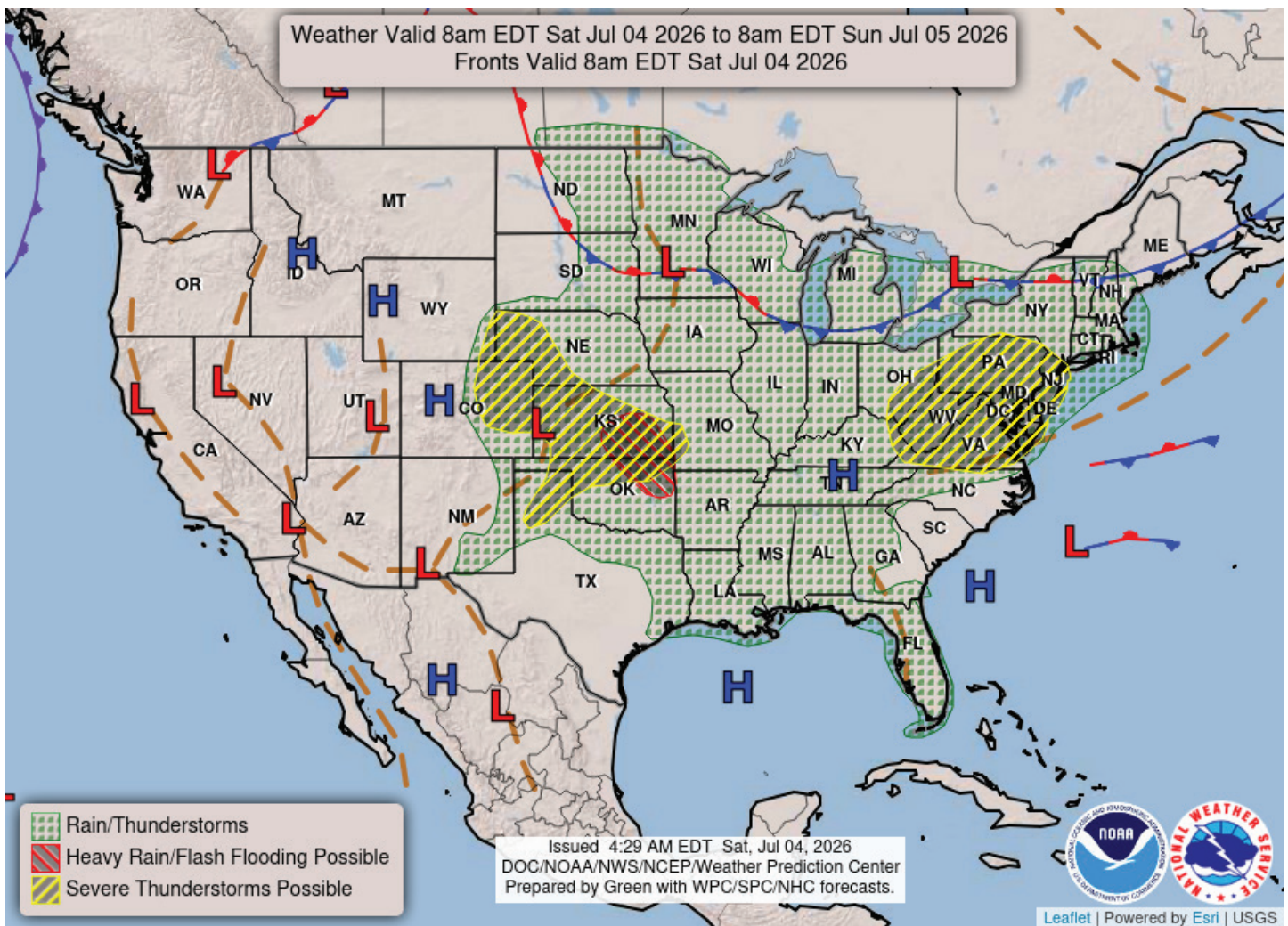
Precip to date in July.: 0.29

Average Precip to date: 11.48

Precip Year to Date: 9.76

Sunset Tonight: 9:23 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:50 am



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Today in Weather History

July 4, 1936: Several record highs were seen on this day, including; 113 degrees 4NW of Gann Valley; 111 in Murdo; 107 in Castlewood; 106 in Clark and Highmore; 105 near Onida; 104 in Faulkton and Miller; 103 degrees 6SE of McIntosh; 101 in Pollock.

July 4, 1988: Several record highs were set on this day, including; 103 degrees in Ipswich and Britton; 102 in Webster; 101 in Summit and Artichoke Lake, MN; 99 in Leola; 98 degrees in Clear Lake and Waubay.

1776: Thomas Jefferson purchased a thermometer from a local merchant before signing the Declaration of Independence. According to his weather memorandum book, at 1 PM it was cloudy and 76 degrees.

1911 — The northeastern U.S. experienced sweltering 100 degree heat. The temperature soared to 105 degrees at Vernon, VT, and North Bridgton ME, and to 106 degrees at Nashua NH, to establish all-time records for those three states. Afternoon highs of 104 at Boston, MA, 104 at Albany, NY, and 103 at Portland, ME, were all-time records for those three cities. (The Weather Channel)

1956 — A world record for the most rain in one minute was set at Unionville, MD, with a downpour of 1.23 inches. (The Weather Channel) (The National Severe Storms Forecast Center)

1987 — Thunderstorms around the country provided extra fireworks for Independence Day. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 82 mph at Clearwater, KS, eight inches of rain in four hours at Menno SD, and three inches of rain in just fifteen minutes at Austin, KY. Morning thunderstorms drenched Oneonta AL with 8.6 inches of rain, their greatest 24 hour total in thirty years of records. The heavy rain caused mudslides and serious flooding, claiming two lives. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Thunderstorms produced heavy rain over the Central Gulf Coast Region for the second day in a row. Monroe, LA, was deluged with 3.75 inches in two hours. Aberdeen and Rapid City, SD, reported record high temperatures for the date, with readings of 105 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Independence Day was hot as a firecracker across parts of the country. Nineteen cities, mostly in the north central U.S., reported record high temperatures for the date, including Williston ND with a reading of 107 degrees. In the southwestern U.S., highs of 93 at Alamosa, CO, 114 at Tucson, AZ, and 118 at Phoenix, AZ, equalled all-time records for those locations. (The National Weather Summary)

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Daily Devotion

The Truth That Sets Us Free

When we ground ourselves in God's Word, we experience His best for us

John 8:31-32: 31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, ``If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;

32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

God desires the best for each of His children, but sometimes we become trapped in habits, thoughts, and emotions that keep us from experiencing His best. Today's passage shows us the way out: If we continue in God's Word, we'll know the truth that sets us free (v. 32).

Continuing in the Word means consistently engaging with Scripture and applying it to daily life. As we do, we'll discover profound benefits that are ours in Christ:

Position. Through faith in Jesus, we have direct access to God and can approach His throne with confidence (Hebrews 4:16).

Provision. God's Word provides living guidance, wisdom, and encouragement for whatever we're facing.

Promises. As we rely on what God has promised, His character is being formed in us—we “become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

Protection. Walking obediently with Christ means His strength guards us against temptation and sin (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

Freedom begins with honesty. Recognize any patterns or sins that are holding you back, and then ground yourself in the truth of Scripture. Claim God's promises by faith—He's ready to help the moment you turn to Him.

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.03.26

7 8 24 42 47 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 2 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.03.26

5 9 29 47 57 16

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$576,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.01.26

10 20 35 38 46 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$31,490,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 2 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.01.26

4 14 22 32 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$164,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 17 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.01.26

10 20 30 60 64 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 47 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.01.26

2 6 26 39 68 6

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$396,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 47 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

Trump hails US exceptionalism before veering into darkly political speech to usher in America 250

By STEVEN SLOAN, STEVE PEOPLES and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump ushered in the 250th anniversary of American independence on Friday with soaring rhetoric about American exceptionalism before veering into a darkly political speech with warnings about a sinister threat of communism that evoked one of the country's ugliest chapters.

"Communism is a mortal threat to American liberty," he said from Mount Rushmore. "It is the greatest threat to our country, including World War I, World War II, Pearl Harbor or even 9/11."

While the language was similar to several other speeches Trump has given in recent days, it was notable for being delivered in a national park that commemorates some of America's most prominent presidents. And it swerved from the typically apolitical, unifying speeches past presidents like Gerald Ford or Ronald Reagan have delivered during earlier high-profile Independence Day celebrations.

Indeed, Trump's language evoked the Red Scare of the 1950s, when alleged communists were persecuted and blacklisted from jobs across America, from Washington to Hollywood.

In New York City, Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a democratic socialist, delivered his own address that cast America as a nation of contradictions "working each day towards the perfection in which it was conceived."

The president's speech capped an Independence Day eve that was otherwise most notable for a brutal heat wave the gripped much of the eastern portion of the country. Officials have warned those celebrating the holiday to stay hydrated and take air-conditioned breaks as needed.

Philadelphia canceled its Salute to Independence parade Friday. The Great American State Fair in Washington shut down in the early afternoon before reopening at 5 p.m. The Capitol Fourth concert, a mainstay of the holiday in Washington, opened its gates a little later than normal but ultimately moved forward with appearances from Patti LaBelle, Trace Adkins, members of the Artemis II space mission and fireworks over George Washington's Mount Vernon. An Independence Day parade scheduled for Saturday in Washington was canceled.

Looking for a place to cool off

By early afternoon Friday in Washington, hundreds of people were roaming the grounds of the National Mall, home to The Great American State Fair. They snapped photos of the flyovers and tried to cool off inside tents that offered \$9 lemonades and \$23 turkey legs. Many were dressed in patriotic colors, their faces glistening with sweat.

Glenn Brooks, who was pardoned by Trump for his participation in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, said he was "thankful to be participating in this grand event."

The activity culminates in the main event Saturday, when fireworks will erupt in communities across the U.S., along with backyard cookouts and block parties. Trump will deliver another speech at the National Mall in Washington before what is being billed as a historically massive fireworks show.

As the rest of the country struggled under stifling heat, the Pacific Northwest enjoyed temperatures in the 60s with even a few light showers.

World Cup soccer fans in Seattle were staying cool Friday as they got psyched up for Monday's big game between the U.S. and Belgium. In the nearby suburb of Issaquah, Megan Kurowski, 31, brought her two dogs to the dog park so they could get some exercise before she went to work.

Kurowski said she was feeling positive about America's 250th anniversary and was planning a possible paddleboard to watch the fireworks.

"Everyone's just, from what it seems, been pretty excited about celebrating 250 years," she said.

The holiday is unfolding at a unique time in the U.S. The anniversary has served as an opportunity for the country to reflect on its history while also reminding it of the political polarization of the moment.

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On a holiday of unity, there is an undercurrent of division

In New York, Mamdani, a Democrat, did not mention Trump by name, but parts of his speech appeared aimed at the president's divisive rhetoric.

"For generation after generation, we have been told that when the world has sent its people to our shores, it has not sent its best," Mamdani said in an apparent reference to a common criticism from Trump. "Those ideals upon which our nation was built — they are strong enough to endure any authoritarian regime, but only if we reach for them."

Freedom 250, an organization aligned with the White House, has come to rival America250, a bipartisan group founded by Congress a decade ago. Freedom 250 has organized much of the activity in Washington, including the Great American State Fair. America250 is behind the ball drops unfolding in many cities, including New York, and will host a concert in Los Angeles on Saturday.

About 4 in 10 U.S. adults feel "proud" about the country's 250th anniversary, according to an April survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Roughly 3 in 10 said "excited" describes their emotions.

Ahead of the holiday, auto technician Joe Fuqua-Bejarano in Topeka, Kansas, sized up "what makes us awesome" as a people. It is clearly not the politics, in his view, but rather resilience.

"We've just all got to find unity somewhere, whether that's in laughter or perseverance, and keep everybody cool," he said from the fireworks stand where he is doing a booming business as a side hustle.

Christina Zhou, a 25-year-old research assistant from Cambridge, Massachusetts, said she would aim to "think about just things that are happening locally."

"It feels a little bit more like within our own personal control," she said.

Jerry Chin of Newcastle, Washington, said he wasn't aware that the U.S. was celebrating its 250th anniversary and planned to stay low-key around the holiday. He and his wife generally skip the fireworks and instead stay home with their fearful dogs to keep them calm.

"America's a great place, but there are some concerns," he said. Chin, 55, and his wife worry about healthcare and issues around staying healthy, but they also stress about politics.

"We're Democrats, so kind of given up hope," he said. "Just feel that it is the way it is. I don't know if there could be change."

At the National Archives in Washington, visitors made their way through the Rotunda to look at the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights -- and to escape the heat outside.

Michael Dresdner, 60, traveled from West Orange, New Jersey, with his wife, Cindi, 57, and about two dozen other people to be part of the America 250 celebrations. He said their group of travelers included people on both sides of the political aisle -- and that is what gave him hope for the future of American democracy.

"We are all here, and we all love America," he said.

Fireworks, heat and politics: America celebrates its 250th birthday

By STEVEN SLOAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The 250th anniversary of American independence is colliding with a country gripped by political polarization and a heat wave bearing down on millions of people across multiple states as celebrations get underway across the United States on Saturday.

The signing of the Declaration of Independence, one of history's most celebrated articulations of democratic ambitions, is being marked in myriad ways. President Donald Trump, set to take a central role in festivities, plans to speak on the National Mall in Washington ahead of what's being billed as a historically enormous fireworks show that will rain down over the nation's capital. The president was in South Dakota at Mount Rushmore on Friday, where he delivered a dark speech about the threat of communism in the U.S. as the chiseled images of four of his most prominent predecessors loomed behind him.

Elsewhere, fireworks are scheduled to be set off Saturday over Navy Pier in Chicago and against the skyline of New York City, which also hosted a ball drop at midnight to usher in the holiday with the same fanfare

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as New Year's Eve. Bristol, Rhode Island, describes itself as home of the nation's oldest Independence Day celebrations dating to 1785. In Los Angeles, Queen Latifah will host a concert featuring performances by The Smashing Pumpkins and Chris Stapleton. Chaka Khan is billed as a special guest.

Anticipation for the milestone holiday has been building for much of the year, serving as an opportunity for Americans to reflect on their complicated history as onetime colonists of an empire who became a superpower of their own. Celebrations months in the making had to adjust or cancel activities entirely as much of the East Coast sweltered under heat that approached and in many cases surpassed triple digits.

Heat is defining the big weekend in many places

In Washington, the Great American State Fair was closed for several hours Friday afternoon during the worst of the heat. The city's Independence Day parade scheduled for Saturday was canceled.

To the chagrin of many on the East Coast, the weather was downright pleasant on the other side of the country. The Pacific Northwest enjoyed temperatures in the 60s on Friday with a few light showers.

In the Seattle suburb of Issaquah, Megan Kurowski, 31, brought her two dogs to the dog park so they could get some exercise before she went to work. Kurowski said she was feeling positive about America's 250th anniversary and was planning a possible paddleboard to watch the fireworks.

"Everyone's just, from what it seems, been pretty excited about celebrating 250 years," she said.

Other American pastimes are overlapping with the holiday.

More than a dozen Major League Baseball games are on the schedule for Saturday. The World Cup, being hosted in the U.S. for the first time in 32 years, will have matches in Houston and Philadelphia on Saturday following a nail-biter overtime win by Argentina over Cape Verde on Friday outside Miami. Pop culture enthusiasts can obsess over Taylor Swift's Friday wedding to football player Travis Kelce at New York City's Madison Square Garden. And Madonna released her 15th studio album, a collection of dance tracks.

An uneasy nation gets ready to celebrate

The celebrations are unfolding against the backdrop of a deep divide that has been expanding for years, visible in everything from political expression to cultural norms to age-old questions over race, class and immigration.

At Mount Rushmore on Friday, Trump spoke of communism as a "mortal threat to American liberty."

"It is the greatest threat to our country, including World War I, World War II, Pearl Harbor or even 9/11," he said.

Without naming Trump, New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a Democrat who is also a democratic socialist and recently backed several successful congressional candidates in their primaries, appeared to reference Trump during a speech Friday.

"Those ideals upon which our nation was built — they are strong enough to endure any authoritarian regime, but only if we reach for them," he said.

Ahead of the holiday, auto technician Joe Fuqua-Bejarano in Topeka, Kansas, sized up "what makes us awesome" as a people. It is clearly not the politics, in his view, but rather resilience.

"We've just all got to find unity somewhere, whether that's in laughter or perseverance, and keep everybody cool," he said from the fireworks stand where he is doing a booming business as a side hustle.

Jerry Chin of Newcastle, Washington, said he wasn't aware that the U.S. was celebrating its 250th anniversary and planned to stay low-key around the holiday. He and his wife generally skip the fireworks and instead stay home with their fearful dogs to keep them calm.

"America's a great place," he said, "but there are some concerns."

Iran begins dayslong funeral for the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, killed in war

By NASSER KARIMI and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of mourners began a dayslong funeral Saturday for Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, beating their chests in sorrow before the glass case containing his flag-draped coffin in Tehran and calling for revenge against Israel and the United States.

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The funeral for Khamenei, who ruled Iran for decades before being killed at age 86 in a Feb. 28 airstrike in the opening moments of the Iran war, could provide a boost for the country's theocracy and its new supreme leader, his son Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei.

That is particularly important as Iran tries to leverage its hold on the Strait of Hormuz in negotiations with the U.S. over a permanent end to the war and as concern still lingers that Israel could attack yet again.

During the ceremony, Iran's top negotiator issued a warning to France and the United Kingdom over their comments about potentially launching joint patrols in the waterway, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all oil and natural gas once passed in peacetime.

Mourners wept at the sight of Khamenei's coffin alongside those of his family members also killed in the airstrike, with some chanting: "Our word is one! Revenge! Revenge!" Some carried banners and flags, while billboards across the city bore Khamenei's image. Crowds of men rhythmically beat their chests in mourning, a common practice at Shiite funerals.

"Imam Khamenei was our heart, our father, our everything," mourner Masoumeh Mohammadi said. "I still can't believe they martyred him. We will not rest until we avenge his death."

Coffins on display at Grand Mosalla

An outdoor stage set up at the Grand Mosalla resembled the stage where Khamenei once gave his speeches at a husseiniyah at his compound in downtown Tehran. A chair like the one he once sat in while giving his sermons, complete with a microphone on a stand and a small table next to it. Just above it hung an image of the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who died in 1989.

Khomeini's funeral saw chaotic scenes as millions thronged his mourning ceremony and trip to the cemetery. Khamenei's death, only the second time Iran has lost a supreme leader since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, came months earlier and gave authorities more time to prepare.

On Saturday, volunteers sprayed cooling water on crowds in the summertime heat as stands outside offered food and drink. Men and women congregated separately inside the Grand Mosalla after being checked by metal detectors and body searches. Police armed with assault rifles stood guard on surrounding streets. Many stayed outside in the street, lounging under the shade of trees because the city had shut down.

The caskets of his dead family members sat beneath Khamenei's, which had his black turban atop it, identifying him as a direct descendent of the Prophet Muhammad. The dead included the wife of Mojtaba Khamenei, whose possible appearance at the funeral remained unclear. He reportedly was wounded in the attack that killed his father.

"We attended the funeral to show that we are all committed to defend our country and religion," said Ali Kazemi, who came from the northwestern city of Tabriz, some 530 kilometers (330 miles) away from Tehran.

Funeral starts as US marks its 250th anniversary

Iran chose July 4, the 250th anniversary of the creation of the U.S., to begin the funeral. While authorities did not acknowledge the timing, crowds at the ceremony in Tehran chanted: "Death to America!" The refrain has been common in Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution and U.S. Embassy takeover and hostage crisis. They also cried: "Death to Israel!"

"We knocked the hell out of Iran," U.S. President Donald Trump said in a speech at the same time in South Dakota in front of Mount Rushmore. "They want to settle so badly. We gave them a week off for a funeral."

The American president was not forgotten in Tehran. In the crowd in Grand Mosalla, several mourners held a large flag that read: "#KillTrump."

As the ceremony went on, Iran's chief negotiator Kazem Gharibabadi criticized a joint statement overnight from British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron, which suggested their militaries stood ready to patrol the Strait of Hormuz.

Control of the strait has been a major point of leverage for Iran, which has suggested it wants to charge vessels passing through it, upending decades of the world considering it an international waterway.

"The security of Hormuz lies with the coastal states — the crisis-makers will be held accountable for the

consequences of their adventurism," Gharibabadi wrote on X. "This is a serious warning."

Khamenei will be buried Thursday in Mashhad

Khamenei's body will be transported to cities in both Iran and neighboring Iraq. Authorities have shut down streets, airspace and daily life for the mourning, which will end Thursday as he's buried at the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad, Khamenei's place of birth.

Authorities offered no immediate attendance count for the event Saturday, which saw the crowds cycle in and out of the Grand Mosalla and the surrounding streets. Other cities across Iran also held mourning ceremonies.

On Sunday, a prayer for the dead is planned at the Grand Mosalla. On Monday, his body and those of his family will be taken through the streets of Tehran, which likely will draw large crowds.

"I am here to say goodbye to my beloved leader Ali Khamenei," said a weeping Hananeh Mousavi, 27, who attended the funeral alongside her mother. "I never expected to see such a day. I wish I had died before this tragedy."

Ukrainian drones hit St Petersburg oil terminal in latest long-range attack on Russia

By The Associated Press undefined

A Ukrainian drone attack struck an oil terminal in St. Petersburg on Saturday, Russian officials said, as Kyiv presses on with bombardment of Russia's oil infrastructure.

Almost daily long-range attacks on Russian oil facilities have created a fuel crisis and heaped political pressure on the Kremlin as its all-out invasion of Ukraine stretches into its fifth year.

Gov. Alexander Beglov said the city's Kirovsky district on the Baltic Sea was hit. He also said that air defenses shot down 72 Ukrainian drones across Russia's second-largest city and the surrounding region.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described the attack as part of Ukraine's "long-range sanctions" against Russia. He said that Ukrainian forces also hit a military target on the island of Kronstadt, just off the coast of St. Petersburg.

"The Ukrainian defense forces hit the port oil infrastructure, which earns money for the Russian war, and there were also hits on Kronstadt — an important military target," he said in a post on Telegram.

St. Petersburg's Kirovsky district was previously hit in June, ahead of Russia's flagship St. Petersburg International Economic Forum.

The Crimean peninsula, which Russia annexed in 2014, has suffered particularly from heavy strikes, causing local authorities to suspend gasoline sales to civilians. A Ukrainian attack on Saturday killed one person and injured two more, including a 10-year-old child, the Moscow-installed Gov. Sergei Aksyonov said.

Ukrainian attacks bring the war home

Russian President Vladimir Putin has shrugged off Ukraine's strikes on Russia's energy facilities as "not critical," and insisted the war will continue until his goals are met.

He has described the attacks on Russian energy as an effort by Ukraine to distract attention from its losses on the battlefield, although analysts say the advance of Russian forces has been stymied in recent months.

On Friday, Putin visited the Russian military headquarters directing the war in Ukraine and received a report on the capture of the city of Kostyantynivka, after weeks of intense street battles. He hailed it as a key step toward capturing the nearby cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk, the key remaining strongholds in the so-called "forest belt" of heavily fortified cities in the Donetsk region that remain in Ukraine's hands.

The capture of Kostyantynivka, a big transport and industrial hub, is of "major strategic importance," Putin, clad in military fatigues, said in televised comments.

Zelenskyy denied that Russia took control of the city. "It is just another Russian lie, an attempt to generate some kind of a news story," he wrote on social media Saturday. "If Kostyantynivka were under Russian control, then perhaps Putin would have no problem meeting me there to find a diplomatic way to finally

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end this war. But the fact is, he won't cross the front line — reality is very different from Putin's words." Zelenskyy's post also seemed to appeal to U.S. President Donald Trump. "Now, on the eve of America's Independence Day, Putin has chosen to lie to the world and to the President of the United States about the situation on the front."

Putin appears to believe his government can keep the fuel crisis from eroding his authority and support for the war he launched more than four years ago. At the very least, the attacks have brought the war home even more poignantly for millions of Russians, shattering Putin's narrative of the conflict as something that doesn't affect the lives of ordinary people in his country.

The border city of Belgorod, which Ukrainian drone strikes have also repeatedly targeted, was left almost completely without power on Saturday due to overnight attacks, local media reported.

Meanwhile, eight people were wounded after a Russian attack struck residential buildings in Ukraine's southeastern region of Zaporizhzhia, including two children, local authorities said on Saturday.

Mali government reports rebel attacks targeting northern towns

BAMAKO, Mali (AP) — The Malian army said Saturday that several northern towns, including Gao and Sévaré, were targeted by rebels.

The statement came as a rebel group announced a new offensive to capture a northern town. Mohamed Elmaouloud Ramadane, a spokesperson for the Azawad Liberation Front (FLA), said in a Facebook post that the town of Anefis was being targeted by the separatists.

There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Mali has previously faced insurgencies by militants affiliated with al-Qaida and the Islamic State group, as well as a separatist rebellion in the country's north. The separatists have been fighting for years to create an independent state in northern Mali.

Along with Mali, neighboring Niger and Burkina Faso have also been battling al-Qaida and IS affiliates.

Following military coups, the juntas in the three countries turned from Western allies to Russia for help combating Islamic militants. But the security situation has worsened with a record number of militant attacks. Government forces have also been accused of killing civilians they suspect of collaborating with militants.

In late April, a coordinated attack by the FLA and the regional al-Qaida affiliate JNIM killed the defense minister in his home and took control of several key towns in the north of the country.

Autism remains widely misunderstood in parts of Africa. A mother in Guinea fights for her child

By BOUBACAR DIALLO Associated Press

FRICA, Guinea (AP) — Kazaliou Balde's parents started worrying about him when as a small child he avoided eye contact and had difficulty communicating.

First, the family in the West African nation of Guinea turned to a traditional healer who suggested protective amulets. Then, as the boy dragged himself along the ground instead of walking, they took him to a hospital in the capital, Conakry, where he was diagnosed with autism — something the family had never heard of before.

Neither had their neighbors. Some of them made rude comments about the child.

"Some suggested that I take him to the bush and throw him away," said his mother, Kadiatou Diallo, a 55-year-old trader.

Misconceptions are common around children with autism in parts of Africa that lack reliable data, awareness and government support. Some mistakenly attribute autism to evil spirits. Experts say the misconceptions have often delayed diagnosis and brought stigma for children and their families.

Autism is a complex developmental condition now known as autism spectrum disorder that affects people in different ways. It can include delays in language, learning or social and emotional skills. For some

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people, profound autism means being nonverbal and having intellectual disabilities, but the majority of people experience milder effects.

Guinea's government does not keep records around autism. The World Health Organization says about one in 127 people worldwide had autism in 2021, but it notes that the prevalence in many low- and middle-income countries remains unknown.

Diallo decided to stand up for her son and seek better care. She said she has four children but loves him especially "because I've suffered so much with him."

There is little support for autism in Guinea

In Guinea, a nation of about 15 million people, only a few schools cater to children with autism and they can cost up to \$300 per month. Not many families can afford it in a country where the minimum wage is 550,000 Guinea francs (\$63) a month, and where 43.7% of citizens live below the poverty line, according to the World Bank.

"In Guinea, the care for autism is very poor," said Dr. Alhassane Cherif, a psychologist and clinician in Conakry. "Private organizations and nonprofits are the only ones addressing this disorder and training staff to try to identify children."

Balde first attended both private and public schools, but none fit him. His teachers did not introduce him to writing and reading, his mother said, recalling their comments that her son "has no provision for school."

"I refused to consider these negative judgments. I refused to take him out of school," Diallo said.

She said her late husband "went to every corner of the country" looking for assistance for their son before dying in a road accident.

The solution appeared in their own hometown.

In 2023, Balde enrolled in the newly opened Salim Foundation for Children with Autism, a rare free school for children with autism. The school's authorities were conducting an outreach program when they learned of Balde and visited his family.

The school teaches him and 14 other students in a large house with three teachers. It has toys in bright colors and pictures of animals on the walls.

The school, registered with Guinea's educational authorities but not receiving government funding, is the brainchild of Mariam Aisha Barry, a social worker and philanthropist who said her daughter with autism was her inspiration.

At the school, children are taught basic things like identifying objects and assembling toys as well as everyday skills such as operating a TV remote.

Last year, the school organized what it called the country's first international seminar on autism.

"Our mission is to break the stigma surrounding autism through awareness-raising, family training and advocacy for better care. These children deserve acceptance, understanding, education and unconditional love," Barry said.

Still, the now-15-year-old Balde has had to spend his life outside school away from many community members because they still attribute his condition to an unknown "evil" and want him shunned.

"I categorically refused," his mother said.

A teacher says many other children are kept hidden

Studies on autism are often conducted in high-income countries, with less attention to places like Guinea. That makes it difficult to identify risk factors or plan effective intervention strategies, experts say.

Sub-Saharan Africa is "critically understudied" in autism research, according to a 2023 study in the Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, which said the region's "rich genetic diversity" could improve understanding of autism globally.

The gap has kept many parents from seeking help.

"We have 15 autistic children here, but there are several hundred in this city. Some parents hide them in their homes to avoid mockery and stigmatization," said Hassanatou Diallo, advocacy officer at the Salim school.

Balde's mother said that despite the challenges, she will not give up on her son's education.

"My most ardent wish is that he knows how to read and write," she said. ____

For more on Africa and development: <https://apnews.com/hub/africa-pulse>

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Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce are married. What to know about the wedding

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Your English teacher and your gym teacher are married. And we finally know a few more details surrounding Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce's wedding at Madison Square Garden.

Adam Sandler officiated, which both delighted and confused those who had been guessing who would have the high honor. Swift's brother Austin Swift served as her man of honor and Kelce's brother and podcast co-host Jason Kelce served as the groom's best man.

The event was attended by hundreds of celebrities, athletes and close friends and family, but even after the marriage announcement was made Friday evening, many of the wedding details remained hidden as photos remained elusive — including any hint of what Swift or Kelce wore.

Here is what we know (and still don't know):

A star-filled wedding at MSG

Swift had once joked that anyone she had ever talked to would be invited to the wedding and Friday's event appeared to make good on that promise.

Singer Camila Cabello, actors Hugh Grant, Ethan Hawke and Jason Sudeikis, and models Karlie Kloss and Gigi Hadid were among the guests, as well as New York Giants wide receiver JuJu Smith-Schuster, Seattle Seahawks wide receiver Cooper Kupp and San Francisco 49ers tight end George Kittle were there.

It may be easier to list those who weren't in attendance, which apparently included Blake Lively and Ryan Reynolds, who had previously had a close relationship with Swift but were reportedly seen in upstate New York over the holiday weekend.

Zoe Kravitz was in attendance, but her fiancée Harry Styles — Swift's ex — was in London while on tour.

How was MSG transformed? Stay tuned

MSG may have provided the privacy and secrecy that Swift and Kelce were looking for in planning a wedding, but that also means those eager to look at how the couple transformed the arena into a bridal venue were left waiting Friday evening.

Remarkably, even with the guest list listed as high as 1,000 people, no photos had been released or shared as of Friday.

While many celebrities and other attendees shared their looks for the big day, it's still unknown what Swift or Kelce wore.

The only thing we do know is that their outfits came from Christian Dior Haute Couture and its designer Jonathan Anderson with shoes custom-made by Christian Louboutin. Swift wore Cartier jewelry.

A spokesperson for Christian Dior Haute Couture confirmed the wedding looks were designed by Anderson, saying they were created in Paris in "close collaboration with the couple."

Many rush to celebrate the happy couple

The Empire State Building said it lit up in blue to serve as Swift's "something blue" for the big day. Elmo posted a poem congratulating his friends for saying "I do." The global superstar and her star football player husband quickly received a warm and joyous reactions to their marriage.

Dolly Parton jokingly teased prior to the wedding that she wanted dibs on their first born child while singing her famous lyrics "I will always love you." The couple had donated \$2 million to Parton's Imagination Library earlier that week as part of giving \$26 million to local and national charities across the U.S.

3 dead and others rescued after boat capsizes on Wisconsin lake amid storms

LAKE GENEVA, Wis. (AP) — Three people died and seven others were rescued Friday after a boat capsized in Geneva Lake as a strong storm passed through southern Wisconsin, an official said.

Many injuries were reported in Wisconsin's Walworth County after the storm toppled trees, knocked down power lines and damaged buildings, said Tom Hausner, undersheriff for the Walworth County Sheriff's department.

Hausner said he did not know any other information about the people who died and those rescued.

Police in the city of Lake Geneva are investigating, Hausner said. Officials there didn't immediately respond to an email and voice message from The Associated Press seeking more information.

Lake Geneva Mayor Todd Krause declared an emergency and said that one person had minor injuries after being struck by a falling tree. Several areas of the city were experiencing power outages, he said in a statement.

Hausner said county authorities received multiple 911 calls reporting damage and people trapped in buildings and seeking help. He said deputies responded immediately but were delayed by downed power lines and trees blocking streets.

"Power lines are all over the place. We are urging people to stay away," he said.

Hausner said his agency asked for help from law enforcement in nearby counties and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Geneva Lake, in southern Wisconsin, attracts tourists from the Chicago area and other parts. The population in Walworth County, where the lake is located, nearly doubles during holiday weekends, Hausner said.

The storms that rolled through the Midwest on Friday afternoon and evening prompted multiple cities to cancel holiday festivals and reschedule fireworks displays.

The National Weather Service issued a severe thunderstorm watch for Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, saying the forecast showed heavy rain Friday with lingering showers into Independence Day and a continued chance of showers and thunderstorms throughout the weekend.

Trump pardons former Abramoff partner, 9 people convicted of violating vehicle emissions controls

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Friday pardoned 11 people, including a former business partner of Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff and nine people identified by the White House as having helped people bypass emissions control systems on vehicles.

The acts of clemency come as Trump has issued a slew of pardons in his second term, particularly for allies, public figures and those seen as politically aligned.

His use of the presidency's sweeping ability to unilaterally grant pardons and commute sentences is among the ways the Republican's return to office has featured an expansive use of executive power.

Trump earlier on Friday announced some of the pardons on social media, without identifying any of the recipients by name.

"It is my Great Honor to have just signed Pardons for six people who were persecuted by the Biden Administration, and were in, or being sent to, prison, for 'fixing their car,'" Trump wrote on his Truth Social media network.

"I AM SETTING THEM ALL FREE, RIGHT NOW!" he said.

In a list provided Friday evening by the White House, Trump pardoned 11 people, including nine who faced charges related to violations of the Clean Air Act by disabling emissions monitoring systems on vehicles or selling devices that enabled emissions systems to be bypassed.

The pardons come after Trump on Monday signed a memo telling the Environmental Protection Agency

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that Americans can fix their own vehicles as they see fit. As he signed the memo, Trump referenced a diesel mechanic he pardoned last year who disabled emissions monitoring systems.

The memo also addressed aftermarket auto parts and would supersede the ability of the California Air Resources Board to evaluate parts that affect vehicle emissions.

The White House, in releasing the list of those pardoned, described Trump having "relieved consumers from these regulatory burdens."

Beyond the emissions-related pardons, Trump on Friday also issued a pardon for Adam Kidan, a former business partner of Abramoff.

Kidan pleaded guilty in 2005 to fraud and conspiracy related to the purchase of a fleet of gambling boats, and in 2006 he was sentenced to nearly six years in prison.

The case was part of a broader investigation of the early 2000s lobbying scandal involving Abramoff, Capitol Hill, the Interior Department and members of President George W. Bush's administration.

After leaving prison in 2009, Kidan began working at a staffing agency, went on to found a staffing business, Chartwell Staffing Solutions, and now serves as president of Empire Workforce Solutions, the White House said.

In March, the newspaper Newsday reported that Kidan was among the hosts of a fundraiser at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort for a Long Island Republican congressional candidate.

A message sent to Kidan's business seeking comment was not immediately returned Friday evening.

Trump on Friday also pardoned ranch owner Jack Harvard, citing an "upstanding record" post-conviction and praising him for allowing the U.S. military and NATO troops to train on his land free of charge.

The White House did not immediately release additional details about Harvard, including his conviction.

Wildfire southwest of Denver forces thousands to evacuate and destroys more than 160 structures

PUEBLO, Colo. (AP) — A wildfire burning southwest of Denver forced the evacuation of thousands of residents and destroyed more than 160 structures by Friday as erratic winds pushed the blaze across two Colorado counties.

The Aspen Acres fire is one of about 40 uncontained large blazes burning mostly in the West, fueled by months of dry weather and a record lack of snow this past winter in some places.

Fire personnel were scooping water from the Pueblo Reservoir to fight the Aspen Acres fire, which had expanded to about 115 square miles (297 square kilometers) by Friday afternoon with zero containment.

All of Colorado City, an unincorporated community of about 2,200, was ordered evacuated as well as the towns of Beulah, Rye and San Isabel, according to the Pueblo County Sheriff's Office.

About 50 National Guard soldiers were being sent in Friday to help with staffing checkpoints on roads in Custer and Pueblo counties.

Guard members would also help State Park Rangers as they bring on additional boats to keep boaters clear of water-scooping operations.

Fire crews on the western side of the Rocky Mountains had contained about 65% of the Snyder Fire on the Colorado/Utah border, where three members of a helitack team were killed and two others injured last weekend when they were overcome by flames.

The Cottonwood fire in southwestern Utah had grown to about 147 square miles (380 square kilometers) by Friday while the Babylon fire in the southeast corner of the state was up to 133 square miles (344 square kilometers).

Madison Square Garden is abuzz with eager Swifties ahead of Swift-Kelce wedding

By KAITLYN HUAMANI and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Amanda Powell flew a thousand miles from Little Rock, Arkansas, to the heart of New York City for just one reason: Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce's wedding. She and two friends came "just to celebrate Taylor's wedding and congratulate her on her big day," she said.

Powell was one of scores of Taylor Swift fans and inquisitive passersby who braved the New York City heat Thursday to satiate their curiosity about what many are calling the wedding of the century and the American equivalent of royal nuptials.

The couple are "literally the king and queen of America," said Kristen Donohue, who stopped by the area surrounding Madison Square Garden Thursday with a fellow Swiftie co-worker on their lunch break.

A law enforcement official briefed on the security plans confirmed to The Associated Press Wednesday that Swift and Kelce will have their wedding at Madison Square Garden on Friday night with a smaller rehearsal dinner planned for Thursday night.

The couple themselves have been mum on the wedding details. Neither has confirmed the festivities will happen on the bustling and hot weekend that coincides with World Cup matches and Fourth of July celebrations. A representative for Swift has not responded to multiple inquiries, including on Thursday.

About 100 guests began arriving at the famed venue at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday — when temperatures were still near the triple digits. The event was for a "pre party celebration," according to a copy of a city permit obtained by The AP. Heavy security was in place as black sport utility vehicles drove into a large tent to drop off passengers, who then walked through a tented area into the arena.

Several fans stopped by in passing or even made trips to midtown Manhattan expressly to scope out the scene hours before those expected arrivals.

Crews have been seen unloading equipment from trucks this week — much of it covered or obscured — and barricades have been placed near the perimeter of the arena. The aesthetic details of what will happen beyond the loading docks have been shrouded in mystery.

Madison Square Garden sits next to New York Penn Station, one of the nation's busiest transportation hubs, so it is naturally a lively area on any day. But Thursday afternoon, people lingered longer than usual as they passed through, and there was an increased police presence in the area.

Rachel Latchford and Linda Solano, nurses in a hospital in central Pennsylvania, made the trip to New York to see a Broadway show this weekend, but they said they had to go "see what all the buzz is about," Latchford said. "We're going to the wedding, baby," Solano joked on a FaceTime call with a friend.

Latchford acknowledged the heavy police presence, but she said she felt "very protected" and added that "there's been police all over the city this week with Fourth of July."

A large tent was erected Thursday on 31st Street outside of an entrance to the arena. Tarps were hung to cover the walkway, so the couple and their guests will presumably be blocked from view as they enter and exit. In one spot where glass windows offered a peak inside, pink curtains were hung around 5 p.m., completely obscuring any of the exclusive happenings indoors.

By 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, 31st Street was completely closed off to pedestrians between 7th and 8th avenues. Some disappointed fans lingered near the barricades and boundaries police had set up and were enforcing. They were still hoping to see anything from their limited vantage point.

While many there earlier on Thursday were keeping their eyes peeled for any decor, florals or anything that could give them a sense of what and who might be inside the arena this weekend, much of the motivation to be there for fans was purely out of excitement for Swift herself.

"She's just so important in everyone's life," said Alyssa Heinen, who was outside the arena Thursday afternoon. "We grew up with Taylor Swift, and just seeing her now find love — I feel like it's inspiring to so many women. It's so nice to see her so happy."

"When they started dating, it was super exciting and cute and adorable," said Brittany McCusker, who

was with her colleague Donohue on their scouting mission. "It's really amazing that they don't have to broadcast anything, they can have it super private. I really respect that, but it's a bummer that we don't get to see it too."

Iran prepares for dayslong funeral for late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, killed in war

By NASSER KARIMI and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran prepared Friday for the dayslong funeral of the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, with banners across Tehran urging the public to rise up in support of the Islamic Republic after the devastating war that killed the 86-year-old cleric.

State television showed people rallying at night in various Iranian cities, chanting slogans in support of the country's theocracy and against America and Israel.

The government expects to see millions flood the streets of the capital beginning Saturday in scenes reminiscent of the burial of the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989.

That could provide a boost for Iran's government, particularly as it tries to leverage its hold on the Strait of Hormuz in negotiations with the United States over a permanent end to the war, and as concern still lingers that Israel could attack yet again.

Despite that, a powerful general who leads Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard emerged publicly for the first time in months for the funeral. Other top government officials will also likely be on hand alongside foreign dignitaries in a show of strength by Iran.

"As long as these people, who are chosen (by God), are on the field, we will definitely continue the same 'no to humiliation' policy that was founded by the Islamic Republic," said Mohammad Hossein Rezaei, a volunteer preparing for the funeral Friday.

"We will continue our policy of pursuing independence, and decisions will be made inside the country, and the people will decide their own fate," he said.

Caskets displayed in Tehran

Khamenei's flag-draped coffin sat at Tehran's Grand Mosalla alongside family members killed in the Israeli airstrike that came in the first moments of the war on Feb. 28.

The dead being honored include a son-in-law, his eldest daughter, a 14-month-old granddaughter and the wife of Iran's new Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of the previous leader who remains in hiding after reportedly being wounded in the attack.

Religious leaders and foreign dignitaries walked up to Khamenei's casket as a military band played or a man sang prayers. Iran's Parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and President Masoud Pezeshkian, key leaders in the country's civilian government, all paid their respects.

Video published by Iranian state media showed an earlier mourning ceremony Thursday night for Khamenei. The black-clad mourners, whom state media identified as coming from families of those who lost loved ones in the 12-day war in 2025 and the recent Iran war, threw scarves and other items for attendants to brush against the coffin, a common practice in Iran seen as a blessing.

Later, state media showed images of Khamenei's casket draped by a red flag with white calligraphy reading "Ya Hussein," a Shiite expression in remembrance of the 7th-century martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson. It had been flying over the Imam Hussein golden-domed shrine in Karbala, Iraq. The flag also traditionally symbolizes both the spilled blood of someone unjustly killed and a call for vengeance.

Top general appears for first time in months

Photos published online by Iranian state media showed Gen. Ahmad Vahidi attending a meeting Thursday about the funeral of Khamenei, then sitting alongside his casket as Iran's theocracy held a smaller service for him Thursday night near the supreme leader's former home in downtown Tehran.

"They must know that the pure blood of our martyred imam will mark another turning point in the victories of beloved Islam across the global arena," Vahidi told state television in comments aired Friday. "They will take to their graves the wish to see this nation surrender. This nation will rise higher day by

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day through this pure blood.”

Vahidi has become a major player in formulating Iran’s tough stance in negotiating a possible permanent end to the war with the United States, experts say. He had not been seen publicly since Feb. 8, weeks before the Iran war began. Israel killed top leaders in Iran’s military and government during the war, and has threatened the life of the new supreme leader as well. Vahidi is believed to be part of a small clique in direct contact with the younger Khamenei.

It remains unclear whether Khamenei will appear at his father’s funeral. His father appeared in 1989 at Khomeini’s funeral, weeping visibly, as he began his journey to lead Iran for decades with an iron fist while confronting the West.

Israel’s repeated threats to kill Khamenei drew a warning from Iran’s joint military command Thursday, which told Israel and the U.S. “to avoid any miscalculation” over the coming days.

Funeral to go on for days

Beginning Saturday, Iran will hold the dayslong funeral for Khamenei and his body will be transported to cities in both Iran and neighboring Iraq. Authorities plan to shut down streets, airspace and daily life in Tehran as mourners commemorate the life of Khamenei.

In Tehran, images of the late Khamenei’s fist could be seen in banners and in a giant statue in Enghelab Square, framed by what appeared to be ballistic missiles flying through the air. In his first message to the nation, read by a state television anchor, Mojtaba Khamenei said he saw his father’s body after his death with raised, clenched fist.

The banners read in Arabic, English and Farsi: “We must rise.”

“This fist is the clenched fist of all us Muslims,” taxi driver Jafar Javadi said. “The leader’s fist is a sign all our fists are clenched and they (the enemies) will be destroyed with these fists, God willing. We will continue chanting death to America and death to Israel with the same clenched fist.”

Putin shrugs off fuel shortages in Russia as he ramps up attacks on Ukraine

By The Associated Press undefined

Despite severe fuel shortages across Russia, President Vladimir Putin appears unbothered by Ukraine’s increasing attacks on his country’s oil refineries.

He has shrugged off the setback for one of the world’s leading oil-producing nations as “not critical,” dismissed ceasefire proposals and insisted the war will continue until his goals are met.

Putin has described the attacks on Russian energy as an effort by Ukraine to distract attention from its losses on the battlefield, although analysts say the advance of Russian forces has been stymied in recent months. The Russian leader appears to believe his government can keep the fuel crisis from eroding his authority and support for the war he launched more than four years ago.

The Russian military unleashed a massive 11-hour barrage on the Ukrainian capital overnight into Thursday morning that killed at least 30 people. It was one of the deadliest attacks on Kyiv since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion.

Here’s a deeper look at the latest exchange of strikes and Putin’s refusal to halt the fighting:

Gas shortages worsen in Russia as more oil facilities are hit

There have been more than 50 reported Ukrainian attacks on oil refineries and other energy facilities in Russia and occupied Crimea since March — a barrage Ukrainian leaders have said is intended to pressure Moscow to end the war.

At the very least, the attacks have brought the war home even more poignantly for millions of Russians, shattering Putin’s narrative of the conflict as something that doesn’t affect the lives of ordinary people in his country.

An estimated one-third of Russia’s refining capacity has been cut off, according to Chris Weafer, CEO of the consultancy Macro-Advisory. The attacks have inflicted lasting damage that will be costly to fix.

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Despite significant air defenses protecting Russia's capital, a top refinery in Moscow has been hit twice. The second strike on June 18 set it ablaze, damaging key equipment that will reportedly take until the end of the year to repair.

With gasoline production in Russia reduced by roughly 17% to 850,000 barrels a day, according to government statistics, rationing has been introduced in many regions, and motorists have had to wait in line for hours to refuel.

In an effort to ease the fuel deficit, the government has allowed production of lower quality gasoline with higher sulfur content through the year's end.

Crimea, which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014, has faced the worst fuel shortages. Gasoline sales to individuals have been periodically halted there altogether.

Putin downplays the impact of Ukrainian strikes

Putin chaired a meeting of government officials last weekend to discuss the fuel shortages.

In televised statements, he acknowledged the country was going through a "difficult period." He pledged to accelerate repairs of energy facilities and said Russia would consider importing gasoline to help make up for what he described as "temporary" shortages. He also said Russia's arms industry will boost production of air defense systems to fend off future Ukrainian attacks.

Putin portrayed the Ukrainian strikes as an attempt to divide Russian society, halt Moscow's offensive and try to force the Kremlin into negotiations on "terms advantageous to our adversary."

"We will not give them that chance," he said.

While Putin said Ukraine's long-range strikes on Russian oil facilities "have absolutely no effect on the situation at the front," Western military analysts say midrange strikes on the Russian army in recent months have hampered military logistics and slowed the tempo of its advance, leaving the battlefield in a stalemate.

On Friday, Putin visited the Russian military headquarters directing the action in Ukraine to receive a report on the capture of the city of Kostyantynivka after weeks of intense street battles. He hailed it as a key step toward capturing the nearby cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk, the key remaining strongholds in the so-called "forest belt" of heavily fortified cities in the Donetsk region that remain in Ukraine's hands.

The capture of Kostyantynivka, a big transport and industrial hub, is of "major strategic importance," Putin, clad in military fatigues, said in televised comments.

There has been no immediate comment from Ukrainian officials on the Russian claim. Earlier Friday, the Ukrainian military's General Staff reported repelling 24 Russian assaults near Kostyantynivka and other settlements.

Putin also warned Friday that "the more strikes Kyiv launches on our civilian facilities ... the bigger security zone we will need to create" in Ukraine.

He issued another threat to Ukraine's Western allies, saying that Russia will look into the details of their "engagement in hostilities," adding that "we will need this analysis for making possible responsible decisions in the future."

Putin dismisses Ukraine's ceasefire offers

The Russian president has responded to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's offer to meet by challenging him to come to Moscow, a non-starter to Ukraine.

Putin has rejected a truce that Kyiv and its Western allies have proposed. He says it would only give Ukrainian forces time to rest and regroup.

He has made any ceasefire conditional on Ukraine's withdrawal from the part of the Donetsk region it still controls, a demand rejected by Ukraine. Putin has said that a final peace deal must oblige Ukraine to abandon its bid to join NATO, reduce its military and protect Russian language and culture.

In last Sunday's interview, Putin claimed that Ukraine had offered to limit the fighting to the four regions that Russia annexed but never fully captured: Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. He said he rejected the proposal because it would free up Ukrainian forces from other areas where Russian troops have made inroads and let them focus on fending off the Russian attacks in the four southeastern regions.

"Faced with a catastrophic shortage of personnel, the armed forces of Ukraine apparently believe this

could be their salvation," Putin said. "Saving the Kyiv regime is not part of our plans."

The Kremlin said the offer was made via confidential channels; Ukrainian officials have not publicly discussed any such proposal.

Putin also dismissed a Ukrainian proposal to mutually halt strikes deep into each other's territory. Russian attacks deep into Ukraine are "much more powerful, sensitive and, frankly speaking, destructive," he said.

In Thursday's deadly barrage on Kyiv, Russia once again hit residential areas even as it claimed to be targeting military sites. By contrast, the vast majority of Ukrainian strikes in Russia have hit oil facilities, weapons factories and other military targets.

A United Nations tally says more than 16,000 Ukrainian civilians have died in the war.

Conservative candidate Keiko Fujimori wins Peru's presidential election in a runoff

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Conservative politician Keiko Fujimori on Friday was declared the winner of the presidential runoff election in Peru, which was dominated by people's concerns over surging crime.

Fujimori, 51, the daughter of a disgraced former president, was running for the presidency for the fourth time. She will be Peru's ninth president in 10 years when she takes office later this month.

Fujimori's victory, along with that of Abelardo de la Espriella in Colombia and José Antonio Kast in Chile, confirms a regional shift toward the conservative wing, a stark contrast from the panorama of a few decades ago when left-wing leaders such as Hugo Chávez in Venezuela or the current Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva emerged.

The election win was certified Friday by the country's top election authority. Figures released by election officials earlier in the week showed that with 100% of ballots tallied, Fujimori received 9,223,000 votes, or 50.135% of the total, while nationalist congressman Roberto Sánchez earned over 9,173,000 votes, or 49.865%.

Fujimori and Sánchez made it to the June 7 runoff election after defeating 33 other candidates in an April vote.

Voters were primarily concerned with increasing levels of crime, especially extortion by violent organized crime gangs, and Fujimori pledged to combat crime with an iron fist.

Fujimori said on social media Friday that "each day of this process of transition is an opportunity to listen, discuss and arrive prepared for the start of a new government."

The winner is the daughter of the late Alberto Fujimori, the former president whose government in the 1990s defeated the Shining Path extremist rebel group but also took an authoritarian turn. He was convicted in 2009 of human rights abuses in the fight against the rebels, and later of corruption charges.

Keiko Fujimori promised to build four prisons and another similar to El Salvador's Terrorism Confinement Center known as the CECOT, and to force prisoners to work in the prisons. She also announced plans to militarize the borders to curb crime and deport undocumented migrants.

Fallout from Venezuela's earthquakes turns political as opposition leader Machado seeks return

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — The fallout from Venezuela's powerful twin quakes has evolved into a major test for acting President Delcy Rodríguez, sending her scrambling to prevent the humanitarian disaster from becoming a political one as her mandate as interim leader expires Friday.

A day after Rodríguez angrily defended the competence of her government's relief effort at her first news conference since the June 24 disaster, her main rival, exiled Venezuelan Nobel Peace Prize laureate María Corina Machado, issued her own appeal.

Machado on Friday argued that the government's quake response exposed its critical weaknesses and that she should return to Venezuela to help "the transition process, especially after the tragedy."

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"My presence stabilizes the situation; it is part of the organizing forces that the country needs at a time when the total absence of the state has become evident," Machado said, referring to widespread criticism of the government's earthquake response as slow and disorganized. "The country needs figures it can trust." She spoke to reporters from Panama.

The quakes have killed 2,645 people and injured over 12,500 others, according to tallies released Friday by the government. Machado's opposition movement has set up an online database to locate the missing — a list of 36,000 people as of Friday. The party has mobilized volunteers to collect donations in Venezuela and solicited aid from the country's vast diaspora.

Machado was barred from running in a 2024 presidential election in which President Nicolás Maduro claimed victory. Vote tallies that the opposition collected from voting machines used in the election showed that the candidate Machado endorsed, Edmundo González, beat Maduro by a more than 2-to-1 margin.

The US praises Rodríguez, blocks Machado

When the earthquakes hit, Machado saw an opening to return home for the first time after fleeing in December to accept a Nobel Peace Prize in Norway. Ever since the United States captured Maduro in a brazen military operation in January, Machado has been seeking a comeback and calling for a democratic transition.

But the Trump administration has thrown its support behind Rodríguez since Maduro's ouster, praising her business-friendly reforms of the country's lucrative oil sector.

Two senior U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity to disclose private diplomatic discussions, told The Associated Press that the Trump administration has grown frustrated with Machado and dissuaded her from returning to Venezuela in the aftermath of the earthquakes.

One official said that Machado had sought assistance from Washington for ferrying her to Venezuela from the Caribbean island of Curaçao and also from Panama.

The second official said the U.S. suspected she wanted to return to lead protests against Rodríguez and push for political change at a time when the focus should be on quake recovery. This official added that the Trump administration could not prevent Machado's return but was not in a position to facilitate it.

Earthquake fallout becomes political

Upon learning of Machado's plans, Rodríguez shut down commercial air traffic into Caracas, the U.S. official said. Those canceled flights were set to bring hundreds of relief workers to assist with earthquake recovery efforts, the official said.

Seemingly concerned that anger over the earthquake response could jeopardize her leadership, Rodríguez on Thursday blamed any criticism of the government on what she called "narratives manufactured in propaganda laboratories."

She claimed that rescue crews deployed immediately with adequate equipment to disaster zones — contrary to complaints by residents that they were left alone to search for their loved ones without official teams or heavy machinery for the first 48 hours.

"Those propaganda operations, driven by partisan political interests, are despicable," she said. "We did not wait one day, two days or three days. We activated immediately."

Rodríguez went on to say that thousands of civil and military rescue workers as well as 11 international field hospitals had been deployed to quake-affected areas, adding that the government had approved the creation of a fund to receive donations for reconstruction.

On Friday, state-run media broadcast her visiting Hernán Alberto Gil Flores, a 43-year-old security guard pried from a collapsed basement after surviving nearly eight days under the rubble, in his hospital bed. His dramatic rescue Thursday served as a rare bright spot in the days since the earthquakes.

Unclear what happens when mandate expires

Under Venezuela's constitution, temporary absences are to be filled by the vice president — which was Rodríguez's former role under Maduro — for up to 90 days, after which they can be extended by the national assembly for an additional 90 days.

On Friday, that 180-day interim period expired. There was no immediate comment from authorities on what, if anything, they would do in response to the expiration of Rodríguez's mandate.

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The National Assembly, controlled by Rodríguez's party, can trigger a snap election if lawmakers declare the post permanently vacant.

A humanitarian crisis brews

International organizations and governments, including the U.S., have pledged hundreds of millions of dollars in emergency relief aid to stave off a full-blown humanitarian catastrophe in Venezuela. With infrastructure and sewer systems damaged, aid workers are scrambling to prevent the spread of disease through contaminated water.

But nine days after the quakes, the scale of human suffering is still coming into focus.

"We know that there are still dead bodies under the collapsed buildings, and it's difficult to give a number on this, but several thousands for sure," said Andreas Spaett, the Venezuela country coordinator for international aid group Doctors Without Borders. "I do believe this is one of the major natural catastrophes in the history of humanity."

Erdogan's warm ties with Trump offer Turkey an edge ahead of NATO summit

By SEUNG MIN KIM and SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has berated and belittled many of his European counterparts expected to attend next week's NATO summit in Turkey. But host Recep Tayyip Erdogan has drawn on his close ties with the U.S. leader to secure his presence at the Ankara event — an appearance that may even come with a significant gift related to Turkish defense.

"I would not have gone for most people," Trump said last week. "But he called me up. He said: 'Please, I have it in Turkey. You got to be there. The United States has to be in there.' And so I'm going out of respect to President Erdogan."

Leveraging that respect has helped Erdogan avoid the disarray that Trump's absence would cause the alliance, particularly at a time when the Republican president has been repeatedly threatening to pull U.S. forces from Europe and scale back America's role in NATO, unsettling allies.

Trump, who has frequently praised Erdogan and has called him a "hell of a leader," has long rebuked other NATO countries over their defense spending. He claimed last year's pledge to collectively boost it as a major personal win. More recently, he has clashed with alliance members for failing to back his war against Iran.

But Trump has sweetened the deal for Erdogan by also hinting that he could make news during his visit related to jet engines and the potential sale of F-35 fighter jets barred for years because of Turkey's closeness with Moscow.

Trump's affinity for strongmen leaders has long made him an admirer of Erdogan, who amassed power in Turkey first as its prime minister and now in his 13th year as president.

"His relationship with Erdogan, which is pretty strong, is consistent with what seems to be a pattern of his preference," said Philip Gordon, who served as national security adviser for Vice President Kamala Harris. "It has often been pointed out he seems to have better relationships with adversaries and autocrats, and he certainly says nicer things about them than with allies."

Gordon, now at the Brookings Institution, added, "Erdogan is taking full advantage of it."

Erdogan snubbed Biden but bets on Trump

Trump, who is expected to have a bilateral meeting with Erdogan on the sidelines of the NATO summit, will be the first U.S. president to visit Turkey since Democrat Barack Obama in 2015. By contrast, Democratic President Joe Biden kept Erdogan at arm's length over Turkey's democratic backsliding and close ties to Russia.

Opposition parties and human rights organizations have accused Erdogan of undermining democracy and curbing freedom of expression. They say baseless investigations and prosecutions of human rights activists, journalists, opposition politicians and others remain a persistent problem in Turkey.

Soner Cagaptay of the Washington Institute said Erdogan and Trump "clicked" personally during Trump's

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first term. When Biden extended an invitation in 2024 for Erdogan to visit the U.S. after Turkey endorsed Finland and Sweden's NATO membership, Erdogan decided not to go.

"That was Erdogan's way of signaling to Trump, 'Hey, you are going to probably win the elections,'" Cagaptay said. "I think Trump saw that as a giant gesture."

Trump signals steps toward jet sales for Turkey

During a meeting with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte last week, a reporter asked Trump whether he was taking "a big gift bag for Erdogan" on the trip, noting that Ankara wants F-110 jet engines and F-35 fighter jets.

"Yeah, I think so," Trump responded. "Yeah, I'm going to probably do something that's going to make him very happy." Trump had also suggested September that the U.S. could soon start selling F-35s to Turkey.

Turkey was barred from the program in 2019, after it purchased Russian-made S-400 missile defense systems. U.S. officials have feared that Turkey's use of the Russian system could enable Moscow to gather information on the F-35's capabilities.

At the Oval Office meeting, Vice President JD Vance said Washington was exploring ways to sell Turkey the jets, emphasizing that any sale would ensure Turkey has complied with U.S. law. There is significant bipartisan opposition on Capitol Hill, including from influential Republicans such as Sen. Jim Risch of Idaho, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, to selling the F-35s to Turkey as long as Ankara is in possession of the Russian missile defense systems.

Meanwhile, the F-110 jet engines that Turkey is seeking to purchase would power its domestically produced KAAN fighter jets. The State Department last week took a step toward making those sales, sending key lawmakers a notice that it planned to bypass congressional opposition to more than \$700 million of the jet engine sales to Ankara, according to two people granted anonymity to discuss details of a nonpublic notification.

"In this case, the State Department did not even attempt to justify its decision," New York Rep. Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said in a statement last week. "It did not invoke any emergency authority, did not present a written rationale, and for months refused to make a good-faith effort to brief me on implications of the sale for the U.S.-Turkey relationship, Turkey's continued possession of the Russian S-400 system, and other regional security concerns."

The relationship between the U.S. and Turkey is thawing in other ways, too. Earlier this year, Trump's Department of Justice dropped a major case against Turkey's state-owned Halkbank, which had been accused of helping Iran evade U.S. sanctions.

Erdogan lauds Trump's friendship and phone calls

When he returned to the White House for his second term, Trump appointed a close friend as ambassador to Turkey: Tom Barrack, a longtime ally who also served as the chairman of his inaugural committee. "Barrack is playing a crucial role as a facilitator in the relationship," said Ahmet Kasim Han, a professor of international relations at Ankara's TED University.

Erdogan and Trump have frequently held telephone calls to discuss Syria, Gaza and the wider Middle East, and Turkey joined Trump's Board of Peace aimed at overseeing the ceasefire in Gaza. Trump claimed this month that he asked Erdogan to stay out of the war in Iran and that the Turkish leader complied, though there is no indication that Turkey had ever intended to get involved.

Trump expressed admiration for Erdogan even while standing beside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a joint news conference last year. Netanyahu, whose government is at odds with Ankara, had hoped to win Trump's support for pushing back on Turkish influence in Syria, but instead found himself watching as Trump showered praises on Erdogan and urged Netanyahu to be "reasonable."

Last year, after meeting with Trump at the NATO summit in The Hague, Erdogan told reporters that the U.S. president is quick to return his calls, an anecdote that illustrated their close ties.

"With my friend Trump, we are opening the door to a new era in Turkish-American relations," Erdogan said. "The process of telephone diplomacy between us has never exceeded 24 hours so far. When we call, the other side responds within 24 hours."

3 men acquitted in killing of journalist shot while covering Northern Ireland protest

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Three men were acquitted of murder Friday in the 2019 killing of Belfast journalist Lyra McKee, who was shot by a member of a dissident Irish Republican Army splinter group while covering a riot in Northern Ireland.

Justice Patricia Smyth regretted that her verdict would bring “little if any comfort or relief” to McKee’s family, but said the circumstantial evidence was insufficient for a conviction, following a nonjury trial held intermittently over the past two years in Belfast Crown Court.

“Lyra McKee’s murder was an act of senseless violence,” Smyth said. “The gunman has never been brought to the court and the evidence against those accused of assisting or encouraging has fallen short of that required for conviction.”

McKee, 29, was shot while standing near law enforcement officers observing an anti-police riot in Londonderry, also known as Derry, on April 18, 2019. Protesters had tossed fire bombs at police and torched a car before four shots rang out and a bullet fired by a masked gunman struck McKee.

No one was ever charged with pulling the trigger, but three other men, Paul McIntyre, 58, Peter Cavanagh, 37, and Jordan Gareth Devine, 25, were charged with murder as accomplices for encouraging or assisting the shooter. The three denied the charges but none testified.

The New IRA, a small paramilitary group that opposes Northern Ireland’s peace process, said one of its members accidentally shot the reporter while aiming at police.

McKee wrote about the challenges faced by the generation of “ceasefire babies” raised after the 1998 Good Friday peace accord ended three decades of sectarian violence. She was becoming an influential voice chronicling the legacy of the years of paramilitary violence carried out by Irish nationalists and supporters of remaining part of the U.K.

The prime ministers of Britain and Ireland and political leaders from Northern Ireland’s Protestant and Catholic communities were among the hundreds who attended her funeral. Her death helped feuding politicians revive Northern Ireland’s power-sharing government, which had collapsed in 2017.

The judge found McKee was murdered by a gunman who acted with intent to kill or seriously injure police to “guarantee the oxygen of publicity” from the fiery riot.

McKee’s sister said that the system had failed her family and vowed to relentlessly pursue justice. She railed against a culture of silence in Northern Ireland, saying that not one of the 150 people who witnessed the shooting spoke out.

“People are afraid to speak out, they are afraid to tell the truth, they are afraid to share information that they have,” Nichola Corner said. “That culture of silence needs to stop in Northern Ireland. It is unfair to victims and it completely allows people with blood on their hands to walk free.”

The National Union of Journalists, which McKee was a member of, and Reporters Without Borders expressed their sympathy with her family and friends and said they were concerned someone got away with the killing.

“The authorities must continue to pursue all legal avenues to establish accountability and ensure that those responsible for Lyra’s death are brought to justice,” Felicity Garvey of Reporters Without Borders said. “Journalists cannot work freely and safely if those who kill members of the press can do so with impunity.”

Six other men were also on trial for charges related to the riot, but not for having a role in the killing. Four were acquitted of rioting while one, Christopher Gillen, 45, was convicted of riot and tossing fire bombs. Kieran McCool, 57, was convicted of assaulting a community worker.

Rescue mission launches to save NASA telescope that's falling back to Earth

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A three-armed spacecraft rocketed into orbit Friday to rescue a NASA telescope that's in danger of crashing back to Earth.

Northrop Grumman launched Katalyst Space Technologies' Link spacecraft from the Marshall Islands in the Pacific. The Pegasus rocket blasted off from the belly of a modified airplane, putting Link on course to reach and capture NASA's Swift Observatory in about a month.

Launched in 2004, Swift is sinking faster than ever because of recent solar storms. NASA is paying \$30 million for Katalyst to capture the telescope and boost its orbit so it can continue tracking some of the biggest explosions in the universe, like gamma ray bursts and exploding stars.

If all goes well, Swift could be back scanning the cosmos by September. Observations are currently on hold to preserve the telescope's orbit as long as possible.

NASA's Hubble Space Telescope could be a candidate for a similar salvage operation in a few years. It's also slipping in altitude because of increased atmospheric drag caused by the sun's outbursts.

The 1.6-ton (1.4-metric ton) Swift currently is circling 224 miles (360 kilometers) above Earth. Katalyst aims to raise the telescope's altitude by 150 miles (240 kilometers), back to where it all began. Link's thrusters will fire to boost Swift slowly, so there's no heavy jostling.

Katalyst threw the mission together in just nine months. NASA insisted on a rush job because the telescope will be too low to recover by the fall. Without a boost, it's predicted to plunge to its demise in October.

Bad weather and technical issues caused a series of last-minute launch delays.

"This is a high-risk, high-reward mission," Katalyst Space CEO Ghonhee Lee said ahead of liftoff. "The biggest danger was always we don't launch anything and we let Swift burn up in the atmosphere. So we were always trying to avoid that risk, and our team has done that."

Catholic group that defied pope and caused schism defends its actions and casts itself as the victim

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — The traditionalist Catholics who defied Pope Leo XIV and caused a schism defended their actions Friday, insisting they were merely saving souls and were victim of an unjust sanction by the Holy See.

The head of the Society of St. Pius X wrote to Leo a day after the Vatican excommunicated the group's bishops and priests and warned its faithful they too could be excommunicated for participating in the schism, or rupture in church unity.

The society, known as SSPX, celebrates the ancient Latin Mass and opposes the modernizing reforms of the Catholic Church. On Wednesday, it consecrated four new bishops without papal consent during a massive ceremony at its seminary in Ecône, Switzerland, committing one of the gravest crimes in church law.

Leo had begged the SSPX not go ahead with the ceremony, but the SSPX defied his will. Within 24 hours, the Vatican declared an exceptionally harsh punishment that surprised even the SSPX's toughest critics.

In his letter to Leo, the SSPX superior, the Rev. Davide Pagliarini cast the SSPX as the defiant guardian of the church's tradition and the victim of an unjust sanction by Rome.

"What the Society of Saint Pius X has done, and will continue to do, is nothing other than an extraordinary initiative for the salvation of souls, amidst the doctrinal and moral confusion into which the church is plunged," he wrote.

Despite the "unjust and invalid" sanctions, the SSPX will love the church even more and "offers up the suffering caused by these new sanctions for the good of the universal church and of Your Holiness," Pagliarini wrote.

French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre founded the SSPX in 1970 in opposition to the reforms of the Second

Vatican Council, which revolutionized the church's relations with other Christians, Jews and people of other faiths and allowed Mass to be celebrated in the vernacular rather than Latin.

While now a fringe movement on the Catholic right, the SSPX has been a thorn in the Vatican's side for five decades because it claims to be even more Catholic than the Holy See. The harshness of Vatican's response suggested that after trying to negotiate with the SSPX over three pontificates, the Vatican under Pope Leo XIV had had enough.

The Rev. Robert Gahl, an ethics expert at The Catholic University of America, said the speed and decisiveness with which the Vatican responded to the consecrations was significant in clearly alerting the SSPX faithful that they were participating in a schism. Doing so, he said, exposed how the SSPX falsely claims to be "more Catholic than the pope."

The SSPX claimed it had to proceed with the consecrations, "that they had a case of necessity because of the need of the faithful to receive their sacramental care, while claiming that their sacramental care is somehow better than what the rest of the church offers," Gahl said. The Vatican's decisive response "calls them out and says, 'If you want the salvation that the church offers, you have to belong to the church, and you stepped out of full communion by disobeying the pope's explicit command.'"

Interpol names suspect in Monaco bombing that reportedly targeted Russia-linked Ukrainian tycoon

By JOHN LEICESTER and SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Interpol on Friday identified a 39-year-old woman from Ukraine as the main suspect in a bombing in Monaco that reportedly targeted a Ukrainian tycoon with links to Russia.

The police organization named Anastasiia Berezovska, who remains at large, in a Red Notice seeking her arrest on charges of attempted murder, placing an explosive device in a public place with criminal intent, and criminal conspiracy.

Monaco authorities haven't identified any of the three people wounded in Monday's explosion at an apartment building entrance but said they are a family and that they appear to have been specifically targeted.

Media reports named Ukrainian construction tycoon Vadym Yermolaiev as being among the wounded. He has said he renounced his Ukrainian citizenship nearly a decade ago, and he was targeted by Ukrainian sanctions in 2023 for ties to Russia.

A woman and a child were also hurt. One of the victims is still in a life-threatening condition, prosecutors said Friday, also mentioning two other "collateral victims" who were slightly injured in the attack.

Investigators are also seeking to establish whether the suspect had accomplices or acted on behalf of someone else.

"The relative sophistication of the explosive device and the modus operandi suggest that the person who planted the device did not act alone," Monaco's deputy prosecutor, Morgan Raymond told a news conference.

He said the bomb was detonated from a distance, using a remote control, and its remains are being analyzed in neighboring France.

The attack shocked Monaco, a coastal playground for the rich and famous known for its tax-friendly incentives, royal family and Formula 1 Grand Prix. Its head of state, Prince Albert II, described the blast as "an odious act" and said all public services were mobilized to ensure security.

Prosecutors have not yet given a motive for the attack.

The Interpol notice says the suspect has a tattoo, possibly of a snake, on her right arm from the shoulder to the elbow. It says she was born in Ukraine, has dark hair, and speaks German.

Raymond said the suspect was initially identified as a heavily built person appearing to be male, wearing a dark long-sleeved top, light-colored shorts and a black bucket hat. A broader review of CCTV footage from previous days and testimony from a witness redirected the investigation toward a woman disguised as a man.

The Interpol Red Notice includes two photos of a woman wearing a white T-shirt with dark stripes, one

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of them in a street where she's holding what appears to be some sort of electronic device, trailing a cable, in her left hand.

Two male individuals were taken into police custody as part of the investigation, but both were subsequently released.

Investigators also identified a rented vehicle fitted with German license plates used by the suspect in Monaco. The suspect's escape route was traced, including the journey from France into Italy, and then across several European countries up to her country of residence. Raymond said that her last known address is in Germany, "a country with which judicial cooperation is particularly active."

German police, including special forces, on Thursday searched the rented apartment near Frankfurt of a 39-year-old Ukrainian woman in connection with the investigation, police and prosecutors said in a statement Friday.

A vehicle used by the woman also was searched and secured, they added, and evidence will be handed over to authorities in Monaco. They said that the woman is on the run and they can't give more details at present.

Ukraine is believed to have carried out attacks and targeted killings of Russian figures in the course of the war, although those attacks have largely been confined to Ukrainian or Russian territory.

In December 2024, Ukraine's security service claimed responsibility for killing the head of nuclear, biological and chemical military protection forces for the Russian military.

Western intelligence officials have recently said that Russia has ramped up a campaign of targeted killings since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

NATO commander says Europe has backfilled most gaps from US cutbacks on military equipment

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — NATO's top commander told The Associated Press on Friday that European allies have filled most of the holes created by a U.S. decision to cut back military contributions in times of crisis.

U.S. Gen. Alex Grynkeiwich urged Europeans to make more equipment available after the U.S. signaled on June 3 that it would no longer supply an aircraft carrier and support ships, aerial refueling planes and dozens of fighter jets, among other assets, to the continent.

He also began weighing back up plans in case of an attack against Europe.

The so-called NATO Force Model is the alliance's Plan A for making forces from the 32 member nations available in times of peace, crisis or war. It sets out the military assets that commanders can call on in phases over the first six months of any conflict.

"In a matter of weeks, European Allies have largely filled the gaps left by U.S. reductions to the NATO Force Model," Grynkeiwich said, days before President Donald Trump and his counterparts gather for a July 7-8 summit in Turkey, where force planning will be high on the agenda.

"And in those few areas where they haven't, where they do not currently have a like capability to replace, we are looking at alternate capabilities with matching effect," Grynkeiwich said. He provided no details.

In a decision that took many allies by surprise, the Pentagon informed its NATO allies that it would no longer provide as much as it focuses on potential threats elsewhere, notably from China in the Indo-Pacific region.

European allies and Canada scoured their inventories to see what could be offered should one of them come under attack. Britain, for example, has put a second aircraft carrier and F35 fighter jets on a higher level of readiness for use in emergencies.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte has played down the impact of the Trump administration's decision. He believes the United States would shift more resources to Europe should conflict arise, just as it did for the war on Iran.

"This is not about where forces and assets are currently located," Rutte said last month. "It's about who would do what if our defense plans were activated. So, let's say in case of an Article 5 situation."

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

Today in History: July 4, Declaration of Independence adopted in Philadelphia

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, July 4, the 185th day of 2026. There are 180 days left in the year. This is U.S. Independence Day.

Today in History:

On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was adopted by delegates to the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia.

Also on this date:

In 1802, the United States Military Academy officially opened at West Point, New York.

In 1817, construction of the Erie Canal began in Rome, New York.

In 1826, 50 years to the day after the Declaration of Independence was adopted, former Presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson both died.

In 1831, the fifth president of the United States, James Monroe, died in New York City at age 73.

In 1855, the first edition of Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" was published.

In 1863, the Civil War Siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi, ended as a Confederate garrison surrendered to Union forces.

In 1910, in what was billed as "The Fight of the Century," Black world heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson defeated white former champ "Gentleman" Jim Jeffries in Reno, Nevada; race riots across the country following the fight killed more than 20 people.

In 1912, the 48-star American flag, recognizing New Mexico and Arizona statehood, was adopted.

In 1939, Lou Gehrig of the New York Yankees delivered his famous farewell speech in which he called himself "the luckiest man on the face of the earth."

In 1946, the United States and the Philippines signed the Treaty of Manila, recognizing Philippine independence from the U.S.

In 1960, the current 50-star version of the U.S. flag was adopted.

In 1976, America celebrated its bicentennial with daylong festivities; President Gerald R. Ford made stops in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, Independence Hall in Philadelphia and New York, where more than 200 ships paraded up the Hudson River in Operation Sail.

In 1987, Klaus Barbie, the former Gestapo chief known as the "Butcher of Lyon," was convicted by a French court of crimes against humanity and sentenced to life in prison (he died in September 1991).

In 1995, the space shuttle Atlantis and the Russian space station Mir parted after spending five days in orbit docked together.

In 2012, scientists at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva cheered the apparent end of a decades-long quest for a new subatomic particle called the Higgs boson, or "God particle."

In 2013, the Statue of Liberty reopened on the Fourth of July, eight months after Superstorm Sandy shuttered the national symbol of freedom, damaging its docks.

In 2022, a gunman opened fire on an Independence Day parade in Highland Park, Illinois, killing seven people and wounding 48 others in the Chicago suburb. Robert E. Crimo III was subsequently convicted in the mass shooting and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

In 2025, flash floods killed more than 100 people in Texas over the U.S. independence holiday weekend, including 27 girls at a summer camp whose cabins were engulfed by the raging Guadalupe River before dawn.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Eva Marie Saint is 102. Queen Sonja of Norway is 89. Actor Karolyn Grimes ("It's

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a Wonderful Life”) is 86. Broadcast journalist Geraldo Rivera is 83. Funk/jazz trombonist Fred Wesley is 83. Vietnam War veteran and peace activist Ron Kovic is 80. Singer John Waite is 74. International Tennis Hall of Famer Pam Shriver is 64. Christian rock singer Michael Sweet (Stryper) is 62. Actor-playwright-screenwriter Tracy Letts is 61. Actor Becki Newton is 48. TV personality Mike “The Situation” Sorrentino is 44. R&B singer Melanie Fiona is 43. Rapper Post Malone is 31. Malia Obama is 28. Actor Sophie Fergi is 19.