

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, July 16

Senior Menu: Cheeseburger casserole, sweet potatoes, corn, fruit, whole wheat bread.

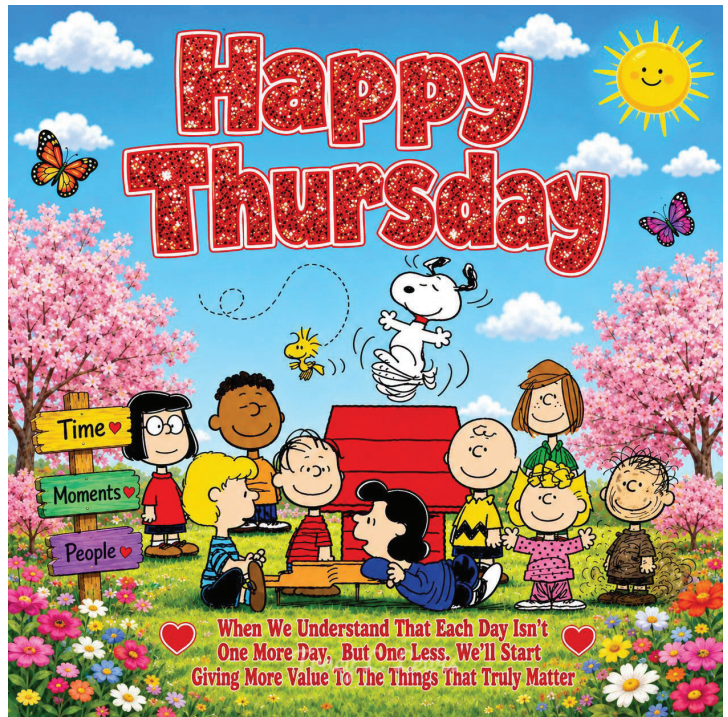
Cancelled: Junior Legion hosts Watertown, 5:30 p.m. (DH).

U14 Tournament in Groton: Game 1: Redfield vs. Groton, 5 p.m.; followed by Clark taking on the winner of Game 1.

Junior/Adult Golf Tournament, 5:30 p.m., Olive Grove Golf Course.

Groton Daily Independent
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Friday, July 17

Senior Menu: Ham and cheese sandwich, potato salad, fresh celery, fruit./

Junior Legion at Aberdeen Smitty's "B", 5:30 p.m., (DH).

U14 Tournament in Groton: Game 3: Loser of Game 1 vs. Loser of Game 2 followed by the winners of Games 2 and 3.

U12 Baseball State Tournament at Elkton/Salem/Beresford

Saturday, July 18

U14 Tournament in Groton: Game 5 (if necessary): 1:00 p.m.

U12 Baseball State Tournament at Elkton/Salem/Beresford

Sunday, July 19

U12 Baseball State Tournament at Elkton/Salem/Beresford

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1440

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

FIFA's Final Set

The 2026 FIFA World Cup final matchup is set, with Spain facing defending champion Argentina Sunday at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey. Post Malone will headline the closing ceremony beginning at 1:30 pm ET, followed by kickoff at 3 pm ET. There will also be a halftime show.

The final caps the most inclusive World Cup in history, with 48 teams participating in more than 100 games across Canada, the US, and Mexico. This year's final offers Argentina a chance to become the first country to win back-to-back World Cup titles since Brazil in 1962. Spain, which last won in 2010, has been undefeated in its past 37 matches. With young stars like Lamine Yamal, La Roja seeks to take on Argentina's legendary Lionel Messi, who is credited with leading the country to its World Cup victory in 2022. Revisit a photo of Messi holding baby Yamal in a 2007 charity photo shoot.

Before Sunday's game, runners-up France and England will compete for bronze in Miami Saturday.

A Chemical Crown

Naked mole rat queens release a chemical that temporarily prevents other females from becoming fertile, new research has found. The practice ensures she alone bears the colony's dozens of babies until she dies or can no longer reproduce.

The compound in question is isopropyl myristate, an ingredient that is odorless to humans and commonly used in personal care products, including makeup, deodorant, and sunscreen. In naked mole rat colonies, researchers discovered the chemical is produced almost exclusively by the queen, with levels fluctuating alongside her reproductive cycle. The chemical's release stimulates olfactory neurons in the nonbreeding females, leading to increased levels of the fertility-repressing hormone prolactin and a decrease in progesterone. The chemical is so influential that its presence prevents conflicts (and sexual activity among other colony members). Its absence can trigger a succession fight.

Trump Nominees Testify

The Senate held confirmation hearings yesterday for President Donald Trump's nominees for attorney general, director of national intelligence, and director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Todd Blanche, who has served as acting attorney general since April, apologized to Jeffrey Epstein survivors over unredacted files, defended a deal exempting Trump from tax audits, and addressed concerns about his past role as Trump's personal attorney (w/audio). Meanwhile, lawmakers questioned intelligence director nominee Jay Clayton about the 2020 election and recent subpoenas issued to journalists. CDC director nominee Dr. Erica Schwartz, who reiterated her support for vaccines, is expected to move ahead in her confirmation process.

Blanche's confirmation hearing continues today; the Senate is expected to vote on the nominees in the coming weeks.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The 154th British Open begins today, with defending champion Scottie Scheffler favored to win the four-day tournament.

CD sales surge 16% to 16.3 million in the first half of 2026, while R&B/hip-hop remains the most streamed genre in the US despite losing ground to Latin and country music.

Comedian and filmmaker Danny McBride is slated to direct a GI Joe film.

"Batman 2" delayed to Feb. 18, 2028, six years after "The Batman" release.

... but the director shared test footage of Robert Pattinson.

Science & Technology

Thinking Machines Lab, AI startup founded by former OpenAI CTO Mira Murati, releases first in-house open-source AI model, called Inkling.

New orange-cream-lipped monkey species identified in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; "Likweli" is the fifth new African monkey species identified in 75 years.

Meteorite that crashed in New Jersey in 2024 found to contain material that predates Earth, preserving clues to the solar system's earliest days.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.4%, Dow +0.3%, Nasdaq +0.6%); Apple shares hit record high after report on the iPhone maker gaining approval to launch generative AI features in China.

Anthropic reportedly setting up investor meetings ahead of possible initial public offering; Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, and JPMorgan Chase involved.

US Mint produces new \$1 coin featuring President Donald Trump's face as part of celebrations for America's 250th birthday.

Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump will address the nation tonight at 9 pm ET; he is expected to discuss the US voting process.

... and may discuss the war in Iran.

Eight Democratic candidates for Maine's Senate race will participate in a debate tonight at 7 pm ET.

Wildfires in Canada and northern Minnesota prompt air quality alerts and warnings in the Upper Midwest and Northeast US; see orange skies over Niagara Falls.

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Two big units (refrigerator/freezer) have been moved into the Groton Community Center for the senior meals to be provided there. Barb Pohlkamp takes a look at the registration information for the new equipment. (Photo by Dorene Nelson)

Land for Sale

**800 Acres Spink
& northern
Clark County
646 tillable acres,
133 pasture**

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www.keminklandco.com



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The Life of Jerald Biffert



Jerald Biffert, 94, of Groton passed away July 14, 2026 at Avantara Groton. Private family graveside services will be held at a later date in Union Cemetery, Groton.

Jerald Dean Biffert was born on June 1, 1932 in Eureka, SD to Jacob and Caroline (Krein) Biffert. He attended and graduated from Eureka High School. He taught rural school in Western McPherson County for 10 years. Jerry continued his education at Northern State, where he earned his degree. On September 10, 1960 he was united in marriage with Sylvia (Meyers) Barrie in Groton. He was graciously welcomed into the family by his brother-in-laws, Edward Imsland and Lloyd Lyren. Jerry was employed at the Department of Transportation for 38 years, where he worked as an engineer and later in maintenance.

Jerry and Sylvia loved to travel and had visited all major cities in the Western U.S. Some favorites included Salt Lake City, Cape Canaveral and Nashville. They also enjoyed camping and spending 30 winters in Apache Junction, Arizona. Jerry dedicated 35 years to PAF genealogy and was able to trace and document his ancestors back to 1472. Throughout his lifetime, he developed many lasting friendships.

Celebrating his life are his children, Robert (LuAnn) Barrie of Arlington, TX, Scott Biffert of Grapevine, TX, Wendy (Glenn) Cooper of Groton, one brother, Tom (Linda) Biffert of Omaha, NE, four grandchildren: Mike Barrie, Chad Barrie, Bonnie Cooper, Charles Cooper, and very special friend, Cecelia Percy.

Preceding him in death were his parents, his wife in 2001, his sister, Maxine and several brother and sister-in-laws.

Pennington County Fatal Crash

What: Single-vehicle fatal crash

Where: 24285 Medicine Mountain Road, 11 miles northwest of Custer, South Dakota

When: 3:11 p.m., Tuesday, July 14, 2026

Driver 1: 17-year-old male from Hill City, South Dakota, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 1999 Toyota 4Runner

Seatbelt Used: No

Pennington County, S.D.- A Hill City, South Dakota man died Tuesday in a single-vehicle crash near Custer, South Dakota.

Names of the those involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 1999 Toyota 4Runner was traveling northbound on Medicine Mountain Road when the vehicle approached two UTVs traveling south. The driver failed to negotiate the curve, and lost control of the vehicle. The 4Runner entered the ditch and rolled. The driver sustained fatal injuries.

The investigation is ongoing. All information released is preliminary.

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

Groton School District New Business Manager



Madi Neiber

Madi Neiber has been hired as the new Groton Area School District Business Manager. She had been previously employed for two years as the business manager for the Britton Hecla School District. Due to their future plans, Madi and her husband Hunter felt that a position in Groton would be a better fit for their family and long-term goals.

Neiber graduated from Langford Area High School in 2019 followed by her 2023 college graduation from the University of Sioux Falls, where she received a double major in Business Administration and Accounting with an MBA in Business Innovation and Marketing. She has been married for two years, and they have a 4 year old chocolate lab.

"My position in Britton provided me with a strong foundation about school finance. I'm familiar with many computer systems and the software being used here in Groton, so the transition has been very manageable. It also provides a good opportunity for me to build on my experience and continue to grow professionally," she said.

"Obviously there are differences between the two schools, but I'm looking forward to the challenge," Neiber admitted. "Even with the same software being used, every district has its own processes, and I am excited to learn how things are done here."

"Probably the hardest part has been figuring out the location and the purpose of each file," she smiled. "I'm a fast learner so it shouldn't take me long to get everything straight. Any questions I do have can be answered by Superintendent Schwan or the former business manager."

"In addition to getting acquainted with the finances and the organization of everything here, I also have to learn the names and faces of all of the staff members," Neiber stated. "That is probably one of the most rewarding parts of this job!"

"Getting this job is a new start in my life, and I'm really looking forward to meeting all of the staff members," she said. "It is a great place for me to learn, grow, and build relationships with students, staff, and the community!"



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

SD governor candidate calls unfavorable poll 'fake' after touting earlier results from same group

BY SETH TUPPER

Republican South Dakota governor candidate Toby Doeden touted a poll in May that correctly predicted him finishing first in the June 2 primary, but he called results from the same firm "fake" on Wednesday when they showed him trailing by 30 points in a July 28 runoff election.

KELO-TV commissioned the new poll from Emerson College Polling in Boston, which shows 62% of likely Republican voters supporting Gov. Larry Rhoden, 32% supporting Doeden and the remainder undecided.

The poll was conducted July 12-13 and has a 4.3 percentage-point margin of error.

Doeden, a businessman from Aberdeen, reacted Wednesday in a Facebook post.

"The paid-off media is attempting to influence the outcome of this election with a very fake poll," he said.

That stands in contrast to his reaction following the May 21 release of a KELO/Emerson poll that showed him leading with 26% support in the four-way primary race.

"KELOLAND News shows us leading in their latest poll," Doeden posted on Facebook at the time, while sharing a bar chart of the poll results. "Our internal polling looks even better."

He ended up finishing first on June 2 with 31% of the votes, but his failure to reach the legally required 35% for victory threw him into a runoff with Rhoden, who received 25% of the votes and finished second. The winner of the July 28 runoff will face Democratic nominee Dan Ahlers in the Nov. 3 general election.

Early voting for the runoff is underway, in person and by mail. The runoff is limited to registered Republicans, and the voter registration deadline was Monday.

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.



Republican governor candidate Toby Doeden speaks to an attendee at the South Dakota Republican Convention on June 26, 2026, in Rapid City. (Photo by Seth Tupper/

South Dakota Searchlight)

Surge in advance voting for Republican runoff driven by party switchers, county auditors say

BY MAKENZIE HUBER

Advance voting in the runoff for the South Dakota Republican nomination for governor is ahead of the pace it was on for the primary election, and some county election officials are attributing it to people switching parties.

"I've got an election coordinator and that's basically all she's been doing since the primary: processing those party changes as they come in," said Brown County Auditor Lynn Heupel.

Through Monday, 12,617 Republican voters statewide had cast ballots for either Gov. Larry Rhoden or businessman Toby Doeden. The runoff election is July 28.

That's about 3,300 more than a comparable time-frame ahead of the June 2 primary — a 35% increase. Early voting for the primary, however, started about a week late due to delayed ballot printing.

Unlike the primary, this election is only for Republican voters (many Democrats, independents and other voters had local races or ballot questions to consider in the primary election). About 19% of advance voters in the primary were non-Republicans, according to data from the Secretary of State's Office.

Since the primary, the Republican Party in the state has grown by 7,350 voters. In Minnehaha County, the state's most populous county, the Republican Party has increased by 1,802 voters.

Minnehaha County Auditor Leah Anderson suspects, "based on the activity that's come to our window," that much of the growth is from people switching their party affiliation to Republican so they can vote in the runoff.

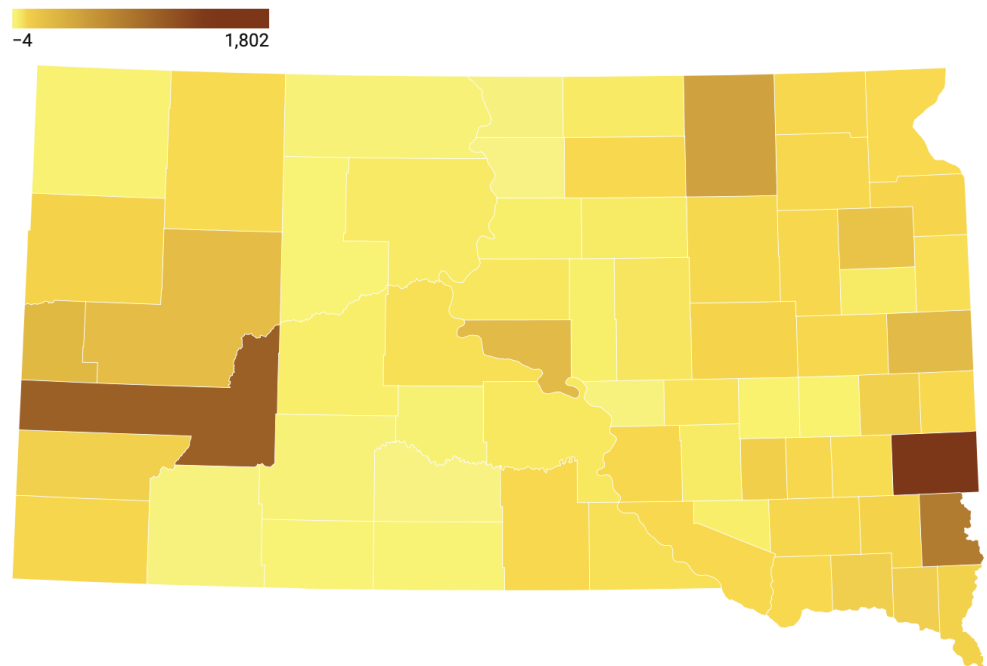
Voters who filled out the form to switch parties often voted immediately after the change was processed, Anderson said. About 85% of advance voting in Minnehaha County so far has been in-person. Advance voting also includes mailed ballots.

In the last few days before the voter registration deadline, which was Monday, Anderson said requests to switch parties overwhelmed her staff, forcing her office to suspend immediate voting while forms were processed. Those voters can return to cast their ballots anytime until the election on July 28.

"We've had a lot of people come and change their party, go vote upstairs and then come down and ask to change it right back," Anderson added.

Republican Party growth by county, June 2 - July 14, 2026

Statewide, the Republican Party has grown by 7,350 registered voters ahead of the July 28 runoff election for the Republican nomination for governor. Much of that growth stems from party affiliation switches, county auditors say, but it can also include new registrations, such as new voters coming of age and voters moving to the state.



The voter registration deadline for the July 28 runoff was July 13.

Map: Makenzie Huber • Source: [South Dakota Secretary of State's Office](#) • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

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Anderson said her office is waiting until after the runoff to implement those reversal requests to ensure voters' ballots are counted. A stack of requests is sitting in her office.

In Brown County, home of Aberdeen, Heupel said her office processed 65 party affiliation changes on the last day of voter registration. Her office has sent 1,022 voter registration acknowledgments since the primary, which includes party affiliation changes and new voter registrations. The majority, Heupel said, are due to party switchers.

The Republican Party has grown by 785 voters in Brown County since the primary election.

Unlike Minnehaha County, Heupel's office does not allow voters to cast a ballot immediately after updating their registration — voters must wait to receive a mailed acknowledgment, which can take a few days.

The county has had 980 people vote in-person so far, Heupel said. Another 207 requested mailed ballots.

Lincoln County Auditor Sheri Lund said her office offers advance voting immediately after people change their party affiliation.

"Probably 90% of those people take us up on that," Lund said. "A lot of them are shocked they can do that."

The Republican Party has grown by 1,023 voters in Lincoln County, which includes part of Sioux Falls, since the primary election.

Lund said party affiliation changes are common ahead of primary elections, but are more pronounced this year due to the interest in the runoff.

"I have heard people say this is election fraud. It's not election fraud at all," Lund said. "It's 100% your right to vote however you want to and change your party affiliation if you want to. Is it right or wrong? That's on their conscience."

Doeden finished first and Rhoden finished second in the June 2 primary, ahead of U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson and state House Speaker Jon Hansen. Because nobody received 35%, a runoff was triggered between the top two finishers.

The winner of the runoff will face Democratic nominee Dan Ahlers in the Nov. 3 general election.

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

Relief from energy bills unlikely as utilities request billions in rate hikes

More than \$18 billion in increases proposed this year, a new report finds

BY KEVIN HARDY

Consumers are unlikely to see any relief in gas and electric bills as utilities proposed more than \$18 billion in rate hikes across the country over the first half of the year.

The consumer advocacy group PowerLines reported that utilities asked regulators for a record \$9.2 billion in cumulative rate increases during the second quarter of this year. Those requested rate increases could affect more than 56 million U.S. customers.

Utilities in Southern states requested the largest increase in rates, totaling \$4.5 billion across more than 26 million customers.

Consumers in the Midwest face \$2.7 billion in requested rate hikes across 14 million customers, while nearly the same amount of Western customers face \$1.5 billion, PowerLines reported.

Most Americans get their electricity from utilities that must seek state consent for rate changes, with appointed or elected state boards approving price structures.

The report, released Tuesday, comes as millions of Americans are already struggling to afford rising electricity bills: One in six American households are behind on utility bills, according to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association.

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Public outcry over rising utility prices has pushed state regulators and lawmakers to consider rate freezes, additional energy assistance funds or new rates targeting large energy users such as data centers.

Regulators often approve increases at lower rates than requested by utilities, so state officials will determine what additional costs are passed onto consumers. But PowerLines notes regulators rarely outright reject rate requests. Its analysis of 2025 rate requests, for example, found just two of 83 requests were rejected, though half were still pending at the beginning of this year.

Since 2021, electric and gas utilities have accelerated the speed at which they ask regulators for new price increases, the report said.

PowerLines found that electric company Oncor in Texas requested the largest rate increase of the quarter, with a \$1.2 billion request, part of its 5-year investment plan to meet demand from oil and gas companies and data centers.

Dominion Energy in Virginia sought \$1.5 billion across three rate requests, including a \$1.1 billion request in unrecovered fuel costs. In Michigan, DTE Energy and Consumers Energy have requested about \$500 million each in rate increases.

"With more than \$18 billion in requests already on the table for 2026, regulators face mounting pressure to scrutinize utility spending plans while balancing the infrastructure investments that a modernizing grid genuinely requires," the report concluded.

The Edison Electric Institute, which represents the nation's investor-owned electric utilities, says its members are focused on keeping energy reliable and affordable. Drew Maloney, president and CEO, pushed for permitting reforms at an energy summit last month, saying as much as a quarter of consumer bills are driven by "regulatory bureaucratic red tape."

But Maloney acknowledged that energy costs are part of broader affordability concerns facing American consumers.

"We understand that energy costs are a component of that," he said, "and every one of our members has programs that help people that need different relief from their electrical bills."

Stateline reporter Kevin Hardy can be reached at khardy@stateline.org.

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

Kevin Hardy covers business, labor and rural issues for Stateline from the Midwest.



Consumers are unlikely to see any relief in gas and electric bills as utilities proposed more than \$18 billion in rate hikes across the country over the first half of the year, according to a newly released report. (Photo by Dave Cummings/New

Hampshire Bulletin)

Trump presses ICE to continue traffic stops despite fatal shootings

BY ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump directed U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers to resume traffic stops Wednesday, reversing a one-day pause on the policy after officers killed two immigrants who were in their vehicles in Texas and Maine.

In a post to social media, Trump called the practice of federal immigration officers conducting enforcement during traffic stops “one of I.C.E.’s most important and effective” tools.

The Trump administration’s aggressive deportation campaign has led to an uptick in people killed by immigration officers, including at traffic stops.

On Tuesday, the Department of Homeland Security ordered all federal immigration officers to pause vehicle-related enforcement after the killings of 52-year-old Lorenzo Salgado Araujo in Houston on July 7 and 25-year-old Johan Sebastián in Biddeford, Maine, on Monday.

Both men were stopped in their vehicles when federal immigration officers shot and killed them. Neither was an initial target of immigration enforcement, DHS said.

Monday’s shooting prompted a demand from Maine’s Republican Sen. Susan Collins, who is in the midst of a tight reelection race, for ICE to “cease all non-urgent vehicle stops.”

Trump said Democrats wanted the pause on immigration enforcement at traffic stops.

“The Radical Left Democrats would like to see this done, but it won’t happen on my watch,” he said. “I.C.E., be judicious, fair and smart, and go back and do your very important job.”

The Department of Homeland Security did not respond to detailed questions about the president’s directive. White House spokespeople did not immediately respond to States Newsroom’s request for comment.

Congress calls for action

Monday’s shooting sparked calls for action among lawmakers, with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus advocating for dismantling of ICE and Maine’s congressional delegation pressing an independent watchdog to conduct an expedited investigation.

“Given the gravity of the situation and the understandable anxiety within the Biddeford community, we urge you to prioritize this investigation,” the Maine delegation wrote to DHS’s Office of Inspector General.

“Timely and factual answers will be critical to providing closure for the grieving community and ensuring that federal law enforcement operations are conducted safely, lawfully, and in a manner that respects public safety.”

Collins and independent Sen. Angus King also requested the Department of Justice collaborate with state and local law enforcement authorities to investigate the fatal shooting.

International outrage

Sebastián was a Colombian immigrant with legal work authorization. Salgado Araujo was a Mexican national who had been in the United States for decades and was the father of three U.S. citizen children.



An Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer's badge and weapon are seen during a vehicle checkpoint on Georgia Ave. in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 30, 2025.

(Photo by Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images)

Both of their killings sparked outrage in their communities, as well as from the leaders of Mexico and Colombia.

Colombian President Gustavo Petro called Sebastián's death, "a murder of a Colombian, a Latin American, at the hands of the US government."

In a social media post written in Spanish, Petro said he expects to hear from Trump about the shooting. "They killed him for believing him to be an inferior being without rights, and as a person, he had all the rights conferred on a human being simply for being born, and he was a citizen with rights in the US," he said.

He added that "ICE is an organization that must be denounced on a worldwide scale."

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum announced Monday that her government will file complaints to the Justice Department relating not only to Salgado Araujo's death, but in states where Mexican nationals have died in U.S. federal detention centers or during immigration enforcement.

"I don't think this situation appears acceptable to anyone," she said, according to the Texas Tribune. "This is an issue for all Mexicans."

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include immigration, congressional policy and legal challenges with a focus on how those policies impact the lives of immigrants and migrants coming to the U.S.

Safety not a factor in determining North Dakota pipeline routes, attorney says

Counties, landowners challenging Public Service Commission permit for Summit Carbon Solutions

BY JEFF BEACH



North Dakota Public Service Commission attorney Zachary Pelham attends a hearing on April 2, 2026, in Fargo. On Tuesday, Pelham argued on behalf of the PSC in a hearing on the Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline. (Photo by Jeff Beach/North Dakota Monitor)

An attorney for North Dakota's Public Service Commission said Tuesday that the agency can't consider public safety when issuing a pipeline permit.

Attorney Zachary Pelham said while the commission must consider public welfare, that doesn't include safety.

"Welfare and safety are two distinct things," Pelham said during a hearing on a dispute over the permit for the Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline.

Two counties and a group of landowners have sued the Public Service Commission and Summit over what attorneys said were flaws in the permit approval process. The lawsuit seeks to rescind the permit and send the application back to the PSC for further review.

South Central Judicial District Court Judge Jackson Lofgren did not issue a ruling Tuesday.

One of the flaws cited Tuesday was that the three-person commission did not seem to consider evidence on what would happen if the

pipeline were to rupture. Carbon dioxide is a hazardous material and inhaling it in high concentrations can be fatal.

Summit Carbon Solutions has developed what is known as a plume dispersion model. The model was

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not made public or made part of the PSC record in the permit case.

Attorney Randall Bakke, representing Burleigh County, said the model would help determine the safety risk posed by a carbon pipeline. Bakke noted that Summit provided the model to some people, including a Bismarck developer and an oil industry lobbyist, but did not provide it to attorneys representing stakeholders in the case.

Attorney Steve Leibel said the plume model was relevant for another reason — it would help determine if setbacks passed by Burleigh and Emmons counties could be considered reasonable. Those setbacks — a minimum distance that must be between a pipeline and a residence — are another basis for the permit appeal.

But Pelham said safety was strictly a federal issue.

That led Lofgren to ask Pelham, "If the PSC doesn't have any authority to direct where a pipeline goes or that it's safe, what role does the PSC have in regulating a pipeline?"

Pelham answered that PSC can consider things such as the impact to state-owned land and to the environment and wildlife. He said the commissioners can ask questions about things such as pipeline thickness and shut-off valves, but has no authority over those areas.

Bakke said Pelham's argument that public welfare doesn't include safety "simply defies logic."

Bakke and Leibel also argued the PSC did not properly address insurance liability concerns from landowners if there was a pipeline rupture and that regulators did not adequately analyze alternate routes. They also challenge the PSC interpretation of state law that state zoning laws preempt local government regulations.

Safety was one of the main public concerns during commission hearings on the pipeline that was proposed to capture carbon from ethanol plants and bring it to western North Dakota for permanent underground storage.

The Public Service Commission initially denied Iowa-based Summit Carbon Solution a permit in 2023. Summit made changes to its route, including avoiding potential landslide areas.

The PSC in 2024 approved a revised route.

The future of the project is unclear, however, as Summit has not been able to secure a state permit in South Dakota.

In addition, two district court judges have determined the underground storage permits and the law they were issued under are unconstitutional. Those cases are being appealed to the North Dakota Supreme Court.

Summit recently announced plans to target a carbon storage area in Wyoming that would bypass the Dakotas and Minnesota.

A spokesperson said in May that North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota "remain important for our company." The spokesperson did not return a request for comment on Tuesday.

Reach North Dakota Monitor deputy editor Jeff Beach at jbeach@northdakotamonitor.com.

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

North Dakota Monitor Deputy Editor Jeff Beach is based in the Fargo area. His interests include agriculture, renewable energy and rural issues.

US House GOP launches process to provide \$60B for defense, up to \$12B for farms

BY JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republicans released their latest budget resolution Wednesday, the first step in a long and complicated process that could allow Congress to approve a third party-line bill.

The 47-page document, once adopted by both chambers, would send instructions to four House committees to draft bills that would be bundled into a roughly \$95 billion package.

The Administration Committee could provide a maximum of \$10 billion that would likely create a grant program for states that institute voter identification requirements.

The Agriculture Committee would be able to spend no more than \$12 billion for farm aid.

The Armed Services Committee could write a bill that gives the Defense Department a maximum of \$60 billion to account for increased costs related to the war with Iran and other military actions taken by the Trump administration.

The Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence would be able to approve up to \$13 billion in new spending.



Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said on Wednesday, July 15, 2026 that a new budget reconciliation process would provide a way for Congress to change how elections work and appropriate more funding for defense. In this photo, Johnson answers reporters' questions after holding a press conference on Jan. 13, 2026. (Photo by Jennifer

Shutt/States Newsroom)

House floor votes as soon as next week

The House Budget Committee is scheduled to debate and vote on the budget resolution Thursday. It's possible that is followed by floor debate and a vote to send the resolution to the Senate as soon as next week.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., could hold a floor vote on the budget resolution in that chamber before its lawmakers depart for their August recess, though it wasn't immediately clear Wednesday whether there is enough support among GOP senators to approve the measure.

Thune has been skeptical about using for a third time the complex budget reconciliation process the party used to enact its "big, beautiful" law last year and provide \$70 billion in additional spending for immigration enforcement earlier this year.

Senate debate on the budget resolution is significantly different than in the House. It requires a marathon amendment voting session that typically lasts overnight and leads to tough votes for Republican senators facing reelection this November. By contrast, House floor debate likely won't include votes on any amendments.

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Elections and defense

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., posted to social media shortly after the budget resolution was released that the reconciliation process would provide a way for Congress to change how elections work and appropriate more funding for defense.

"Safeguarding American elections and strengthening our national defense are the most basic responsibilities of Congress and are supported by an overwhelming majority of Americans," Johnson wrote, before criticizing Democrats for voting against Republicans' SAVE America Act.

It's unlikely Republicans will be able to include the full text of that bill, which would require Americans to provide proof of citizenship to register to vote and a photo ID to cast a ballot, given the rules of the budget reconciliation process.

Every provision in the package must have an impact on federal spending, revenue, or the debt that isn't deemed "merely incidental" by the Senate parliamentarian.

House Budget Committee ranking member Brendan Boyle, D-Pa., wrote in a statement he plans "to fight like hell to make sure taxpayer dollars are being used to lower costs and make life better for American families, not to bankroll Trump's giveaways to billionaires and endless wars overseas."

"Republicans have already made life worse for American families and added trillions to the national debt," Boyle wrote. "Now, this 'America Last' budget would add tens of billions more to the national debt to fund the most unpopular war in American history."

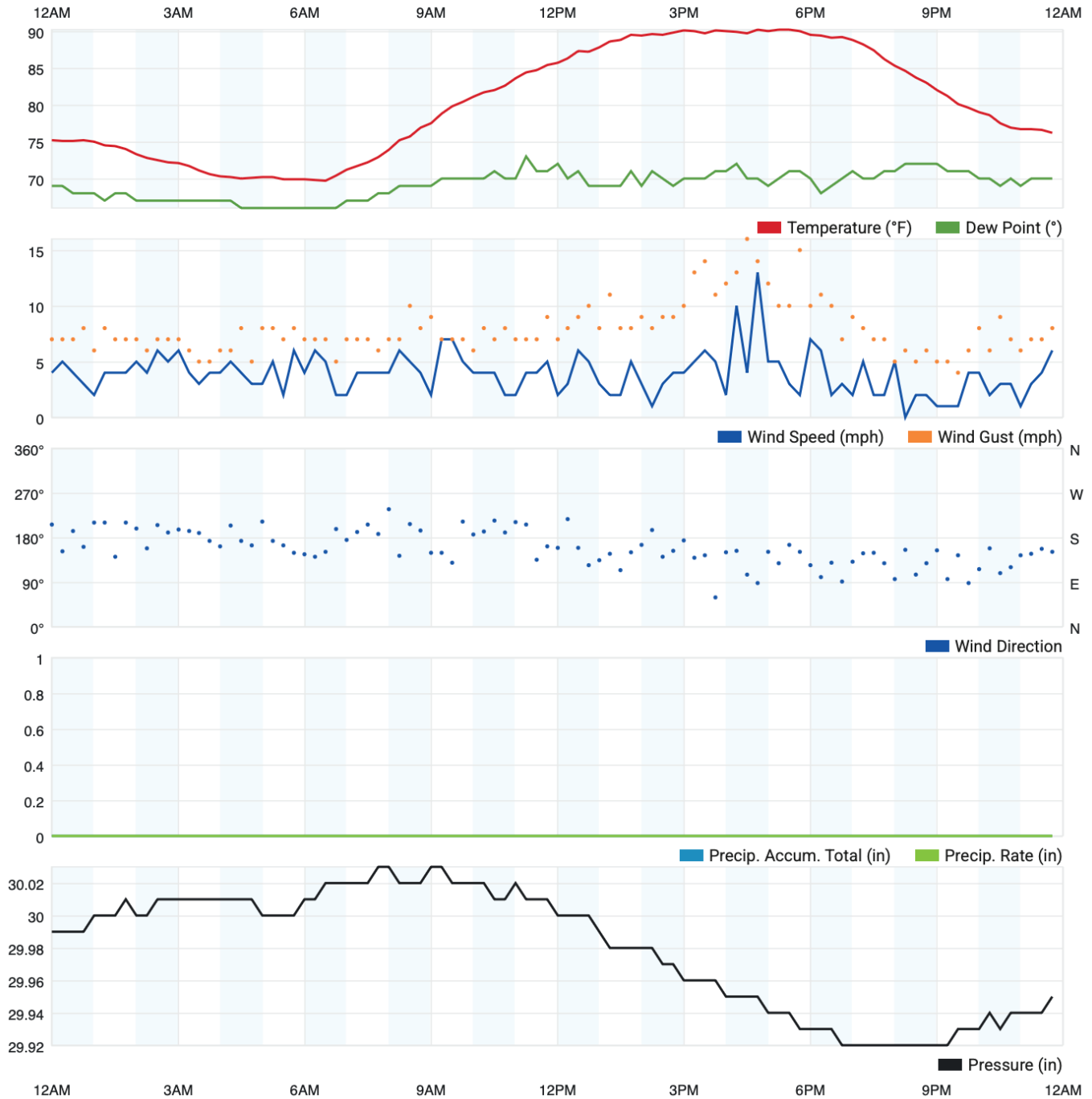
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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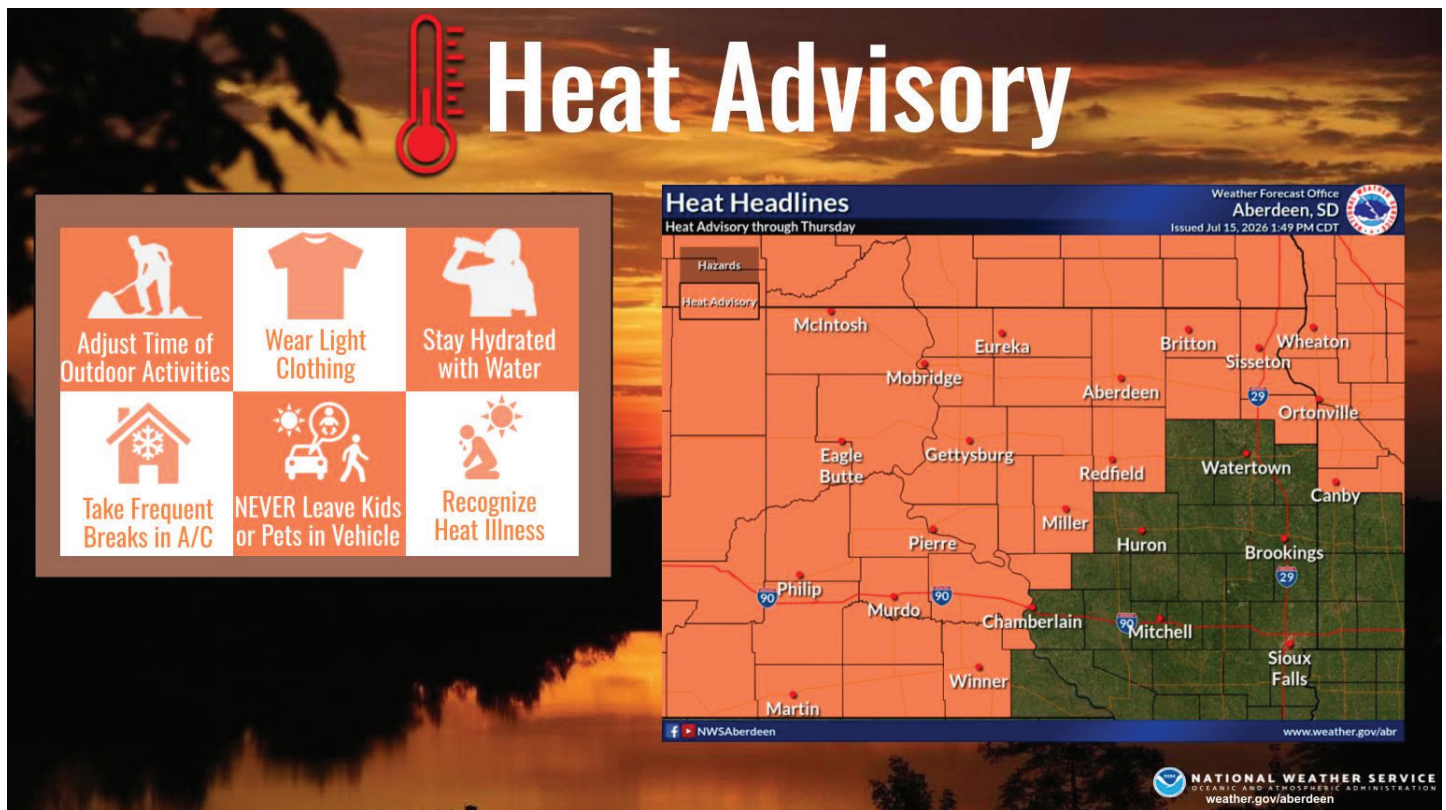
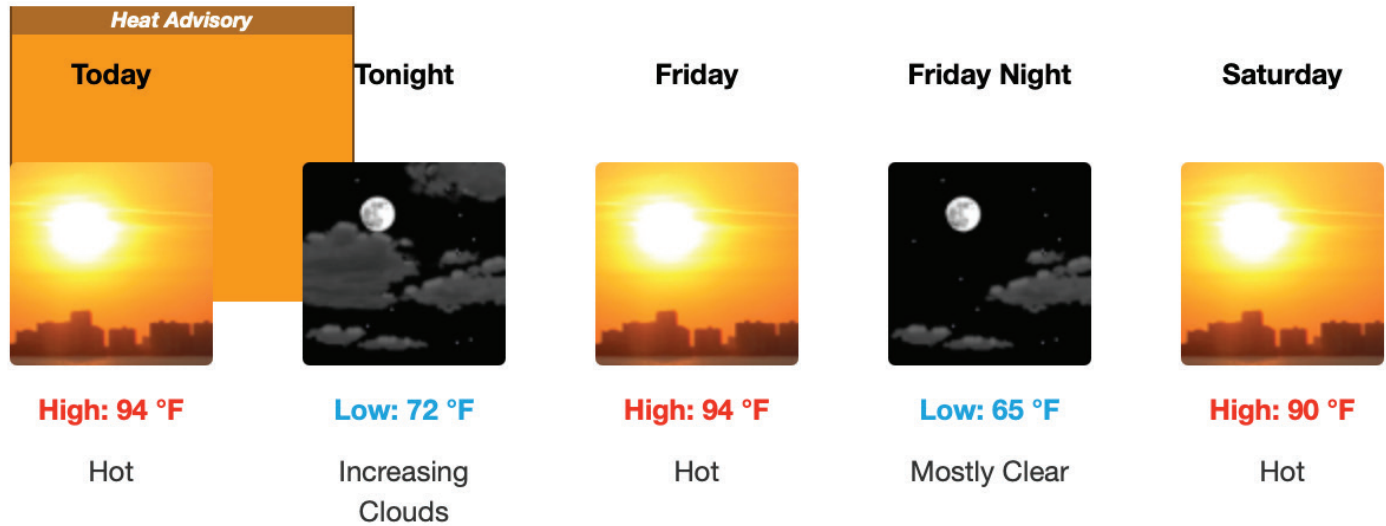
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

July 15, 2026



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A heat advisory remains in effect for Central SD, portions of northeast SD and west central MN until Thursday evening. The hot temperatures and high humidity may lead to heat related illnesses, so make sure to take caution.

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Heatwave Continues

July 15, 2026
3:01 PM

Key Messages

- Temperatures and humidity remaining consistent the rest of the week and weekend.
 - ◆ **Highs in the 90s to the lower 100s, warmest over central SD.**
- Dewpoints in the upper 50s to upper 60s, highest James Valley and eastward.
 - ◆ **Heat Index Values from 90s to low 100s.**
- **The LONG DURATION heat may cause widespread heat related impacts particularly for those without adequate cooling and/or those sensitive to heat!**

Maximum Temperature (°F) & Maximum Heat Index (°F) Forecast

		7/16	7/17	7/18	7/19	7/20		7/16	7/17	7/18	7/19	7/20	
		Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon		Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	
Aberdeen	Max Temp	94	95	91	97	93	Miller	Max Temp	97	97	93	98	93
	HeatIndex	94	97	89	98	91		HeatIndex	96	97	91	99	90
Britton	Max Temp	92	91	87	90	88	Mobridge	Max Temp	99	96	95	98	94
	HeatIndex	94	93	86	91	87		HeatIndex	98	96	92	98	91
Chamberlain	Max Temp	99	101	99	102	97	Murdo	Max Temp	99	99	96	101	93
	HeatIndex	99	102	97	103	95		HeatIndex	97	99	95	102	90
Clark	Max Temp	90	94	87	89	88	Pierre	Max Temp	102	101	99	103	96
	HeatIndex	90	95	86	89	87		HeatIndex	101	102	97	105	94
Eagle Butte	Max Temp	99	96	95	99	92	Redfield	Max Temp	95	98	93	98	94
	HeatIndex	97	96	93	99	89		HeatIndex	94	98	91	98	92
Eureka	Max Temp	95	94	90	94	90	Sisseton	Max Temp	90	93	87	90	88
	HeatIndex	93	94	88	94	87		HeatIndex	91	96	86	91	87
Gettysburg	Max Temp	99	97	94	99	93	Watertown	Max Temp	91	95	87	91	89
	HeatIndex	98	97	92	99	90		HeatIndex	93	98	87	92	89
McIntosh	Max Temp	97	91	93	97	89	Webster	Max Temp	90	92	85	87	86
	HeatIndex	96	91	91	97	86		HeatIndex	91	94	85	88	85
Milbank	Max Temp	92	95	87	89	88	Wheaton	Max Temp	92	93	88	89	89
	HeatIndex	94	98	87	90	88		HeatIndex	93	96	87	89	87



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Dangerously hot temperatures continuing the rest of the week and weekend as the region remains under the heat dome. High temperatures remain in the 90s to the lower 100s. Very little relief is expected overnight with low temperatures in the upper 60s to mid-70s.



Maximum HeatRisk

July 15, 2026
3:01 PM CDT

Key Messages

- Maximum HeatRisk is expected to be **Moderate** to **Major** for the rest of the week and potentially dropping into **Minor** for some areas this weekend.
- This heat will affect anyone without cooling/hydration and those sensitive to heat.
- **Don't forget about your pets!** Make sure to provide them with lots of water and shade. Bring them inside if possible. **Never leave pets in a hot vehicle!**

Yellow 1	Minor - Primarily affects those who are extremely sensitive to heat and without cooling/hydration.
Orange 2	Moderate - Affects those who are sensitive to heat, especially those without cooling/hydration, and some health systems and industries.
Red 3	Major - Affects anyone without cooling/hydration as well as health systems and industries.

Maximum HeatRisk Forecast

	7/16	7/17	7/18	7/19	7/20
	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon
Aberdeen	3	3	2	2	2
Britton	2	2	1	2	1
Chamberlain	3	3	2	3	2
Clark	2	3	1	2	2
Eagle Butte	2	2	2	3	1
Eureka	3	2	2	2	2
Gettysburg	3	3	2	3	2
McIntosh	2	1	2	2	1
Milbank	2	3	1	2	2
Miller	3	3	2	3	2
Mobridge	4	3	2	3	2
Murdo	2	2	2	2	1
Pierre	2	2	2	3	2
Redfield	3	3	2	3	2
Sisseton	2	2	1	2	2
Watertown	3	3	2	2	2
Webster	2	3	1	2	1
Wheaton	3	2	1	2	2



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: 90 °F at 3:48 PM

Low Temp: 70 °F at 6:23 AM

Wind: 16 mph at 4:27 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 112 in 1936

Record Low: 42 in 1976

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 1.80

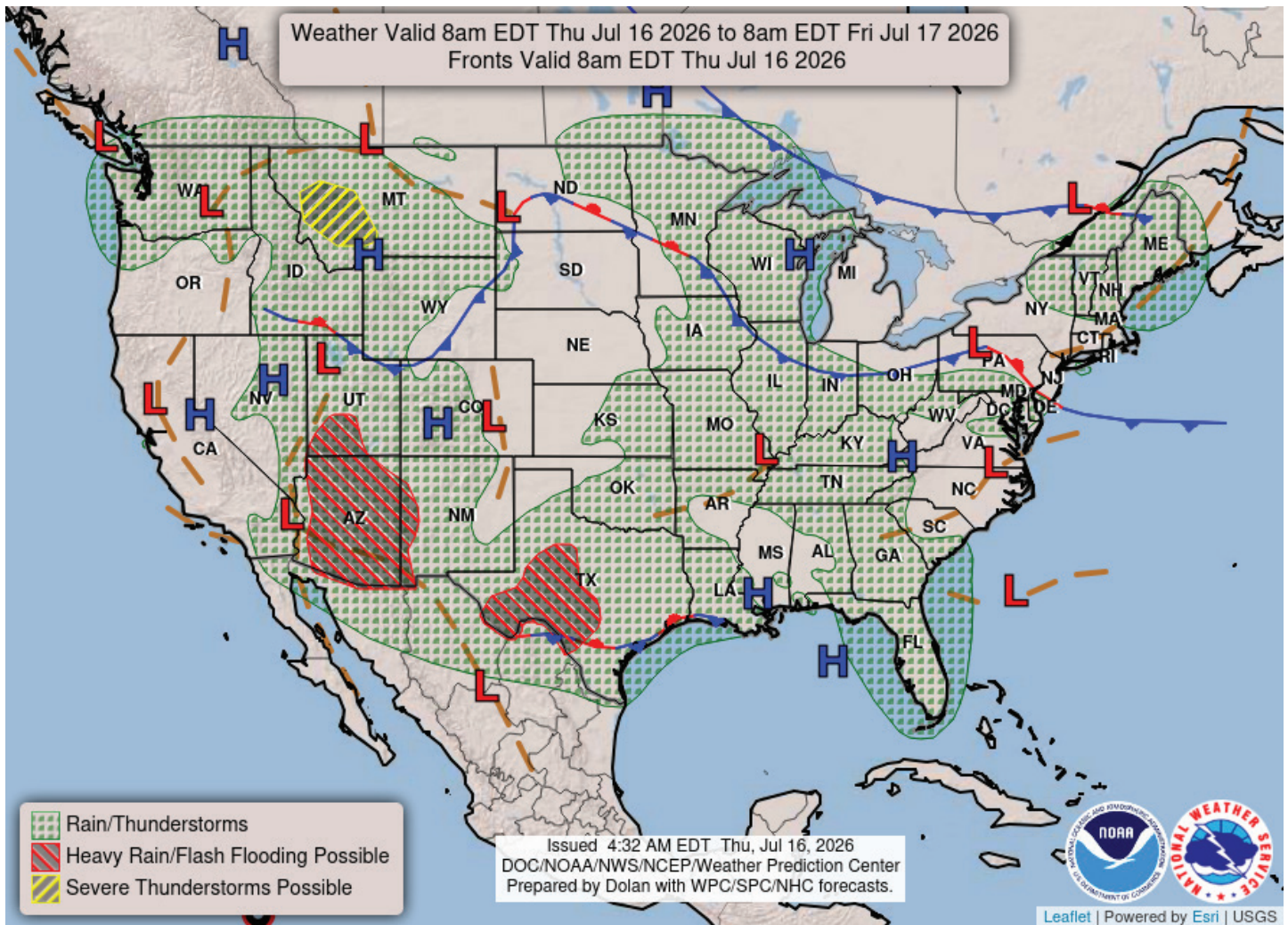
Precip to date in July.: 4.72

Average Precip to date: 12.81

Precip Year to Date: 14.19

Sunset Tonight: 9:17 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:00 am



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Today in Weather History

July 16, 1993: Thunderstorms, dumping two to seven inches of rain caused flooding problems in north-eastern South Dakota. Several dams and many roads were washed out. Most of the damage was in Marshall County. Six families were evacuated about six miles southeast of Britton as two private earthen dams broke. Winds, as high as 70 mph were also reported in a couple of locations in Marshall County. The torrential rains resulted in flooded farmland, roads, and basements in northeast South Dakota through July 21st. In Groton and Claremont at least 90 percent of the homes had water in the basements. Some storm total rainfall amounts include 3.20 inches in Leola; 3.14 in Ipswich; 3.13 in Britton; and 2.77 in Eureka.

July 16, 2001: Very heavy rains of 3 to 7 inches fell across north central Corson County causing flash flooding. Oak Creek along with several other streams washed out several roads and damaged some fences from Watauga to McIntosh to McLaughlin and north. Travel stopped for a while on the Highway north of McLaughlin.

1920 — A severe hailstorm over parts of Antelope and Boone counties in Nebraska stripped trees of bark and foliage, ruined roofs, and broke nearly every window facing north. (The Weather Channel)

1946 — The temperature at Medford, OR, soared to an all-time high of 115 degrees to begin a two week heat wave. During that Oregon heat wave the mercury hit 100 degrees at Sexton Summit for the only time in forty years of records. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1975 — An early afternoon thunderstorm raked the east side of Tucson, AZ, with gale force winds, heavy rain, and numerous lightning strikes. A thirteen year old boy was swept through a forty foot long culvert by raging waters before being rescued. (The Weather Channel)

1979: The most damaging tornado in Wyoming history touched down 3 miles west-northwest of the Cheyenne airport. This strong tornado moved east or east-southeast across the northern part of Cheyenne, causing \$22 million in damage and one fatality. 140 houses and 17 trailers were destroyed. 325 other homes were damaged. Four C-130 aircraft and National Guard equipment sustained \$12 million damage. Municipal hangars and buildings suffered \$10 million in losses.

1987 — Showers and thundestorms in the southwestern U.S. ended a record string of thirty-nine consecutive days of 100 degree heat at Tucson, AZ. A thunderstorm at Bullhead City, AZ, produced wind gusts to 70 mph reducing the visibility to near zero in blowing dust. Southerly winds gusting to 40 mph pushed temperature readings above 100 degrees in the Northern Plains. Rapid City, SD, reported a record high of 106 degrees, following a record low of 39 degrees just three days earlier. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Thirty-seven cities in the eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Highs of 96 degrees at Bluefield, WV, and 104 degrees at Charleston WV were all-time records, and afternoon highs of 98 degrees at Binghamton, NY, 99 degrees at Elkins, WV, and 103 degrees at Pittsburgh PA, tied all-time records. Highs of 104 degrees at Baltimore, MD, and 105 degrees at Parkersburg WV were records for July, and Beckley, WV, equalled their record for July with a high of 94 degrees. Martinsburg, WV, was the hot spot in the nation with a reading of 107 degrees. Afternoon and evening thunderstorms raked the northeastern U.S. with large hail and damaging winds. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Showers and thunderstorms developing along a stationary front drenched the Middle Atlantic Coast States with heavy rain, causing flooding in some areas. More than five inches of rain was reported near Madison and Ferncliff, VA. Hot weather prevailed in Texas. San Angelo reported a record high of 106 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

2009: A hailstone, 3.3 inches in diameter, 6.8 inches circumference, and weighing 2.1 ounces fell in Westford, Vermont. This hailstone is the largest ever found in Vermont.



No Condemnation; Only Love

Jesus' great sacrifice reminds us we can walk in freedom as beloved children of God.

Romans 8:1-2: 1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

The Father's love for His children is so wide, long, high, and deep that we can never fully fathom its extent (Ephesians 3:14-19). God's love is constant, unchanging, and eternal. But sometimes our feelings tell us otherwise.

We frequently correlate our behavior and divine love. When we have been good, we believe that we're loved by God. But when we sin or make mistakes, we sometimes question how much He cares for us. After a series of missteps, we might conclude He disapproves of us far more often than He loves us.

The truth is, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Rom. 8:1). God is our loving Father, who sometimes uses discipline to bring us back into alignment with His will (Hebrews 12:7). He also allows us to experience the consequences of sin. However, divine condemnation is not one of them.

Everything that separated us from God was dealt with at the cross. Because of Jesus, we are set free and healed from the sickness of sin. He took our place so we could be reconciled to the Father. Because of His great sacrifice, we can know God intimately and experience His presence forever—not as condemned sinners, but as beloved children.

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

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The Groton Independent

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.15.26

1 5 18 23 33 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 37 Mins 41 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.14.26

2 4 10 48 56 22

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$672,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 22 Mins 40 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.15.26

26 29 41 46 47 9

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$34,120,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 37 Mins 40 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.15.26

1 9 10 16 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 52 Mins 40 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.15.26

14 15 23 33 42 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 21 Mins 40 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.15.26

2 7 18 29 38 16

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$526,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 21 Mins 40 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

More than 500 feared dead as officials investigate reports of boats capsizing with Rohingya refugees

By KRISTEN GELINEAU Associated Press

SYDNEY (AP) — More than 500 people are feared dead after reports that two boats carrying members of Myanmar's persecuted Rohingya minority have capsized in the Bay of Bengal, officials said Thursday.

According to preliminary information, the two boats left Myanmar's western state of Rakhine in late June carrying mostly Rohingya passengers, including some who had traveled from refugee camps across the border in Bangladesh, according to a statement from the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

One boat, believed to have been carrying around 250 people, lost contact shortly after departure. A second boat, reportedly carrying 280 people, is believed to have sunk off Myanmar's Ayeyarwady coast on July 8.

"While the incidents and casualty figures have yet to be officially confirmed, UNHCR and IOM are gravely concerned by the potentially devastating loss of life," the agencies said.

Acting police Brig. Gen. Soe Lin Aung, the spokesperson for Myanmar's Ministry of Home Affairs, declined to comment. Spokespeople for Myanmar's president and the Ayeyarwady region's government did not respond to requests for comment.

The Rohingya, who have in recent years fled both Myanmar and Bangladesh's squalid refugee camps by the thousands, typically avoid such boat journeys at this time of year, when monsoons are frequent and conditions at sea are particularly dangerous. The UNHCR and IOM noted this in their statement, saying that recent torrential rain and flooding across the region would have made such journeys especially risky.

Around 1.2 million stateless, predominantly Muslim Rohingya remain trapped in overcrowded refugee camps in Bangladesh after fleeing waves of violence by Myanmar's security forces.

The refugees have no way to safely return to Myanmar, where the military that killed thousands of Rohingya in 2017 during what the United States declared a genocide remains in charge of their homeland. The Rohingya still living in Myanmar face severe restrictions and many are confined to internment camps.

Steep cuts to foreign aid by the U.S. and other countries have led to ration cuts in Bangladesh's refugee camps, while the ruling military and an ethnic armed organization in Rakhine have fought for control of the region.

The unrest has led to an increasing number of Rohingya attempting to make the dangerous ocean crossing to Malaysia on rickety boats. Thousands have died in the process, including babies, children and pregnant women. Local maritime authorities have frequently abandoned the Rohingya at sea, often ignoring reports of boats in distress.

The IOM and UNHCR said on Thursday that the latest potential tragedy at sea underscores the continued lack of sustainable solutions for the Rohingya, and urged the international community to support those trapped in Bangladesh's camps.

"Stronger regional and international efforts are needed to prevent further loss of life along one of the world's deadliest maritime routes, including through enhanced search and rescue efforts, access to asylum and protection, and actions against smuggling and trafficking networks," the agencies said.

More than 6,500 Rohingya fled and nearly 900 were reported dead or missing in 2025, the deadliest year for Rohingya who tried to leave by boat. The figure represents the highest mortality rate of any major route for refugee and migrant sea journeys in the world, the UNHCR said.

Ukraine buries its unknown soldiers as families wait for identification

By HANNA ARHIROVA and VOLODYMYR YURCHUK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — In a military cemetery in Kyiv, a brother and sister walk between the crosses, carrying a bunch of carnations. Each cross in that section bears the same words: “unknown defender of Ukraine,” with an ID number below and a note that identification is ongoing.

One grave stands out: beneath the inscription, a photo was later attached, showing Ihor Yalynych, a soldier last seen alive in Kharkiv region in 2022. After four years of searching, Stanislav and Oleksandra Yalynych found their father.

Identification of the dead is a reckoning that will stretch on for years, among the longest-lasting wounds of Russia’s war in Ukraine. Some graves may remain nameless forever, with the families left to wait.

For most of the war, there was nowhere to bury the unidentified dead. The bodies lay in refrigerated storage while the national military cemetery was still being built. Even before the cemetery was completed in January, the first group of the unknown soldiers were laid to rest in August. More than 300 now lie beneath numbered crosses, with more graves being dug.

“I was a daddy’s girl, and I took the loss very hard,” said Oleksandra Yalynych, 21. “All these four years, all I wanted was to come and sit with him, to talk. ... Now I’m glad we found him. Now I have somewhere to go.”

One unknown soldier’s story

Ihor Yalynych was killed in April 2022 in eastern Ukraine. He had served in the military since 2015, the year after armed conflict began in eastern Ukraine and Russia illegally annexed Crimea.

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion in 2022, he was in a brigade stationed in eastern Ukraine. He returned safely from his first mission and sent photos to his son, but he never returned from the second.

After weeks of silence, Stanislav posted on social media that his father was missing. An acquaintance had seen a photo on a Russian Telegram channel — nine soldiers in Ukrainian uniform, shot and lying in a row — and recognized Ihor Yalynych among them. When Stanislav saw it, he knew that his father was among them.

Ukraine’s National Police in the Kharkiv region confirmed to AP that an investigation is underway into the deaths of a group of Ukrainian servicemen whose bodies were found in the region in April 2022, and into their identification.

Ihor’s body lay in the occupied part of the region but was only recovered after the area was liberated in September 2022. The family had to navigate layers of bureaucracy, including DNA testing, before they could reclaim his remains, a process that took four years.

“It could have been faster if the police hadn’t lost the case,” Stanislav said. According to him, the file was sent to the police of Mykolaiv region, where his father was from, and sat unprocessed for more than two years.

In response to a written request from AP, Mykolaiv police did not address the family’s account of a lost file or a delay, but said only that no one had lodged criminal proceedings over Ihor’s identification.

Because the file was missing, Stanislav was only permitted to give a DNA sample for comparison about six months ago. The match followed two months later.

State stands in for family until a body is identified

At a Ukrainian military funeral, the flag that covers the coffin is folded and handed to the family. With no one to receive the flag of an unknown soldier, the state stands in, accepting each flag and holding it until the soldier can be identified, Veterans Affairs Minister Natalia Kalmykova said.

“Honoring a person who gives their life for their country is, first of all, truly needed by those who remain,” she said. “So we understand the price being paid for independence — in our case, our country’s — for our right to choose our own path and democracy in this country.”

Three of those first buried as unknown have since been identified, she said.

Part of the reason so many remain nameless dates to the start of the invasion, Kalmykova said. Soldiers

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who joined in the first years were not required to give DNA samples, so no database existed. Only later was one built. About half of Ukraine's troops have now given samples, according to a senior military official who was not authorized to speak publicly.

In cases where there's no sample on the database, identification requires a close relative to come forward, and many cannot as they are in occupied territory, abroad, estranged, unaware, or simply gone.

Since the full-scale invasion, more than 40,000 samples from unidentified bodies have been registered, said Ruslan Abbasov, deputy director of the State Scientific Research Forensic Center of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Most of them have now been matched with some of the 170,000 samples taken from relatives.

Often, Abbasov said, identification moves beyond the lab, with investigators seeking other ways to obtain a person's DNA like searching an apartment or belongings they left behind.

When an unidentified body is buried, a number is placed inside the coffin, written on the outside and inscribed on the cross that marks the grave. A registry records which number belongs to which body, so that when a number and its DNA produce a match, the grave can be located.

Naming the dead

Bodies come directly from the battlefield and through repatriation from the Russians. Since the start of the invasion, Ukraine has repatriated 24,805 bodies, according to the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War.

Pockets sometimes hold passports, military IDs or driver's licenses. But DNA testing is still required, because there is no certainty the documents belong to the body they are found with.

Maksym Paziura, a forensic medical examiner, said in some cases the remains of several people are mixed into a single bag, complicating the process of even taking a DNA sample. Most of the bodies are in the late stages of decomposition.

His branch in the Kyiv region processes 15 to 20 bodies a day, holding them in refrigeration until they are identified or can be buried. The workload has grown roughly fivefold compared with peacetime, he said.

"Even if the war ends, we'll still have a great deal of work," Paziura said. "Identification is a hard, long process, and it won't stop when the fighting does."

For families, identification is not only about closure. Until a death is confirmed, relatives cannot settle an inheritance, remarry, or claim the compensation owed to families of the fallen.

Abbasov pointed to the Western Balkans, where bodies are still being identified, long after the wars there ended. Ukraine, he said, will be no exception.

When Stanislav Yalynych saw his father's photo on the grave, something eased.

"Now it won't only be us who know our father lies there," he said. Since the photo went up, strangers have stopped to ask about him. To Stanislav, it means his father's sacrifice was not for nothing, and his memory will live on.

'Jurassic Park' actor Sam Neill died from pneumonia, agent says

By CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-McLAY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — Actor Sam Neill died from pneumonia and will be honored at a private family memorial at his New Zealand farm later, his agent told The Associated Press on Thursday.

Neill's family had earlier announced the actor known for "Jurassic Park," "The Piano" and other films died Monday in Sydney.

His agent Philip Grenz said he was providing more information after speaking with Neill's family and following news reports "which contain inaccuracies and outright falsehoods," he said.

"Sam passed away from pneumonia," Grenz said. "Prior to becoming sick, Sam had valiantly fought and beaten lymphoma through a new treatment called CAR-T therapy."

He added that Neill had filmed four projects "back-to-back" during the past year that are due to be released in the coming months.

"As Sam was an intensely private man who loathed a fuss, his family will honor him with a private family

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memorial at his farm in New Zealand at a still-undetermined later date," Grenz said.

The New Zealand actor disclosed in 2023 that he had been diagnosed with angioimmunoblastic T-cell lymphoma, a rare type of non-Hodgkin lymphoma, and said in April this year that he was cancer-free. CAR-T therapy is a form of immunotherapy based on an individual's T cells and is used for several types of blood cancer.

His agent's statement followed days of tributes to Neill from film industry colleagues who remembered him as a kind, witty and curious man.

"You are so loved and will be sorely missed by us all," director Taika Waititi, who directed Neill in 2016's "Hunt for the Wilderpeople" — one of Neill's best-loved films in New Zealand — wrote on Instagram on Wednesday.

"Love you and see you soon, sweet Nigel," Waititi wrote, referring to Neill's birth name, which he told interviewers he had changed to Sam at school because there were too many Nigels in his class.

"Sam was exceptionally collaborative," said Steven Spielberg, who helmed the first "Jurassic Park" movie, in which Neill played paleontologist Alan Grant.

"I adored making all the Jurassic movies with him," Spielberg said in a statement. "Along with Laura Dern and Jeff Goldblum, we will always have our Jurassic family and Sam will never be forgotten by us or his many millions of fans around the world."

Neill was one of a host of actors and directors who achieved international fame after an explosion of Australian films that began in the late 1970s. In New Zealand, he has been mourned as a friendly, unassuming person who shunned celebrity and contributed to causes and community projects near his home, according to local news outlets.

Neill was also a vintner and under his Two Paddocks brand, he produced pinot noir and riesling wines from his winery in the Central Otago region of New Zealand's South Island.

He is survived by his four children and eight grandchildren.

Top officials in Arizona's Maricopa County agree on how to oversee elections, ending a legal battle

By JOSH KELETY Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Election officials in Arizona's most populous county reached an agreement this week on how to jointly oversee the vote, ending a prolonged legal battle.

Republican Maricopa County Recorder Justin Heap sued the predominantly GOP board of supervisors in June 2025, alleging it illegally took control of certain aspects of election administration. The board called the lawsuit frivolous and said Heap was wasting taxpayer money.

They reached a settlement this week to resolve the lawsuit after mediated negotiations, and the board approved it.

"This deal gets us out of the courtroom," board Chair Kate Brophy McGee, said after Tuesday's vote. "I'm sick of drama. We are done with being on the front page going forward."

Heap said his objective was simple: to ensure his office's statutory responsibilities are carried out lawfully.

"I am pleased we have reached an agreement that, when implemented, will restore those responsibilities and establish a clear framework for administering elections moving forward," Heap said in a statement jointly released with the board.

Under the agreement, an interim plan proposed by Heap and approved by the Arizona Supreme Court will govern the July 21 primary. Early voting began in late June.

Heap will oversee much of early voting, selection of ballot drop box locations and other duties. The board will handle other areas, including Election Day voting, ballot tabulation and voting location equipment maintenance. The board also will fund a new \$15 million information technology system and related positions for the recorder.

Heap was backed in the lawsuit by America First Legal, a conservative public interest group founded by Stephen Miller, a deputy chief of staff in the White House. Heap had claimed the board transferred fund-

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ing, IT staff and some key functions — including management of drop boxes and establishment of early voting sites — away from his office through an agreement negotiated with his predecessor.

Heap defeated incumbent recorder Stephen Richer, in a GOP primary, and won the 2024 general election.

The two were at odds over election administration in Maricopa County. In the past, Heap has stopped short of repeating false claims that the 2020 and 2022 elections were stolen. But he has said voters don't trust the state's voting system and that it is poorly run. Richer, also a Republican, relentlessly defended the legitimacy of the vote.

Supervisor Steve Gallardo, a Democrat, did not vote to approve the settlement and criticized Heap during Tuesday's board meeting.

"Honestly, I don't think he wants to have an election that is conducted transparent or even an election that's not compromised," Gallardo said. "Now, with this, he owns it."

Search suspended for 3 missing after boat with family spreading ashes capsizes on San Francisco Bay

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ and JAIMIE DING Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — U.S. Coast Guard crews suspended their search late Wednesday for three people missing a day after a boat capsized in the cold, choppy waters of San Francisco Bay while carrying 20 family members and friends who went out to scatter the ashes of a loved one.

"Suspending a search is one of the hardest parts of our job and our condolences are with the families of all involved," U.S. Coast Guard Captain Jared S. Toczko said in a statement.

Ralph Boisa said his extended family and a few close friends were on his younger brother's boat Tuesday afternoon to celebrate the life of his daughter who died over a decade ago and was in her 30s.

His older brother, Clifford, died shortly after being pulled out of the water. Sixteen others were rescued as the cabin cruiser was hit by a wave, took on water, listed heavily to one side and rolled over before sinking. Clifford's dog also died.

The three people missing are his sister Carol, Clifford's wife Jackie, and his daughter's friend, he said.

"We've gone through a lot of tragedy over the years," said Boisa, who lost his other daughter in 1995. He lives in Washington and couldn't make it for the excursion.

Search ends at sundown Wednesday

Crews searched more than 814 square miles (2,108.3 square kilometers), according to the Coast Guard, and suspended their search "pending further developments."

Toczko previously said he would not dismiss the possibility that those missing could still be alive, though he also said some could have been trapped inside the three-deck, 49-foot (15-meter) cabin cruiser.

"We do know individuals were in the main deck and potentially below deck," he said. Witnesses described seeing people pounding on glass windows, trapped as the boat sank.

Crews have identified the location the boat sank but have yet to determine how deep it sank, Toczko said.

Once the boat is located, officials will send either divers or an underwater drone to determine if it's feasible to salvage it, said San Francisco Police Commander Brien Hoo. If the boat is under 120 feet (37 meters) of water, it would be difficult for divers to get to it, he said.

Witnesses reported "rough seas," San Francisco Fire Department Chief Dean Crispen said, and rescuers said swells reached up to 5 feet (1.5 meters). Marine weather conditions, however, didn't warrant a small craft advisory from the National Weather Service.

Fire department spokesperson Lt. Mariano Elias said the vessel, named Volare, was registered out of Stockton, California, which sits at the eastern edge of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

According to the ship-tracking website VesselFinder, the boat departed a San Francisco marina, passed under the Golden Gate Bridge twice and visited Angel Island State Park, the largest natural island in the bay. It was on its way back to San Francisco when it sank near Alcatraz, the famous maximum-security federal prison which closed more than 60 years ago.

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Kirk Miller, an experienced local sailor with a master mariner license, said an uneven distribution of passengers could have caused the Volare to tip.

"As it rocks in the waves, it leans over a little bit," Miller said. "And as it leans over, the stability would decrease. If you had weight down below it acts as ballast. There was nothing in the conditions that were extreme in any regard. There was no massive gust of wind, no huge wave."

Like a 'Titanic' scene, rescuer says

Two men who jumped into action while fishing for halibut said the boat that sank was more than capable of being out in the bay. Justin Marceline and Michael Montoya said they saw what they thought was smoke and arrived to find the vessel halfway submerged.

"We just started yanking people out," Marceline told The Associated Press. At least two people bobbed in the water without life jackets, while others clung to a windsurfer's board.

Marceline could see people trapped inside the rapidly sinking boat through its windows. He threw lead fishing weights to survivors in the water, hoping they could smash the glass, but they were too weak.

"It was like Titanic in real life," he said. "There was stuff everywhere. People were banging on the glass."

Montoya estimated they pulled eight or nine people aboard, including the captain, before first responders arrived.

Initial callers reported what appeared to be smoke coming from the boat, but San Francisco police officers who first reached the vessel said it was steam.

Toczko said there were life jackets onboard the boat and that some people were rescued wearing them.

Sudden immersion in water under 60 degrees Fahrenheit (15 degrees Celsius) can lead to cold water shock, a condition where people lose dexterity in minutes. That can be dangerous or deadly when trying to escape a sinking watercraft.

The owners of the boat are John Boisa and Miriam Boisa of Stockton, Coast Guard records show. They did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment.

"All of us are grieving during this time," he told the San Francisco Chronicle.

Ralph Boisa said his brother John is a "very capable and experienced boatsman" who served in the U.S. Navy. He frequently took family members out on the boat to the San Francisco Bay, Boisa said.

His older brother who died, Clifford Boisa, lived on a small prune orchard in Sutter County in the Sacramento Valley and was a volunteer sheriff's deputy for more than a decade. Ralph Boisa had planned to visit him for his 80th birthday party next month.

"He was a happy guy, jovial," Boisa said. "We're pretty broken up here."

After six years, Trump brings his election obsession to primetime at the White House

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

In the weeks after Donald Trump lost to Joe Biden in 2020, the people that Trump appointed to run the Department of Justice, cybersecurity agencies and intelligence departments all said the same thing — the election was fair, legitimate and free of major fraud or foreign interference.

In his second term, Trump has tried to use the levers of power to rewrite that well-settled history, something that he's expected to try again on Thursday night with an address to the nation.

He has already appointed loyalists who have echoed his false claims that the 2020 election was stolen and made clear he expects everyone to follow his lead.

In an indication of how fealty to Trump's lies has become a litmus test for his administration, many of his nominees have steadfastly refused to directly answer the question of who won in 2020, preferring to tersely note that Biden became president. Jay Clayton, Trump's nominee to become the next national intelligence director, was the latest to repeat that formula in his confirmation hearing on Wednesday.

"He had the most electoral votes," Clayton said of Biden. "He was declared the winner."

"And who has the most electoral votes? Is it the person who wins or the person who loses?" asked Sen. Mark Kelly, an Arizona Democrat.

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"That's your characterization," Clayton responded. "I'm not going to continue to do this."

The president has embraced baroque conspiracy theories about an international cabal that penetrated U.S. voting machines that have led to libel suits against his allies when they've repeated the claims.

Ahead of his speech, Trump has teased "really big news" and said "it doesn't get bigger, because without free and fair elections, you don't have a country."

Election experts fear another round of falsehoods.

"There has been six-plus years of consistent findings from the intelligence community and from everyone who's looked at it that there was no foreign interference in 2020, and our voting systems were secure and accurate," said Victoria Bassetti of States United, a nonpartisan group supporting the state officials who run elections. "I suppose the president could come up with some new assertion or new conclusion. It would fly in the face of all the evidence."

Huge range of reviews find same thing: No major fraud

There's been an enormous amount of reviews of the 2020 election. Trump and his allies lost dozens of court cases challenging the results, sometimes before judges the president appointed himself. Numerous audits, recounts and investigations, including several by Republicans, found no major problems with the vote or count.

Trump's own attorney general at the time, William Barr, said there were no signs of significant fraud, a statement that earned him Trump's ire. Trump's appointee to run the agency that watches for cyberattacks on American election infrastructure, Chris Krebs, declared that the 2020 election was secure and there were no signs of tampering — which led Trump to fire Krebs and demand an investigation of him upon returning to power in 2025.

An intelligence assessment released in the early days of the Biden administration but completed on Jan. 7, 2021, in Trump's last days in office, found no foreign tampering with vote totals or election equipment in 2020. And, last year, Trump signed a federal document as part of a regular review of possible foreign influence in elections that declared "there has been no evidence of a foreign power altering the outcome or vote tabulation in any United States election."

'Untold taxpayer resources' re-investigating the election

Since returning to office, Trump has launched a review of the 2020 vote. Federal agents have seized voting records in Democratic-run Fulton County, Georgia, and Republican-run Maricopa County, Arizona — two major metropolitan swing state counties that figured prominently in 2020 conspiracy theories.

Trump tapped Kurt Olsen, a prominent lawyer in the world of election conspiracy theorists, to head the probe. Olsen was previously sanctioned by the Arizona Supreme Court for false statements in a lawsuit he brought to challenge the 2022 loss of an Arizona governor's race by one of Trump's allies.

"He has committed untold taxpayer resources," said David Becker, a former Department of Justice lawyer who now leads the Center for Election Integrity & Research. "They've found nothing."

A search warrant affidavit filed in the Fulton County case was full of old, debunked conspiracy theories about the vote in the county. The FBI reassigned hundreds of analysts to go through the material.

Conspiracy theories have led to libel cases

Still, election conspiracy theorists have been buzzing — as they have ever since Election Day in 2020 — that Trump is about to reveal irrefutable evidence of massive election fraud.

One version alleges that Venezuela and possibly other countries manipulated U.S. voting machines to deprive Trump of a victory. Venezuela's former president, Nicolas Maduro, is currently awaiting trial in Manhattan on federal charges of drug trafficking after the U.S. military took him from that country's capital.

Those theories have led to massive payouts in libel lawsuits brought by voting machine companies and others. Fox News paid \$787.5 million to settle one lawsuit over it airing those claims and others on the air in late 2020. Conservative networks Newsmax and One America News have also reached settlements with voting companies over airing those allegations.

A Denver jury found that Mike Lindell, a prominent election conspiracy theorist who Trump this week endorsed as a Republican candidate for governor in Minnesota, defamed an employee with a voting ma-

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chine company by calling him a traitor.

Becker noted there has been a clear pattern over the six years of election conspiracy theories surrounding Trump's loss. Conspiracy theorists, including Trump himself, make sweeping allegations in public, sometimes with what seems to be massive reams of documentation from elaborate election databases. But they've lost regularly in court, where the threshold is whether there's any factual basis to the claims.

He suggested that anything new from Trump on elections be subjected to that same scrutiny.

"If someone's alleging a crime that occurred six years ago, we shouldn't be responding to their claims," Becker said. "We should be demanding they meet the burden of proof."

Trump is taking longer to approve disaster aid and denying Democratic states more frequently

By DAVID A. LIEB and M.K. WILDEMAN Associated Press

When major disasters strike, Americans are routinely waiting weeks — or even months — to receive presidential approval for aid. And if they live in a state that didn't support President Donald Trump, chances are greater that aid will be denied.

Since taking office last year, Trump has approved about 65 requests for major disaster declarations and denied more than two dozen others from states, tribes or territories seeking federal financial assistance following hurricanes, tornadoes, storms, floods and fires.

Trump has taken longer on average to approve disaster requests than any other president, according to an Associated Press analysis of data dating back to 1989, when a federal law setting new parameters for disaster determinations was implemented. And no other president has such a disparity in denials between states that supported him politically and those that did not.

The delays and denials come as Trump's administration contemplates a makeover of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which administers disaster aid. Major disaster declarations are intended for events that are beyond the resources of state and local governments.

Trump is saying yes to Republicans more than Democrats

During his second term, Trump has denied a greater percentage of disaster requests than any president dating to 1989. Those denials have not been evenly distributed among states.

Trump has approved 80% of the disaster requests from Republican governors but only about 60% from Democratic governors, according to the AP's analysis of FEMA data.

The discrepancy is even more apparent when analyzing major disaster declarations based on presidential elections. Trump has approved more than three-fourths of the requests from states that voted for him in the 2024 election but less than half the requests from states that did not. Although there are federal criteria for disaster aid, decisions ultimately are at the president's discretion.

A batch of denials earlier this month included four Democratic states — Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island — seeking federal aid for a February snowstorm.

"The President's denial is part of a pattern of extreme partisanship as he tries to shift a heavier economic burden onto blue states. Disaster aid should be merit-based, not politicized," Rhode Island's Democratic U.S. Senate and House members said in a joint statement.

White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson said in a statement that "there is no politicization to the President's decisions on disaster relief."

During his first term, Trump actually approved a greater share of requests from states that had opposed him than those that supported him.

Yet no other president had such a wide partisan divide in disaster declarations as currently exists under Trump. Obama approved 87% of the disaster requests from Democratic governors during his second term and 79% from Republican governors, but Obama's approval rate was identical for states that voted for and against him.

When requests are denied, individuals, insurers and local governments are left to shoulder the costs themselves.

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Trump is waiting longer to declare disasters

Since Trump assumed office last year, it's taken him an average of a month and a half to approve major disaster declarations after receiving a request from the governor or chief executive of a state, territory or tribe, the AP found. Because it can take several weeks after a disaster for officials to inspect the damage and submit a request, the total wait time often has exceeded two months.

By comparison, Trump approved major disaster requests in an average of about three weeks during his first term, a pace similar to President Joe Biden. Their predecessors — Presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush — all had average disaster approval times of less than two weeks.

All presidents have taken longer to approve some requests. But that's become the norm in Trump's second term. Of Trump's approvals, 70% have taken at least month — up from about one-quarter of requests during Trump's first term and Biden's administration, and fewer than 10% under their predecessors.

Jackson said that Trump conducts a more thorough review than any administration before him, "ensuring American tax dollars are used appropriately and efficiently by the states to supplement — not substitute — their obligation to respond to and recover from disasters."

The longer the approval process takes, the longer people must wait to receive federal aid for daily living expenses, temporary lodging and home repairs. Delays in major disaster declarations also can hamper recovery efforts by local officials uncertain whether they will receive federal reimbursement for cleaning up debris and rebuilding infrastructure.

FEMA nominee is pledging faster decisions

FEMA has had four different temporary leaders since Trump took office in January 2025. One of those, Cameron Hamilton, is awaiting Senate confirmation as the agency's permanent director.

During a Senate committee hearing last month, Hamilton said he would try to speed up disaster declaration decisions and reimbursements. He also pledged to ensure that FEMA is objective, fair and reasonable in reviewing disaster declaration requests and making recommendations to the president.

Hamilton, a former Navy SEAL, had been fired as FEMA's acting director in May 2025 after publicly disagreeing with Trump's idea of dismantling the agency. His reemergence signals that Trump now may support changes to FEMA instead of an outright elimination of the agency.

Panel's recommendations could lead to more denials

A council appointed by Trump has recommended a series of changes to FEMA that would shift greater responsibility to states, potentially reducing the number of major disaster declarations and the amount of federal money paid out.

The council suggested revised criteria to qualify for presidential declarations, including a prerequisite of annual minimum expenditures by states, territories and tribes.

Another recommendation, which would require congressional approval, would reduce the federal government's share of the disaster aid from a minimum of 75% to 50% of the costs, leaving state and local governments more to cover. For governments approved for assistance, federal funding could get there quicker — within 30 days of a federal disaster declaration, instead of waiting months or years for reimbursements that are based on proof of expenditures.

For individuals, the council recommended consolidating several different types of aid into one payment targeted for those whose homes are uninhabitable.

DHS finds itself back in the headlines after 3 fatal ICE encounters, in a test for Secretary Mullin

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Markwayne Mullin took over as Homeland Security secretary from fired Kristi Noem, he pledged to get the department responsible for carrying out the Trump administration's mass deportations policy out of the headlines.

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But just months into Mullin's time in office, the department is squarely in the center of controversy again after three people were killed in encounters with Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers in the span of less than a week.

The events are the first major test for Mullin, who promised a steady hand for a department roiled by his predecessor's conduct and the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

As he navigates the uptick in violence, he is being forced into a balancing act that has him juggling pressures from a White House eager to carry out mass deportations and his former colleagues in Congress seeking answers — all while attempting to ease tensions in American cities over the deaths.

"When he took his position, Secretary Mullin said that his goal was to get the department off the front page of the news," Democratic Rep. Seth Magaziner said on the House floor Tuesday. Then, waving a newspaper, he said: "Well, you're back on the goddamn front page now."

Mullin's approach is a marked change from his predecessor, Kristi Noem

Mullin, a former senator from Oklahoma, was a surprise pick to run the sprawling department after Noem was fired in the wake of two deadly shootings of American protesters at the hands of federal immigration officers in Minneapolis earlier this year.

As the secretary in charge of carrying out the administration's mass deportations vision, Noem pushed an aggressive style of immigration enforcement where she was front and center, including most famously, a visit to a Salvadoran detention center. She was quick to speak publicly on controversial events, weighing in on both Minneapolis shootings with statements accusing the killed protesters of being agitators.

President Donald Trump, who made mass deportations a central promise of his second administration, ultimately soured on Noem over a \$200 million ad campaign and her handling of the Minneapolis operation.

Mullin promised a different approach, while still pledging to deliver on the president's priorities. His first trip as secretary was not to promote immigration enforcement but to observe hurricane recovery efforts in North Carolina. Noem frequently went out on immigration raids with her officers — Mullin has not.

Since he became secretary and in the aftermath of the Minneapolis violence, the administration has also moved away from high-profile and unpopular immigration operations in American cities to a quieter approach to enforcement that has largely shifted media attention away from the crackdown. Under Mullin, Immigration and Customs Enforcement is also retreating from a plan to use warehouses to detain migrants.

But immigration arrests continue under Mullin and often with little fanfare: ICE arrested 10,000 people over a five-day period in late June, averaging out to about 2,000 arrests per day. And legal pathways to immigration have also faced new restrictions.

Trump, during Mullin's tenure, has hailed the secretary as "so incredible," and "amazing," lauding him for giving up his Senate seat to run DHS.

For months, it appeared as though Mullin's change in approach was taking hold. While advocates and civil rights activists accused the department of mistreating immigrants under his leadership, Mullin's less confrontational approach seemed to keep the department out of the spotlight.

ICE-related deaths bring renewed spotlight to Mullin and DHS

But the events of the past week have posed a new challenge for Mullin as he walks a tightrope between his softer approach and the president's demands.

"Trying to deal with competing policy objectives is a challenge for any Cabinet secretary, but Mullin has this worse than most," said Tom Warrick, a former counterterrorism official at Homeland Security who's now at the Atlantic Council.

"In the case of Homeland Security, the White House wants both to meet their immigration quotas at the same time that they keep public trust, and how you do that — even with the funding that Mullin has — is a really difficult challenge."

ICE officers in Houston and Maine shot and killed individuals in their cars during immigration operations. In Florida, a man fleeing ICE officers was killed in a car crash.

Mullin has not spoken publicly about the deaths while the department's public affairs office has released only brief statements following each.

Behind the scenes, Mullin, who frequently talks about how he shares his cellphone number with members

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of Congress and encourages them to call him directly, has talked with lawmakers and shared information, including talking with both senators from Maine.

And after the second shooting death in Maine, as criticism surged from both protesters and Mullin's former colleagues in Congress, ICE was ordered to suspend most vehicle stops.

Trump heaps pressure on Mullin over vehicle stop order

That decision infuriated Trump's supporters.

Conservative influencer Nick Sorter called it a "TOTAL CAPITULATION to the left," in a post on X. Conservative activist Mike Davis accused Mullin of heeding the advice of Maine Sen. Susan Collins, who said she'd suggested the vehicle stop pause to the secretary.

A day later, Trump appeared to contradict the guidance to ICE, saying in a social media post "we must be strong, tough and smart and we CANNOT give up one of ICE's most important and effective Crime Fighting tools, THE TRAFFIC STOP!"

Mullin then reposted Trump's words, adding that people in the country would be "arrested and deported wherever they are." He later said on X that he and the president are "on the same page."

It was not immediately clear whether vehicle stops were back on.

But it showed the friction between Mullin's attempts to maintain calm and the president's demands that illegal immigrants, which the administration has in many instances portrayed as criminals, be arrested in large numbers.

Democrats have slammed the new secretary, saying that they see little change at the department.

"Secretary Mullin, if he wants to, and if he has the backing of the White House, he has the ability to get ICE under control and make them follow the law," said Rep. Joaquin Castro, a Democrat from Texas. "So either he has no interest in doing that, or the White House is not backing him up, or the agents are simply out of control."

Republican lawmakers have come to Mullin's defense.

"I think the Secretary has lived up to what he's wanted to do to try to change the atmosphere over there," said Rep. Andrew Garbarino of New York, who as chair of the congressional Homeland Security Committee has requested a bipartisan briefing on ICE's use of force policies from DHS.

"I don't think anybody is celebrating that ICE is back in the headlines," Garbarino said.

America already tried permanent daylight saving time. It lasted less than a year. Could it work now?

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — It's an idea whose time, as it were, may have come — again.

The twice-yearly changing of the clocks in the United States could be a thing of the past if legislation currently in Congress that calls for permanent daylight time makes it through. But even as annoying as some find the back-and-forth of the time shift in the spring and the fall, that doesn't necessarily mean sticking to one would go over well. America has tried it before, most recently in the 1970s, and it didn't last.

Now it's a new era, one full of people working at home who didn't before — and advances in sleep science that tell a more nuanced tale.

Could this time (shift) be the charm?

What's going on this time around?

The House of Representatives on Tuesday voted overwhelmingly to pass a bill that makes the shift to daylight saving time, when clocks are moved forward one hour, become permanent.

Currently, the shift is forward in spring and back to standard time in fall as a way to give people more daylight time in the summer evenings. But the semi-annual change has few fans - an AP-NORC poll last year found that only 12% of American adults were in favor of it, while almost half opposed it. Proponents of a single time include the American Medical Association and American Academy of Sleep Medicine — outfits to whom daily rhythms are deeply important.

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The Senate would have to pass it before it could be signed into law. President Donald Trump has indicated he's supportive.

So just change it. What's the big deal?

Not so fast. People may not like making the change, but history shows they also don't like living with even less morning light in the winter months, when daylight hours are shorter than in summer.

In 1973, Congress passed a law instituting permanent daylight saving time for what was supposed to be a trial period from January 1974 to April 1975. It lasted until October, when it was repealed after public outcry. Among the concerns was worry that schoolchildren would have to get to class in darkness. These days, school starting times have started to shift later.

Kevin Birth, a professor of anthropology at Queens College whose research focuses on cultural concepts of time, was in elementary school in Syracuse, New York, at the time and remembers it vividly. "I had to get up for school and it was like it was midnight," he said. "It was just pitch black and it remained pitch black into the school day."

If the U.S. decides to try it again, he said, more has to change than just the clocks. The time zones across the country would need to be adapted as well. The current four zones wouldn't be adequate - they cover so much ground that sunrise comes at different times in western and eastern parts of each zone.

US imposing a 25% tariff on some Brazilian imports starting July 22, citing unfair trade practices

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States is imposing 25% tariffs on imports from Brazil after finding a range of what it deemed unfair trade practices by the world's 10th-biggest economy.

The tariffs, which were first proposed last month, will take effect July 22.

The order exempts some goods that are not produced in the U.S. or that officials worry would disrupt supply chains. Exempted products include coffee, beef, oranges and orange juice, some oil and gas energy products and aerospace parts and components.

The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative concluded after a yearlong investigation that Brazil had a range of unfair trade practices, including lax anti-corruption enforcement and unfair tariffs of its own, among other practices seen as unreasonable and unfair. The U.S., however, has had a goods trade surplus with Brazil for years.

U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said in a statement that the action was necessary to ensure American workers and companies compete on a level playing field.

"Extensive negotiations with Brazil over the past year have not resolved these issues, but we remain open to continuing negotiations with Brazil to bring about long-needed changes to the problems identified in this investigation," he said.

After U.S. officials in early June warned that they were proposing the tariffs, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva reacted with indignation. He instead pointed to political considerations, blaming his rival in the country's October elections, Sen. Flávio Bolsonaro. Bolsonaro had recently visited Washington and is the son of former President Jair Bolsonaro, an ally of President Donald Trump.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a post on X about the announcement of the tariffs: "Let there be no confusion about why: President Lula and his government have not negotiated with the US in good faith. His economic policies are bad for Americans and bad for Brazilians. For the past year, Lula has put his own ego ahead of making a deal for the welfare of the Brazilian people, and these tariffs are the price for that."

The tariffs are being imposed under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, allowing the U.S. to launch the investigation into Brazil's trade practices.

The U.S. Supreme Court in February ruled against many of Trump's tariffs imposed under a different law, the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977. The court found he overstepped his authority under that act to impose sweeping tariffs on U.S. trading partners, including Brazil.

Trump had under that law imposed a 50% tariff on Brazil to protest its prosecution of Jair Bolsonaro

for trying to overturn his loss in a 2022 election. But Trump's relationship with Lula seemed to improve in May, when he visited the White House.

US airstrikes hit northern Iran as it disables ship trying to run the blockade

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The United States intensified its strikes targeting Iran early Thursday, hitting targets further north as American forces also fired into a ship it accused of trying to break its naval blockade on the Islamic Republic. Iran retaliated with missile and drone fire targeting Bahrain and Kuwait before dawn.

Days of back-and-forth strikes by the U.S. and Iran across the Middle East — and renewed threats to the Strait of Hormuz — have shredded the interim deal to end the Iran war and could tip the region back into all-out war. Already, Iranian officials say U.S. strikes have killed more than 35 people and wounded more than 300 others. Strikes also reached into areas around Iran's capital, Tehran, for the first time of this latest round of violence.

When the U.S. and Israel launched the war on Iran on Feb. 28, Tehran effectively closed the strait to shipping traffic — a move that sent the price of oil, fertilizer and many other goods soaring far beyond the region and gave Iran major leverage in negotiations.

US and Iran trade threats as attacks intensify

Those rising prices pose a particular challenge to U.S. President Donald Trump and his Republican Party, which hopes to retain control of Congress in elections in November. But Washington has struggled to successfully reopen the waterway, leading to Trump reimposing the naval blockade Wednesday.

Iran's parliament speaker and lead negotiator, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, said Iran was prepared for a fuller military confrontation if the U.S. does not live up to the terms of the interim deal, and Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard threatened to halt all energy exports from the Middle East over the blockade.

"The export of oil and gas from the region will be either for everyone or for no one," the Guard said.

Trump again insisted Iran was ready to strike a peace deal, but he did not elaborate.

"They don't like what we're doing, and they do want to settle. We'll find out whether or not we settle with them, or we just finish it off," he said Wednesday at the U.S. Army War College in Pennsylvania.

Trump separately said on social media that Tehran made a goodwill gesture by releasing an American citizen wrongly detained in Iran since 2024. He didn't release further details. Human rights lawyer Jared Genser released a statement identifying the detainee as his client Dena Karari, a U.S.-Iranian citizen who runs a nonprofit and was charged with espionage.

Iran did not immediately acknowledge the release and her case hadn't been publicly known, which sometimes happens with detentions in the Islamic Republic.

Both the US and Iran launch attacks as the blockade is reimposed

The U.S. strikes early Thursday hit around Tehran, state media reported. It also reported American attacks targeted Semnan province, home to Iran's ballistic missile production and space program.

On Wednesday, the U.S. resumed striking Iran during daylight — further showing the increasing tempo of the attacks. Its attack on Greater Tunb Island, a strategic point in the Strait of Hormuz — targeted Iranian defense and missile sites, Central Command said.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military said it opened fire on the Curacao-flagged oil tanker Belma sailing toward Kharg Island, Iran's main oil export terminal in the Persian Gulf. After the ship "ignored multiple warnings," a U.S. aircraft disabled the merchant vessel by firing a missile into the ship's smokestack.

Another American strike Wednesday targeted a barracks for Iran's 388th Mechanized Infantry Brigade, which operates tanks and armored vehicles, in Sistan and Baluchestan province, Iranian state television reported. The report said Americans fired at least 13 missiles in the attack and the seven dead included conscripts and career soldiers. A number of troops were wounded.

The Strait of Hormuz remains at the heart of the fighting

The latest round of fighting is focused on the Strait of Hormuz. How to reopen the strait has bedeviled the U.S. since Iran choked it off in the early days of the war.

During the interim deal, some ships began moving through the passage using a route near Oman overseen by the U.S. military that is outside Tehran's control.

In recent days, Iran attacked ships using that route — and back-and-forth attacks ensued. The U.S. has threatened to reopen the strait by force — but experts say that would require a much bigger armada if not tens of thousands of ground troops. Imposing the blockade is another way to put pressure on Iran.

But in the meantime, oil prices are rising. The price for Brent crude oil, the international standard, traded above \$85 a barrel on Thursday — more than 15% higher than the price before the war, but still well below the nearly \$120 reached at the height of the conflict.

New York Times files motion to quash subpoenas served on journalists over Air Force One coverage

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The New York Times on Wednesday filed a motion to quash subpoenas that the Justice Department served on journalists who reported on security concerns involving the new, Qatari-gifted Air Force One, teeing up a significant court fight pitting press freedom against the the government's ability to force reporters to identify sources.

David McCraw, the newspaper's senior vice president and deputy general counsel, accused the government of bringing the subpoenas in "bad faith to punish The Times for its coverage."

"They violate the constitutional rights of The Times and its journalists," McCraw said in a statement. "We are going to court to defend our journalists' rights to report freely on the administration and to provide the public with stories that matter."

The filing was made under seal in the Southern District of New York, where the journalists were summoned in subpoenas delivered last Friday to testify before a federal grand jury. The Times had said it expected five journalists to be subpoenaed; three were ultimately served.

The subpoenas, delivered to reporters at their homes, marked a dramatic escalation of the Trump administration's crackdown on media leaks that free press advocates swiftly condemned as a government effort to intimidate news organizations. It followed an FBI search earlier this year of a Washington Post reporter's home and the seizure of her electronic devices.

The new jet in question, a present from Qatar that Trump's administration spent \$400 million to retrofit and upgrade, recently entered service. But the Republican president used an older model Air Force One jet to leave a NATO summit in Turkey last week.

The Times, citing anonymous sources, reported that the switch had come at the urging of the Secret Service and that the newer plane lacked some of the advanced security features of the older aircraft, including antimissile capabilities. On social media, Trump denied security concerns.

The Justice Department has justified the subpoenas by saying that "to be clear, reporters are not the targets, those leaking classified information are."

"We value and appreciate the important role that the press plays in this country," the department said after the Times reported it had received the subpoenas. "But DOJ also plays an important role to make sure that the people entrusted with our nation's secrets do what they're supposed to do with that information, which means not sharing classified information."

Asked about the issue at his Senate confirmation hearing Wednesday, acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said the Justice Department is "not targeting reporters," describing them as "material witnesses" to a leak investigation.

When Sen. Peter Welch, a Vermont Democrat, pointed out to Blanche that the department wants to ask the journalists who their sources were, Blanche replied, "No, the question we want to ask them is who

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provided them with classified national security information, which everybody in this body should want to protect.”

The Justice Department over the years has developed, and revised, internal policies governing how it will respond to news media leaks.

Though the department across presidential administrations has periodically seized the phone records of individual journalists in hopes of identifying sources for national security stories, it is extremely rare for the government to attempt to compel a reporter to reveal their sources before a grand jury.

In April 2025, then-Attorney General Pam Bondi rescinded a policy from President Joe Biden’s Democratic administration that protected journalists from having their phone records secretly seized during leak investigations — a practice long decried by news organizations and press freedom groups. The moves again gave prosecutors the authority to use subpoenas, court orders and search warrants to hunt for government officials who make “unauthorized disclosures” to journalists.

A memo Bondi issued said members of the press are “presumptively entitled to advance notice of such investigative activities,” and subpoenas are to be “narrowly drawn.” Warrants must also include “protocols designed to limit the scope of intrusion into potentially protected materials or newsgathering activities,” the memo stated.

In January, FBI agents searched the home of Washington Post reporter Hannah Natanson, who has been covering Trump’s transformation of the federal government, as part of a leak investigation into a Pentagon contractor accused of taking home classified information.

More than half of House Democrats vote to cut Israel aid in growing split

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — More than half the House Democrats voted Wednesday to strip \$3.3 billion in U.S. aid from Israel, the most substantial signal yet that once rock-solid bipartisan support for the country is disintegrating in the aftermath of its war in Gaza that has killed thousands of Palestinians.

The vote tally, 104-314, was not enough to attach the amendment to a broader national security spending bill, but stands as a stark accounting of the shifting attitudes that are dividing the Democratic Party and the nation over Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s war strategy, now approaching its third year.

The House’s Democratic leadership split over the issue in what was largely seen as a test vote ahead of the U.S. midterm elections that will determine control of Congress. More than 100 Democrats voted for the amendment to strip the foreign military aid money, and almost as many voted against. Most Republicans voted to preserve the Israel aid.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, who announced he opposed the measure that would zero out the aid, nevertheless said “that for the good of Israel and the Palestinian people, American policy in the Middle East must change.”

Jeffries said in a letter to colleagues, ahead of a private caucus meeting this week where he spoke on the issue, that he believes “there are more decisive ways to achieve the urgent change necessary when it comes to the far-right Netanyahu government.”

Democrats divided over US support for Israel

The deepening divide over Israel threatens to upend the Democratic Party as it faces an energized left flank that is promoting self-proclaimed democratic socialists in a handful of marquee House races, particularly last month in New York.

While more traditional Democrats have stood with U.S. support for Israel, a growing number have distanced themselves from Netanyahu’s strategy as the war has dragged on in a prolonged response to the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel.

The Democratic Whip, Rep. Katherine Clark of Massachusetts, announced she would support the measure to withhold the funds.

Republicans have seized on the divide to portray Democrats as being overtaken by their more radical

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far-left elements, even as House Speaker Mike Johnson faces divisions within his own ranks as President Donald Trump's most ardent America First Republicans lean toward less foreign military spending.

According to an AP-NORC poll this month, about one-third of U.S. adults — including roughly half of Democrats — believe Israel has committed genocide against Palestinians during the war in Gaza, an accusation that's been leveled by some human rights organizations and vehemently denied by Israel and the U.S. government.

Amendment pushed forward from Rep. Thomas Massie

The amendment to strip Israel's foreign aid was offered by Rep. Thomas Massie, the libertarian-leaning Kentucky Republican who lost his own bid for reelection after Trump backed his challenger.

During the floor debate, Massie said the \$3.3 billion could be better spent at home on U.S. roads, bridges and veterans' needs, especially as national deficits are on the rise. He said the American weapons were used on "oftentimes innocent civilians."

"I think we should stop it — we should put them on a diet," Massie said.

But Democratic Rep. Steny Hoyer of Maryland, himself a former party leader, championed longtime support of Israel and warned against withdrawing U.S. aid.

"I rise in strong opposition to this amendment, which would dangerously undermine American national security," Hoyer said. He said it would limit the United States' ability to confront terrorist organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah, which he said "expressly target American citizens and military personnel."

Lawmakers under pressure as midterms near

The lawmakers were feeling pressure from all sides as they prepare for midterm elections this fall.

The powerful American-Israel group AIPAC encouraged its supporters to contact members of Congress to register their opposition.

"We must ensure his dangerous amendment is defeated," AIPAC said in a statement ahead of the vote.

At the same time, the progressive advocacy organization J Street gave lawmakers more leeway to express their views, as Jeffries did, even as the group opposed the amendment as poorly drafted and overly broad.

President Jeremy Ben-Ami said in a statement that J Street recognizes "that, for many Democrats, this is one of the few opportunities to cast a recorded vote expressing opposition to the way American military assistance and American-supplied weapons have been used by the Israeli government in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon and elsewhere."

He said that what unites the majority of Democrats "is far more significant" than this vote as they work to support "the security and rights of both Israelis and Palestinians."

NYC's Rikers Island jail hosts World Cup watch party for inmates

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City's official World Cup guide lists no less than 100 free places to take in soccer's biggest tournament on big screens. One place that isn't listed? The city's notorious Rikers Island jail complex, better known for its overcrowding and violence than for hosting social events.

But more than 100 inmates were rewarded with a special viewing of the World Cup semifinal match Wednesday between England and Argentina because of their model behavior behind bars.

The inmates, dressed in tan uniforms, took seats at tables facing a large projection screen set up in a gymnasium. The jail has hosted about 90 such watch parties since the tournament kicked off last month, with about 4,500 of the roughly 6,600 inmates incarcerated on the 400-acre island participating, correction officials said.

"Programs like this equal safety in our jail," said Stanley Richards, the city's correction commissioner and a former Rikers inmate. "What we say to them is that your humanity is seen, heard and valued."

Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who briefly stopped by, added: "The World Cup has been a magical moment for the entire city. These are New Yorkers, and they will be New Yorkers when they get out of Rikers."

The scene Wednesday was in sharp contrast to complaints about Rikers Island that have been so bad in recent years that a federal judge appointed an outside manager to help improve the facility.

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On Tuesday, that federal overseer, former Vermont Department of Corrections head Nicholas Deml, submitted a plan for reforms that underscored the continued dysfunction at the facility, which opened in 1935.

The report described one instance when inspectors arrived at a housing unit to find it filled with smoke from fires set by prisoners, blaring alarms and people pounding on their cell doors. In another incident, prisoners streamed through an unsecured door and brawled after a guard abandoned his post.

"Violence remains pervasive, basic correctional practices remain unreliable, and unconstitutional conditions persist," the report said.

Mamdani has vowed to honor a 2019 city law mandating the closure of Rikers, but also conceded the 2027 deadline is likely unrealistic after years of delays.

With his white shirt sleeves rolled up, the Democrat went table-by-table chatting up inmates.

One told the mayor he expected Argentina to prevail over England and go on to face Spain, which had defeated France the day earlier.

"You never know," said Mamdani, a professed Morocco fan.

At another table, an inmate told the mayor he was going home later in the day. "That's amazing," Mamdani said, patting his back.

The jailhouse crowd erupted in a mix of groans and cheers as England struck first with a goal early in the second half.

Ralph Veal was among the minority of England fans who raised his arms in celebration. The 53-year-old Mount Vernon resident, who has been incarcerated since November, said the watch party made him reflect on how he might better approach life after jail.

"I could be doing this with my family, you know?" he said. "My son, he's a big soccer fan, so this would be great for me and him to have that relationship and that bond."

Others simply relished the chance for a rare treat: a freshly catered meal of salad, salmon, penne alla vodka and chicken parmesan, along with Snapple drinks.

"I've been locked up 21 months," said Thomas McCoy, 52, of Brooklyn. "It's been a long time since I had real food like that."

When the final whistle blew and Argentina earned a spot against Spain in the final Sunday, Victor Caldas was overcome with emotions.

The 39-year-old, who has been incarcerated for four months, has been rooting for Argentina since his home country of Ecuador was knocked out of the tournament.

"It reminds me of when I was a kid, playing soccer. It's all about love. Soccer brings a lot of love," he said, still staring at the final score as others started cleaning up the gym.

"It don't matter from where you are in the world, you know. It's about bonding with another culture, other people."

Federal government replaces slavery exhibition at Washington's home in Philadelphia

By COREY WILLIAMS and TASSANEE VEJPONGSA Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — The Trump administration on Wednesday replaced an exhibit on slavery at the site of President George Washington's home in Philadelphia with a version that historians say whitewashes the nation's history.

The new exhibit was installed in the same area where the Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776.

"Overnight, under the cover of darkness, the federal government removed panels at the President's House that told a thorough history of Philadelphia," Philadelphia Mayor Cherelle L. Parker said. "It was allowed to do this by the decision of the federal court, but that it did so at night shows it understands this action is shameful, that it violates community trust."

The original panels were put in place in 2010 and told the story of how nine slaves lived in the home along with George and Martha Washington in the 1790s, when Philadelphia was briefly the nation's capital.

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The changed exhibition comes as President Donald Trump has made dismantling diversity and inclusion initiatives a priority in an aggressive campaign to overhaul some of America's most sacred cultural, historic and educational institutions.

Trump issued an executive order in 2025 that called for federally owned or controlled historic sites to not display information to "disparage Americans past or living" and to focus on the "greatness of the achievements and progress of the American people."

The directive has raised concerns about sanitizing and erasing dark sides of American history.

Trump has continued a broadside against culture he deems too liberal. In March, Trump revealed his intention to force changes at the Smithsonian Institution with an executive order that targeted funding for programs that advanced "divisive narratives" and "improper ideology." He has also pressured organizations outside of the government, including universities, to take similar actions with the stated aim of eliminating what he says are discriminatory practices.

The Trump administration began removing the old panels earlier this year, but a lower court forced the federal government in February to stop while the city appealed. A three-judge panel of the U.S. 3rd Circuit of Appeals reversed that and ruled July 3 that the work could continue.

The three-judge panel praised the plans for the replacement installation, writing that they were "full of historical context," despite objections from historians and city officials that the content appears whitewashed.

The Interior Department told The Associated Press Wednesday in a statement that the new "panels are full of historical context and highlight the momentous events that took place in the President's House and the other sites at Independence National Historical Park."

"They acknowledge the evils of slavery, including its injustices and hypocrisies, and, by telling the stories of the nine slaves that Washington kept in the President's House, remind us of their essential humanity," the statement said.

The new panels still include information on enslaved people who lived in the home and details on the abolitionist movement, how the Constitution treated slavery, the end of slavery in Pennsylvania and how Washington and his successor, John Adams, viewed and treated slavery, as well as information about the 20th century Civil Rights movement.

However, the replacement panels do not include some of the detail in the earlier ones, such as a map of slave trade routes and a timeline on slavery. They also avoid critical headlines such as "The Dirty Business of Slavery."

The city of Philadelphia had sued the federal government over the removal of information previously included in the panels. It argued that the federal government must consult with the city before making changes to the President's House Site. Justice Department lawyers argued the administration alone can decide what stories are told at National Park Service properties.

Parker said the city intends to seek a rehearing "on serious legal issues" presented in the appeals court decision.

Michael Coard, an attorney and founder of Avenging The Ancestors Coalition (ATAC), said the Philadelphia-based history preservation group continues to work on legal strategies opposing the Trump administration's changing of the panels.

ATAC joined the city's lawsuit.

Trump is attempting to rewrite history, Coard told reporters Wednesday near the site.

"What if there's a president next time who doesn't like the Liberty Bell because the Liberty Bell was used by abolitionists to support the end of slavery?" he said. "What if there's a president who doesn't like the Statue of Liberty because too many immigrants come in? Do we remove the Statue of Liberty?"

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ICE should keep making traffic stops despite recent shootings, Trump says

By REBECCA SANTANA and PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump wants Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers to keep pulling over vehicles, signaling his opposition Wednesday to plans announced just a day earlier to suspend most traffic stops following another string of fatal shootings.

It's not clear whether ICE will quickly reverse course and resume most stops, which have been a key tool in Trump's immigration crackdown.

Ending those stops, Trump wrote, would be "playing right into the criminal's hands."

"We CANNOT give up one of ICE's most important and effective Crime Fighting tools, THE TRAFFIC STOP!" Trump wrote Wednesday on his social media site.

Hours after Trump made his views known, Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin issued his own statement saying people illegally in the country would be "arrested and deported wherever they are." While Mullin didn't directly say whether ICE officers will be allowed to carry out traffic stops, he later said in a statement that he and Trump "are on the same page," and that they want ICE officers "to have all options available to keep them safe while executing our mission."

ICE's enforcement tactics are coming under renewed criticism after three people died during encounters with federal officers within a week. In Florida, a 28-year-old man was killed Tuesday after he was hit by a tractor trailer while running from immigration and other federal officers, authorities said.

Before that, two motorists were shot and killed by ICE officers — one in Texas last week and another in Maine on Monday.

Policy change for ICE traffic stops

After the Maine killing, Trump administration officials told ICE officers to suspend most vehicle stops, people familiar with the decision said Tuesday.

Since the immigration crackdown began, federal officers confronting drivers have opened fire several times, saying the drivers' vehicles had posed a danger. Policing experts have long said that shooting into moving cars presents a danger of its own and should almost always be avoided.

There have been at least 10 deaths involving encounters with immigration agents since Trump launched his deportation campaign. At least four of them involved people in vehicles, a trend so troubling that Republican U.S. Sen. Susan Collins of Maine urged Department of Homeland Security leaders "to cease all non-urgent vehicle stops."

Two shootings in a week, she said Wednesday, "raise very serious questions" and warrant a halt in that approach for the time being.

ICE has been under pressure to beef up arrest and deportation numbers. It says people being sought are increasingly staying in their homes, and it often blames immigration advocates who advise immigrants to stay in homes unless ICE produces a warrant signed by an independent judge.

ICE officers say that means they're forced to find other ways to make arrests.

DHS says the man killed in Maine came to the US illegally

More protests are planned after hundreds gathered Tuesday to remember Johan Sebastián Durán Guerrero, the 25-year-old Colombian national who was shot in his car Monday.

Karolina Rojas, his partner and the mother of their young daughter, shared a photo on Instagram of the three hugging and smiling.

"I love you, my darling, my life. I love you. I have no words for this pain. You were my everything. Please watch over me. Help me find the strength to carry on. Stay with me always. Don't leave me alone. I'm begging you, my love," she wrote.

Durán Guerrero illegally entered the U.S. on Sept. 1, 2023, through the southern border, DHS said Wednesday. Advocacy groups said that when he was killed, he was authorized to work in the U.S.

Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, said the Homeland Security secretary told him on Monday that ICE officers were in Biddeford to serve an arrest warrant but that it wasn't for the person who was shot.

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When ICE tried to stop a vehicle driven by someone who came from a home under surveillance, the "vehicle attempted to flee the scene and, fearing for public safety, an officer discharged his weapon," the department said.

In its statement Wednesday, DHS said Guerrero was released into the U.S. after crossing the border.

The department didn't answer questions about the agent who shot him.

Photos showed bullet holes in Durán Guerrero's car windshield, but the officers involved didn't have body cameras, leaving many questions.

Texas state police will investigate Houston shooting

Republican Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a staunch supporter of Trump's immigration crackdown, said Wednesday that the state's top law enforcement unit would investigate the fatal shooting of Lorenzo Salgado Araujo in Houston.

DHS' account of the July 7 shooting is disputed by three other men who were riding in a van with Salgado Araujo at the time. A public viewing for Salgado Araujo, a homebuilder from Mexico, was set for Thursday in Houston.

More than a week after the shooting, new court records show the FBI is investigating if drugs were found in the van, according to a search warrant application signed by a federal judge Tuesday.

FBI special agent David McNeilly stated in an affidavit that he observed four plastic bags of a white substance appearing to be meth inside the van. DHS has not stated that suspected drugs were the reason why ICE officers engaged in the traffic stop. The FBI referred questions about the search warrant to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The ACLU of Texas, which is providing legal representation for Salgado Araujo's family, said the Trump administration "lacks credibility" to investigate itself.

Maine shooting puts a spotlight on ICE

Outgoing Colombian President Gustavo Petro called the shooting of Durán Guerrero in Maine a targeted killing "at the hands of the U.S. government."

In Wednesday's social media post, Trump told ICE to be "judicious, fair and smart, and go back and do your very important job."

Border czar Tom Homan told reporters that the investigation needs to play out and that officers will be held accountable if they are found to have acted inappropriately or illegally.

Maine's Democratic governor, Janet Mills, said ICE should be scrapped as a federal agency if it can't be fixed.

Mills, who has criticized ICE before, said Wednesday that the agency needs changes "before more families are robbed of a loved one."

Lawmakers cast doubt on Kathryn Ruemmler's testimony about Epstein ties

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lawmakers said Kathryn Ruemmler, the former top lawyer at Goldman Sachs and White House counsel to President Barack Obama, was not being truthful Wednesday about her relationship with Jeffrey Epstein, rejecting her testimony that Epstein had merely "used" her.

Ruemmler in her opening remarks told members of the House Oversight Committee that "it was a mistake to deal with" Epstein, but she insisted she never witnessed criminal activity. She said Epstein "used me and other respectable people to legitimize his standing."

Democrats emerged from questioning Ruemmler saying she was not being forthcoming about her ties to Epstein.

"It is difficult to see how she's being completely truthful in there with the answers she's given the committee," Rep. Robert Garcia of California, the top Democrat on the committee, told reporters.

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Jennifer Connelly, a spokeswoman for Ruemmler, said in response that Ruemmler had "testified openly and truthfully for six hours and answered every question the committee asked."

Ruemmler is the latest prominent figure called before the House Oversight Committee as lawmakers investigate the network of powerful people connected with Epstein. The bipartisan inquiry has already included testimony from more than a dozen high-profile witnesses, including Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates and former President Bill Clinton, as lawmakers examine how Epstein's wealth and influence may have helped shield him from scrutiny.

Ruemmler served as White House counsel under Obama from 2011 to 2014 and was briefly considered for attorney general. She served as Goldman Sachs' general counsel for six years before announcing in February that she would step down amid backlash over her correspondence with Epstein. Although she said she would step down on June 30, she remains employed by Goldman Sachs.

Lawmakers have focused on Ruemmler's close relationship with Epstein in the final years of his life, pointing to affectionate communications between the two.

"For her to deny that there was any type of real relationship there, I just don't buy it," Garcia said. "And so, again, the fact she is not under oath is very problematic."

The two were close years after Epstein's 2008 conviction on sex crimes

While Ruemmler has tried to downplay their relationship in more recent statements, thousands of documents released by the Justice Department showed that Ruemmler and Epstein had an extensive relationship. The files included personal emails, social plans and gifts that extended beyond formal legal work. Documents showed she had called Epstein "Uncle Jeffrey" in emails and said she adored him.

Ruemmler said in her opening remarks that she first met Epstein in 2014 regarding potentially working with him and Gates "to set up a large donor-advised fund." Soon after, according to Ruemmler, she learned about Epstein's 2008 conviction on sex crimes, when he became a registered sex offender.

She said Epstein expressed remorse about it, and that he did not know the women were underaged. She said she "relied on the resolution reached by federal and state prosecutors and validated by a judge as being a proportionate and final resolution of his criminal conduct."

House Oversight Chair James Comer told reporters Wednesday that the "most concerning" part of Ruemmler's communications with Epstein is how she "tried to rehabilitate his image after he was convicted of solicitation of a minor."

Ruemmler's interview is part of a broader investigation

Comer said Wednesday that Ruemmler is the 18th person to testify as part of their broader investigation.

Billionaire investor Leon Black was subpoenaed last month after lawmakers said he refused to answer some questions about his yearslong relationship with Epstein.

Comer said Wednesday that Black will appear for a formal deposition on Sept. 3 but that he expects to have Black's nondisclosure agreements by "the end of the week."

The committee has also expressed interest in questioning acting Attorney General Todd Blanche, whose nomination to permanently lead the Justice Department is pending before the Senate. Former Attorney General Pam Bondi identified Blanche as the department's point person on the release of the Epstein documents, a process that has drawn bipartisan scrutiny.

"Hopefully Blanche will come in as soon as his confirmation is over," Comer said.

During a lengthy podcast interview with Joe Rogan released Wednesday, Vice President JD Vance said the administration "absolutely" mishandled the communications surrounding the Epstein files and its contents. Vance pointed largely to Bondi, who famously stated that an alleged "client list" of Epstein's was "sitting on my desk right now."

Defending champion Argentina reaches World Cup final by beating England 2-1

By JAMES ROBSON AP Soccer Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — No “Hand of God” this time. Argentina didn’t need it.

Instead it was the hallowed feet of Lionel Messi and the unbreakable spirit of a team that has repeatedly fought back at this year’s World Cup that is now one step away from back-to-back titles.

Trailing 1-0 going into the 85th minute, Argentina rallied for a 2-1 victory over England on Wednesday with goals from Enzo Fernandez and substitute Lautaro Martinez.

“I dreamed it, I swear. I told Alexis (Mac Allister) that I was going to score. I told him that I was going to come on and I was going to win it,” Martinez said. “I can tell you this team keeps showing what it’s made of.”

At the final whistle, Messi fell to his knees in celebration while England players collapsed in disbelief — again.

Add 2026 to 1986 and 1998 on the list of games when Argentina has extinguished English hopes at the World Cup.

“I’m gutted for the team, the staff, the fans,” England captain Harry Kane said. “We worked so hard to be here. The lads have given every bit of blood, sweat and tears. To fall short like we did is just gutting.”

The defending champions will take on European champion Spain in the final on Sunday in East Rutherford, New Jersey. The best that South America has to offer against the best of Europe.

The loss for England will hurt a new generation of fans in a similar way to Diego Maradona’s infamous handball goal in the 1986 World Cup quarterfinals and the penalty shootout loss in 1998 when David Beckham was sent off for kicking Diego Simeone.

The difference is there can be no sense of injustice this time, even if England had victory in its sights after Anthony Gordon scored the opening goal in the 55th minute.

The English were hanging on as the game wore on. England goalkeeper Jordon Pickford made vital saves while Mac Allister sent a header off the post as wave after wave of Argentina attacks came.

Messi had largely been kept quiet. But when he’s on the field, anything seems possible.

He fed the ball to Fernandez to sweep in the equalizer from outside the box in the 85th minute. And two minutes into stoppage time, Messi sent in a cross for Martinez to head in the winner.

It almost felt inevitable. Especially given the amount of times Argentina has simply refused to give in at this year’s World Cup. From Cape Verde to Egypt, Messi and Co. always seem to find a way.

“It is a show of the collectiveness, the brotherhood that we are in, the fight to the very end that we’ve got,” Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. “We were ready to go home, sad, knowing that we had left everything on the pitch, but after they scored we really proved ourselves.”

England, in contrast, came up short in the World Cup semifinals for the third time after losses to Germany in 1990 and Croatia in 2018. And it’s another occasion in recent years when England’s players have squandered a winning position in the later stages of a major tournament.

They led 1-0 against Croatia in the semifinals eight years ago and lost 2-1. They were up 1-0 against Italy in the European Championship final in 2021 and lost on penalties.

On Wednesday, England coach Thomas Tuchel’s substitutions seemed to be more intent on holding on, rather than killing the game off with another goal.

“Argentina played with more risk, played with more rhythm, played with the feeling maybe that they have nothing to lose anymore, which freed them up and held us back because we played suddenly with a feeling that we have a lot to lose,” Tuchel said.

Argentina is now one step away from history. Messi, now 39 and likely playing at his last World Cup, is one win away from further strengthening his case to be considered the greatest soccer player of all time.

“We’re going to try to win, we’re going to leave everything out there,” Scaloni said. “It’s very difficult to get people to understand what these players are showing. It’s incredible. We are unique, truly, and it’s not arrogance, it’s from the heart. We are unique.”

Flooding forces evacuations in parts of South Texas as slow-moving storms swamp the region

By JESSE BEDAYN and JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — Widening evacuation warnings and high-water rescues in Texas mounted Wednesday under relentlessly heavy storms that turned roads into rivers, washed away vehicles and spun up a tornado across a busy interstate in San Antonio.

Texas Game Wardens have participated in rescues of more than 40 people so far in the flooding, mostly in the Uvalde County area, according to a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department spokesperson.

Forecasters warned that already dangerous conditions were likely to worsen in some hard-hit communities. The deluge dumped nearly a foot of rain in some counties and put people in dozens of counties under flood watches, including parts of the Texas Hill Country where last summer's devastating floods killed more than 100 people. Some of the flood watches were expected to remain in effect through Friday evening.

The National Weather Service said a tornado touched down in the northwestern part of San Antonio near Interstate 10. Videos posted on social media showed what appeared to be a small twister. Apartment buildings and other properties were damaged, local officials said.

There have been no reports of deaths or injuries from the tornado or the flooding.

As much as 10 to 20 inches (25 to 50 centimeters) of rain was possible in some places before the storms move out, the weather service said.

As of Wednesday evening, just over six million Texas residents in 57 counties were under a National Weather Service flood watch that was scheduled to continue through early Thursday night. Watches for 34 of those counties were scheduled to expire Friday evening.

More than a foot of rain has fallen with more to come

The highest rainfall totals so far — up to 16 inches (40 centimeters) — have been in Uvalde County, where officials tallied 25 rescues as of 9 a.m. Wednesday, and said more people needed help as river levels rose. Highways and roads were closed across the region because of high water.

The county normally gets about 23 inches (58 centimeters) of rain a year, according to the Uvalde County Extension Office.

The Uvalde Police Department said on Facebook at 1 p.m. that a dam in the northern part of the county was still intact, but the Leona River was still expected to rise another 15 feet (about 4.6 meters). Police warned people along the river to get to higher ground.

State Rep. Don McLaughlin said that despite a "little lull," the rainfall wasn't done and waterways could become more dangerous. "The rivers and the creeks are going to be coming up, and they're going to be coming up again with a vengeance," McLaughlin said.

Frances McNamara and her 10-year-old son, Everett, watched the bloated Leona River in Uvalde sweep southward Wednesday as she considered possible evacuation routes. She pointed to a solid line of dirt, branches and twigs about 8 feet (2 meters) above the river where the water reached the day before.

"We've seen the water rise, but not to this extent," she said, describing how it rushed through a ditch next to her home with enough force to sound like a river on Tuesday.

This week's severe weather brought back memories of last year's deadly flooding in Texas Hill Country. "It scared me," said McNamara, her eyes wet with tears as she recalled the 2025 floods. "Cause I have a son, and to know what those parents went through." Her son reached up and patted her back.

Some mandatory evacuations ordered in Uvalde

Uvalde police ordered mandatory evacuations for some parts, with first responders notifying people affected directly, the department said on Facebook. Others were asked to stay vigilant in case more evacuations are needed.

Some folks walked out of their homes onto the street to see the water growing closer every hour, their faces worried. People living along the river scrambled to pack cars and head out, though many did not yet know where they should go. One man threw two kayaks into his truck bed, just in case.

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Bailey Luckman, 26, was getting ready to evacuate with her dog Wednesday afternoon. The floodwaters are close to her house, she said, and authorities recommended that she leave.

"I'm very worried about my things," Luckman said.

She gestured to an inundated road nearby, saying she normally drives that route to get to the gym. It looked more like a river than a road.

"I've never seen it flow the way that it is right now, so that's pretty terrifying," Luckman said.

Lightning flashed as clouds darkened the landscape, and brown water created large rapids in the typically calm Leona River. The river was pushing up against the town's high bridge and into neighborhoods by Wednesday afternoon.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has issued disaster declarations for dozens of counties.

Authorities posted videos on Tuesday showing a rescue crew in a boat navigating flooded streets and a vehicle being swept away by fast-moving waters. Five people were rescued by the Texas Game Warden Search and Rescue Team and four were rescued by a local game warden, said Maggie Berger, a Texas Parks and Wildlife spokeswoman.

Other areas of Texas could see dangerous flooding

Forecasters warned that hilly terrain in other parts of the region could be especially vulnerable to heavy rain.

The highest level of concern for potentially dangerous flooding Wednesday was for areas west of San Antonio and north of Route 90, Weather service meteorologist Monte Oaks said.

In Boerne, a city of about 24,000 northwest of San Antonio, residents of several areas were told by officials to either evacuate voluntarily or prepare to shelter in place as waters rose. City spokesperson Chris Shadrock said in a video post on Facebook that high-water rescues were ongoing and that the city's busiest intersection was "completely underwater."

"This is a life-threatening weather event, I don't want to mince words about how serious this situation is," Shadrock said.

He said the water was rising even in areas that don't usually flood.

First responders helped a woman escape after a car was swept off Boerne's River Road by the fast-rising Cibolo Creek.

People in about 20 vehicles were stranded in a nearby gas station parking lot when every surrounding street quickly flooded. Police officers blocked the exits to keep people from trying to ford the roads.

Kendall County is home to nearly 53,300 people, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates. About 45% of them live in the southern portion of the county in Boerne, where the Cibolo Creek reached 22.47 feet (about 6.8 meters) as of 1 p.m. according to a USGS gauge, about 19 feet (about 5.8 meters) higher than just two days before.

Oaks said the rain is being fueled with tropical moisture, mostly from the Gulf of Mexico and some from the Pacific Ocean.

"This is called a typical midsummer tropical weather pattern that happens in Texas," Oaks said. "About once every five years, we'll get soaked in with a daily recurrence of heavy rain chances that's generally produced by a stagnant kind of a pattern with a low-pressure center that's just not moving very fast."

Drained Reflecting Pool reveals Trump's 'American flag blue' liner is now closer to gray

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The newly drained Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool's bottom surface has noticeably faded since it was lined with a protective coating in a color President Donald Trump called "American flag blue" this spring.

An Associated Press reporter and photographer viewed the fenced-off Reflecting Pool on Wednesday from the top of the Washington Monument. The new liner appears grayer than when the pool was repainted and refilled with water in early June. Debris that had been visible earlier this week after the pool

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was drained is now largely gone, after work crews removed it.

Trump's problem-plagued effort to revamp the landmark has stretched well past his initial goal of having the Reflecting Pool ready by July 4 for the nation's 250th birthday.

The president at first suggested his renovations would cost \$1.5 million, but the bill ballooned to more than \$16 million by June.

Trump had said the repairs would last a century, but within days of the project's initial completion last month, the water was beset by an algae bloom and pieces of the new coating appeared to be peeling off the bottom.

Ohio-based Green Water Solutions, also known as Greenwater Services, was given a \$1.7 million contract to install a water-purification system in the Reflecting Pool, while Virginia-based Atlantic Industrial Coatings was awarded \$14.7 million to repaint and waterproof the pool's concrete floor.

Vandalism charges were levied against a former Olympic canoeist

Trump has repeatedly blamed vandals for the peeling paint, though critics allege it's from shoddy repair work.

Trump has said, without citing evidence, that vandals made a "350-foot gash" in the liner and caused other problems. No large slash marks were immediately visible Wednesday from the Washington Monument view. It was not possible to do a more up-close inspection of the entire pool due to a dark fence surrounding the perimeter.

Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, whose agency oversees the National Park Service, said that after the water is drained and debris is cleaned from Independence Day fireworks, the plan for the pool is straightforward: "Repair the vandalism that was done. Fill it back up again." He was speaking with conservative podcaster Katie Miller.

Court documents show that the National Park Service reported to the U.S. Park Police a June 9 incident in which a sharp knife or razor was said to have cut the pool's new liner.

Former Olympic canoe racer David Hearn pleaded not guilty last week in D.C. Superior Court to deliberately damaging the Reflecting Pool. Hearn has said he reached inside the pool to examine the peeled sealant and let go of a chunk when he was told to by a park worker.

His attorneys and other Trump administration critics have derided the case as an abuse of prosecutorial power and maintain he is being scapegoated for the poor job done fixing up the Reflecting Pool.

At least three other people have been charged in the same court with misdemeanors for allegedly removing pieces of paint from the pool, court records show. All three pleaded not guilty during initial court appearances.

The work on the Reflecting Pool is just one of a number of projects Trump has spearheaded across the nation's capital. Most prominently, he demolished the White House's East Wing to build a \$400 million ballroom and plans to build a towering arch. between the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery.

Trump drifts into campaign topics while addressing defense technology gathering

By WILL WEISSERT and SAGAR MEGHANI Associated Press

CARLISLE, Pa. (AP) — President Donald Trump addressed a defense summit at the U.S. Army War College on Wednesday but spent little time talking about battlefield issues — even as the war in Iran has reduced the U.S. supply of critical missile and interceptor systems.

Seated at a roundtable with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Republican Pennsylvania Sen. David McCormick, Trump said the gathering would generate around \$10 billion in pledged investments from domestic defense and technology companies, without providing details.

"The talent and innovation in this room will keep America safe for many years to come," Trump said.

He spoke shortly after the U.S. military launched another round of missile strikes that Trump had previously promised against Iran as a ceasefire to end that war remains in tatters. Trump made brief references to the war and a January military operation to oust Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, saying, "We're

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really doing well with Iran."

"Iran is unhappy right now," he said.

But his lengthy speech spent more time drifting into themes Trump repeats during his political rallies, boasting about — and sometimes exaggerating — his administration's accomplishments. Trump also diverted into a broadside against the use of windmills in Britain, questioned having steam catapults on U.S. ships and pondered the Battle of Gettysburg.

"What a war that was, when you read about it," the president said of the Civil War.

Trump suggests he had stored up frustrations over catapults

Trump suggested that oil from Venezuela would eventually pay for what the U.S. spent toppling Maduro some 50 times over — though he also said private oil companies would profit more than the country. After a long aside about the use of magnets to improve catapults on vessels, Trump finally offered, "I hope I'm not boring anybody."

"I'm getting it all out now," he added. "All the anger I have when I hear about electric catapults that don't work."

Later, Trump advised, "I'll tell you how to make money: Do magnets." At another point Trump declared, "I watch more tractors than any human being on earth."

The gathering in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, was organized by McCormick and also featured Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Army Secretary Dan Driscoll; CIA Director John Ratcliffe; and Mike Waltz, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

Summit attendees included JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon, Blackstone President Jon Gray, Lockheed Martin CEO Jim Taiclet, General Dynamics CEO Phebe Novakovic, Boeing CEO Kelly Ortberg, SpaceX director Antonio Gracias and artificial intelligence firm Palantir chief technology officer of analytics Shyam Sankar.

"I'm in a world where I'm shaking hands with celebrity business people, mostly," Trump said.

Another presidential stop in Pennsylvania

Trump has come to the critical swing state seven times during his second term, including last month, when he went to a Mack Trucks facility in Macungie.

Trump carried Pennsylvania in 2016 and 2024, and McCormick is not up for reelection this cycle, but Republicans are increasingly concerned about the war and the persistently high cost of living as well as the president's low approval ratings as they look to maintain control of Congress during November's midterm elections.

As he frequently does, however, Trump complained Wednesday that affordability and the rising cost of living that have increasingly worried voters were issues the Democrats have fomented for political purposes.

"That's a fake word that they use, they caused the affordability problem," he said, before referencing one of his friends, whom he didn't name, having bought a private plane just for the tax benefits.

Trump spoke at a similar gathering organized by McCormick last year in Pittsburgh that sought to make the city a hot spot for advancement in energy technology and robotics. Then, the senator announced \$90 billion in pledged investments in those sectors across Pennsylvania.

Before Trump's arrival, multi-analytics threat detection leader ZeroEyes, which is based in Conshohocken, outside Philadelphia, announced a planned \$10 million investment in artificial intelligence and machine learning research and development.

Pittsburgh-based Gecko Robotics says it plans to open a new 10,000-square-foot (930-square-meter) manufacturing facility designed to boost integration of robotics into defense manufacturing processes and better expand the nation's defense industrial base.

Shortage of Tomahawks and Patriots may take years to make up

Unmentioned during Trump's appearance was an analysis released in May that found that U.S. military contractors will need at least three years to replenish stockpiles of Tomahawks, which are used to strike targets deep inside enemy territory, as well as Patriot and THAAD interceptors, which defend against incoming missiles and drones.

Stocks have dwindled as the U.S. has repeatedly fired strikes on Iran, adding to concerns that American forces would have limited firepower in any potential future conflict with China.

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Trump also recently pledged to give Ukraine a license to produce Patriot air-defense systems, which could be a major development in its war with Russia, though turning the idea into real weapons is also likely to take years.

Trump has sought to correct the shortfall by seeking a historic \$1.5 trillion defense budget proposal for 2027. But a package authorizing such spending levels is stalled in Congress, and, even if it eventually moves forward, loads of additional time will still be required to expand production capabilities to accommodate such weapons systems.

Jake Loosararian, co-founder and CEO of Gecko Robotics, said U.S. defense companies have "got to supercharge supply chains" to reduce how long it takes for new technology to be ready for widespread production.

"President Trump uniquely understands the importance of pragmatic impact today," Loosararian said. "He also understands big, beautiful things for tomorrow."

Blanche confronts skeptical questioning of fund, tax deal for Trump at Senate confirmation hearing

By ERIC TUCKER and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche confronted skeptical questions at a Senate confirmation hearing Wednesday about the creation of a fund to compensate President Donald Trump's allies and a tax immunity deal for the president as he aimed to lock down the Republican support needed to advance his nomination.

Blanche insisted that the \$1.776 billion "Anti-Weaponization Fund," which was scrapped after fierce bipartisan backlash, was "not moving forward." But lawmakers, including Republican Sen. John Cornyn, conveyed concerns that the Trump administration has yet to commit in writing that the fund is dead and could therefore conceivably be resurrected.

"Just to be clear, the president of the United States, who's a plaintiff in this lawsuit, has not agreed in writing to delete the weaponization fund and there's no guarantee that he or one of the other plaintiffs" won't raise the issue in the future, Cornyn asked. Blanche replied that Trump has no power over the fund, which was to have been administered by the Justice Department but was never launched.

Cornyn's questions were closely watched since Blanche requires the backing of all Republicans on the Judiciary Committee and the Texas senator has not committed his support.

The hearing arrived at a tumultuous time for the Justice Department, with mass firings and resignations having hollowed out the workforce and Democrats and other critics raising alarms that Blanche is still functioning as Trump's personal lawyer. He has led the department on an interim basis since April, functioning as the public face of the maligned fund and accelerating investigations into perceived Trump adversaries. Even as he said the fund was shelved, he made clear that immunity from tax audits afforded to Trump this year remained in place despite a congressional outcry.

Those actions, plus the flawed release of files from the Jeffrey Epstein sex-trafficking investigation, received fresh scrutiny Wednesday.

"You're in charge of a Department of Justice I don't recognize, prosecuting the president's political enemies, firing rank and file prosecutors and FBI agents," Democratic Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware told Blanche. "These are some actions that in your previous confirmation hearing before us, you said you would not take."

Blanche, for his part, pointed to investigations into Trump during the Biden administration to argue that he had inherited a politicized Justice Department.

"In recent years, we watched the Justice Department turned against many of you and a former president, and it damaged the public's faith in justice," Blanche argued. "We are fixing that."

Blanche will need the support of each Republican on the panel

Key to Blanche's confirmation are Cornyn of Texas, who in May lost his primary, and Sen. Thom Tillis, a North Carolina Republican who has opted not to seek reelection. In the final stretches of their Senate career, both are seen as more likely than before to split from Trump and both have been outspoken critics

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of the fund the Trump administration created to compensate people who feel unjustly persecuted by the criminal justice system.

After questioning Blanche, Cornyn told CNN he continues "to have some concerns" and is not "going to make any decisions at this point." Tillis, meanwhile, indicated during questioning that he is likely to support Blanche, even as he said he wanted "to stick a fork in this turkey of a 1776 fund."

The death of South Carolina Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham, who was a member of the committee, left 11 Republicans and 10 Democrats on the panel. With Democrats united in solidarity against Blanche, =a no-vote by even a single Republican on the panel would scuttle Blanche's nomination.

Blanche insists the fund is dead. Lawmakers aren't so sure

The fund emerged from a settlement of Trump's \$10 billion lawsuit against the Internal Revenue Service over his leaked tax returns. Blanche had initially defended the initiative only to later reveal that it was being scrapped amid fierce bipartisan backlash.

The judge handling the case said in a scathing ruling Monday that Trump had effectively engaged in self-dealing through the lawsuit. She said she was troubled Blanche had signed the settlement given his prior representation of Trump and was concerned the acting attorney general had given misleading testimony. Blanche said Wednesday that he disagreed "with the judge's insinuations about me."

Blanche also defended a separate element of the settlement that afforded Trump and members of his family protection from tax audits and that, he has said, remains on track. He said the deal covers any existing audits but does not protect the president from examination of future tax filings.

"Nobody is above the law," Blanche said. Such a settlement "doesn't make any of those individuals above the law."

Epstein files are also under scrutiny

Blanche was also pressed on the department's staggered release of the Epstein files, a process beset by problems, including redaction errors that left exposed nude photos showing the faces of potential victims.

During a podcast interview with Joe Rogan released Wednesday, Vice President JD Vance said the administration "absolutely" mishandled the communications surrounding the files, including when then-Attorney General Pam Bondi distributed binders of Epstein documents at the White House to far-right influencers that contained already-public material.

Blanche acknowledged that "mistakes were made" in the release process but nonetheless defended the work.

"I want to make sure that the American people know that this administration, when it comes to Jeffrey Epstein, has been more transparent than any administration," he said. The Justice Department only released additional files after Trump bowed to bipartisan pressure to sign a law forcing the department to do so.

A former federal prosecutor and key member of Trump's defense team as the Republican battled four indictments, Blanche arrived at the Justice Department last year as deputy attorney general. At one point, under friendly questioning from Republican Sen. John Kennedy about whether he and Trump are friends, Blanche responded: "I'm his lawyer," before quickly correcting himself to say he "was his lawyer."

He ascended to the top job in April after Trump ousted Bondi, who had frustrated the White House by struggling to bring successful cases against Trump's political opponents. Blanche has tried to satisfy Trump in that regard, including with an indictment of ex-FBI Director James Comey, another Trump adversary, on charges of threatening the 47th president by posting a social media photograph of seashells in the numerical arrangement of "86 47."

Comey has said the numbers were not a call to violence.

Blanche was also asked about Jan. 6 violence

Tillis, who has said he would not support for attorney general anyone who equivocates on the events of Jan. 6, 2021, when pro-Trump rioters stormed the U.S. Capitol, asked Blanche if he agreed that any Capitol Police officer assaulted that day was the "victim of a heinous crime." Blanche said he agreed.

Democrats, meanwhile, pressed Blanche on the violence and Trump's sweeping clemency action benefiting more than 1,500 people, including those convicted of violently attacking police.

Democratic Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse criticized Blanche for comments at a political conference this year

where he appeared to characterize the Jan. 6 pardons as an administration accomplishment. Blanche replied that he has "never said that any sort of violence against law enforcement is appropriate."

"He has the absolute right to pardon anybody for any reason he sees fit," Blanche said of the president. "I am not celebrating that. It is a fact."

Hegseth announces new policy to test troops for low testosterone

By KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and MATTHEW PERRONE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced Wednesday that he is rolling out a new screening program for "testosterone deficiency" among troops, calling it necessary to allow them to operate at their "absolute best."

The screenings will be conducted annually as part of service members' required medical screenings for those 30 and older, he said. Troops under 30 can volunteer to be tested. In a video on social media, Hegseth said receiving testosterone replacement therapy would be voluntary.

In the video, Hegseth simply refers to troops, though it appears he is talking about only testing men in uniform for hormone irregularities.

The move comes as other Trump administration officials have begun to advocate for men to have easier access to testosterone replacement therapies, but the messaging from Hegseth and others blends known science on the hormone with broader, and less substantiated, claims.

Testosterone use in the military has previously come under scrutiny

When asked what conditions Hegseth was looking to address with the new policy, the Pentagon referred to Hegseth's remarks in the video that mentioned keeping troops "strong, resilient and capable" and that the rigors of the modern battlefield demand "maximum psychological and mental readiness."

Over the past several years, special operations troops — and specifically Navy SEALs — have come under scrutiny for their use of testosterone and similar substances to enhance performance.

The death of a SEAL recruit during training in 2022 led to a discovery of substances in his possession, including testosterone, and revealed far more rampant drug use among the elite program than was previously acknowledged.

A year after the recruit's death, the Navy said it would begin a drug-testing program to screen for "any hormonal substance, chemically or pharmacologically related to testosterone, that promotes muscle growth."

Hegseth said his new initiative is "not about artificial enhancement."

The Pentagon did not respond to questions about what research or academic studies underpinned the move. It also didn't say if female troops would be able to be evaluated for estrogen-based therapy as they entered perimenopause.

RFK Jr. has touted testosterone, but medical experts are wary

Testosterone levels in men decline naturally with age and have long been linked to issues like erectile dysfunction, low libido, mood changes and weight gain. But experts have debated for years how to diagnose those problems and whether they should be treated by replacing the hormone.

Hegseth's announcement comes as Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and other Trump administration officials are moving to make it easier for doctors to prescribe testosterone. Last month, the Food and Drug Administration proposed easing prescribing limits on testosterone gels, pills, patches and injections.

The current FDA label specifies that the medications are only for men with hypogonadism, a medical condition that causes drastically low testosterone.

But many influencers and proponents of Kennedy's "Make America Healthy Again" movement tout testosterone as a way to look younger, build muscle and stay mentally sharp — although those uses aren't accepted by most medical experts.

Still, recent studies have bolstered the case for testosterone's benefits, for certain conditions, while allaying worries about its safety — particularly concerns about heart safety.

Last year, the FDA removed a boxed warning about possible risks of heart attack and stroke from the drugs.

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Separately, a series of studies by the National Institutes of Health in older men found that taking testosterone improved erectile dysfunction, libido and other sexual measures and had a small effect on mood. But there was little or no improvement in other measures like fatigue, memory or overall well-being.

Other studies have shown potential improvements in muscle-building, strength and bone density.

However, current medical guidelines generally recommend against blanket testing of testosterone levels. Typically, doctors are advised to discuss testosterone therapy with men who have troubling symptoms and documented low levels of the hormone on two separate blood tests.

Testing for testosterone is challenging because levels of the hormone fluctuate throughout the day. Accurate testosterone readings are typically measured in the morning after fasting.

Some female Democratic lawmakers with military experience blast the new policy

Sen. Tammy Duckworth, an Illinois Democrat and Iraq War veteran, said the announcement sounded "like gender-affirming care to me," referencing Hegseth's stance against transgender troops.

Rep. Chrissy Houlahan, a Pennsylvania Democrat and Air Force veteran, said it "proves that Secretary Hegseth takes direction from the far corners of the manosphere."

Both lawmakers called on Hegseth to make hormone testing available for both men and women.

"Let's extend hormone screenings for all of our brave servicemembers to help us identify fertility issues early — since studies show that both women and men in our military disproportionately face higher rates of infertility than the general population," Duckworth, who is on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said in a statement.

Hegseth has previously said he does not believe women should hold combat roles and that those positions should be based on the "highest male standard." He has blocked some military promotions for women or fired female leaders since becoming Pentagon leader.

He has made other changes related to the medical treatment of troops.

In April, he announced the repeal of the military's long-standing flu vaccine mandate, citing "medical autonomy" and religious freedom. In June, a flu outbreak at the U.S. Air Force's boot camp sickened at least nearly 300 people.

Heavy smoke from wildfires blankets the US Midwest and Northeast, prompting evacuations

By DORANY PINEDA and JACQUELINE GANUN Associated Press

Thousands of visitors were told to evacuate a remote Minnesota wilderness area accessible only by boat as wildfires send dangerously heavy smoke over the U.S. Midwest and Northeast this week.

More than 100 wildfires are burning in Canada, where a train crew in northern Ontario filmed themselves surrounded by flames before being safely evacuated. Winds are carrying the smoke southeast.

Warnings about unhealthy air conditions Wednesday extended from Minnesota through Toronto and into New York. Unusually hot summer temperatures were expected, too.

The best advice is to stay indoors to avoid both the smoke and the extreme heat, said Tyler Hasenstein, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Chanhassen, Minnesota.

"Those two things coinciding with each other is not good from a health perspective," he said.

Rangers try to get thousands of campers out of remote Minnesota wilderness

In far northeastern Minnesota, rangers were trying to warn people that the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness was closed Tuesday because about 17 fires caused by lightning more than a week ago were spreading through the vast wilderness accessible primarily by canoe.

Rangers estimated anywhere from 6,000 to 10,000 people were inside the 1.1-million-acre (445,000-hectare) wilderness, which is almost the size of Delaware, Superior National Forest spokesperson Joy VanDrie said.

"It's an arduous job," VanDrie said of rangers and campers having to canoe for hours or even carry their boats over land to evacuate.

No injuries or deaths have been reported. Rangers were going through every lake and waterway and

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officials estimated they had about 90% of the people out Wednesday.

Campers rescued this week said skies quickly darkened from smoke and they could feel the heat as they paddled or were taken by boat to safety.

Jan Bailey was camping with her husband, daughter, son-in-law, two grandchildren and three dogs when they noticed wispy smoke on the horizon. Two hours later, they could see a raging firestorm. A paddle-boarder with a satellite phone fled to their campsite and they called forestry rangers who sent a boat to rescue them and others.

"We had fire on both sides of us at that time," Bailey told Minnesota Public Radio. "So we're just weaving between the lakes. It's a little smoky. Campsites are going up."

Even authorities in Canada pitched in. They rescued two groups of youth campers Wednesday who had crossed the border. One group was stuck on an isolated sandbar, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz said.

VanDrie didn't know when the area might reopen. Minnesota officials said some fires in the Boundary Waters will be allowed to burn indefinitely but will be monitored to ensure they don't threaten people or property.

Severe drought and heat have led to a busy wildfire season

Dan Westervelt, associate professor at Columbia University's Climate School, said severe drought conditions combined with heat in Canada and the U.S. have created "a perfect storm for really dry conditions to provide a lot of fuel for these wildfires to burn." Research shows warming temperatures from burning coal, oil and gas are making fires more frequent and intense.

High levels of fine particulate matter in the air from wildfire smoke may be unhealthy for sensitive groups, such as children and people with heart or lung conditions. The particulates can cause shortness of breath, coughing, dizziness or fatigue and aggravate heart and lung diseases and other chronic health issues.

Experts suggest wearing a N95 mask if you have to be outside and keeping your indoor air cleaner by closing windows and running an air purifier or air conditioner.

It's been a particularly busy and deadly fire season in the U.S. About four dozen large fires are currently burning across 15 states, from Minnesota and North Carolina to Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Oregon and California, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

Prolonged drought and record low snowpack levels combined to make conditions ripe for rapid fire growth.

Smoke spreads as officials warn wildfires could burn for months

In Minnesota, officials warned large fires could burn for months. In Minneapolis, the high Wednesday was expected to be 96 degrees F (36 C) and temperatures above 90 F (32 C) were expected the rest of the week.

"It could well be we're having significant fires throughout the summer until we have snow. Snow would be a good thing," said Patty Thielen, director of the state Department of Natural Resources.

The smoke was so thick that the sky turned orange like Mars in northern Minnesota, said Matt Taraldsen, supervisory meteorologist with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

Part of the danger of the heat and smoke there is that only about half the buildings have air conditioning, Taraldsen said. Residents usually would open windows to keep cool "but when there's dense smoke, you can't do that," he said.

Taraldsen's mother said she woke up in her Duluth, Minnesota, home Wednesday morning and everything smelled like a campfire. When she opened her door, her eyes watered and she had to use her inhaler to ease her asthma.

Typically, Theresa Taraldsen said, she can see the St. Louis River from her yard but it was all a white wall of smoke Wednesday.

"You literally couldn't see nothing," she said.

Officials in Michigan and Wisconsin warned residents about air quality issues that could last for days. People in New York reported smelling smoke Wednesday afternoon and the problems extended even to Maine, where residents were reporting a yellowish and brownish color in the sky.

The most intense smoke could spread as far south as Washington, D.C., by midday Thursday.

Vance says Trump administration 'screwed up' communications around Epstein files

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President JD Vance says the Trump administration “absolutely” mishandled the communications surrounding the Jeffrey Epstein files.

During a lengthy podcast interview with Joe Rogan released Wednesday, Vance pointed largely to former Attorney General Pam Bondi, who infamously stated that an alleged “client list” of Epstein’s was “sitting on my desk right now.” Epstein was a convicted sex offender who was known for his wide web of connections to the world’s elite.

In addition to those comments, the Justice Department under Bondi had also offered conservative commentators and influencers binders that were called “The Epstein files: Phase 1” and “Declassified.”

“I know Pam. I like Pam. I don’t think there was anything malicious going on,” Vance told Rogan. “I think Pam was trying to respond to the political moment. I think she overstated what we had and what we didn’t have.”

As a result, Vance said, Bondi was “roasted” publicly for it and led people to “mistrust” the administration’s transparency efforts on the Epstein files.

“We absolutely screwed up the comms of the Epstein files. Like, we just did,” Vance said. “But do I think the reason we screwed up the comms is because we were trying to hide something? No.”

The controversy over the Epstein files dogged the administration for much of last year, with lawmakers eventually passing a measure that compelled the release of a massive trove of documents in the government’s possession related to its investigations of the disgraced financier. The Justice Department began releasing the documents in late December, which included photos, call logs, grand jury testimony and interview transcripts.

Fed chair Warsh sidesteps Senate questions on inflation, AI, contact with Trump

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve Chair Kevin Warsh on Wednesday navigated a series of thorny questions from senators on issues such as the impact of AI on inflation, what contacts he has had with President Donald Trump, and how the central bank will determine the persistence of inflation, without providing many specifics.

Warsh has said since taking office seven weeks ago that he would provide less guidance about the Fed’s next interest rate moves than his predecessors. Yet he has frustrated many Fed-watchers by largely avoiding explanations of how the central bank might respond more generally to potential economic changes.

“I don’t view a one-time change in prices as necessarily being inflationary, because I think there’s a supply response,” he said in answer to a question on the impact of massive investment in AI infrastructure. “Will it increase measured prices over the course of the next 12 months? I suspect it will be. Whether that’s inflationary or not, that’s up to the Federal Reserve, and we’re going to have something to say about that.”

The cost of computer memory and processing chips has soared as high-tech firms have spent hundreds of billions of dollars on data centers and computing equipment. Companies such as Apple, Microsoft, and Dell said they have had to raise prices on laptops, tablets, and video game consoles as a result.

According to the minutes of the Fed’s last meeting June 16-17, “many” of the 19 officials on its rate-setting committee said that the “ongoing strong demand for AI infrastructure would likely sustain upward pressure on prices for technology products and electricity.” The committee has been sharply divided over whether to raise rates later this year.

Inflation data downplayed

In his second day of congressional testimony, Warsh also downplayed positive inflation data released

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Tuesday and Wednesday that could make his job as Fed chair easier. As inflation fades, it reduces pressure on the Fed to raise its key interest rate to cool borrowing and spending.

The government said earlier Wednesday that wholesale inflation slowed in June, a day after consumer prices were reported to have fallen from May to June for the first time in six years. On a yearly basis, inflation cooled to 3.5% last month from 4.2% in May.

"Any central banker would be happy to have data going in the right direction," he said, but "these are all imperfect measures of the state of underlying inflation."

Instead, Warsh said he would look to a task force he has created to study the sources of data the Fed uses. He suggested the task force could come up with ways that government statistical agencies "could do a better job in an evolving economy." Warsh announced the formation of five task forces last week, which will also consider the Fed's inflation framework, the impact of AI on jobs and productivity, and the Fed's ownership of trillions of dollars of government bonds.

Warsh did sketch out one standard the Fed would use when evaluating whether inflation was becoming a persistent problem: It will consider whether prices are rising in more than a just a particular category, such as oil and gas, and affecting "the generalized price level."

Yet when asked by Sen. John Kennedy, a Republican from Louisiana, how the Fed will determine whether inflation is "temporary or permanent," Warsh said, "You use five task forces to get to the big and hard questions."

Questions about whether Warsh has spoken with Trump

Separately, Warsh reiterated that he would act independently as Fed chair and resist any political pressure from Trump, who has often demanded lower interest rates. But he did not directly answer whether he has communicated with Trump since his appointment.

"I don't want to be in the business of sharing discussions that the president and I have," Warsh said in response to a question from Sen. Chris Van Hollen, a Democrat from Maryland.

"I will tell you what I've said to the president repeatedly and said to the Treasury Secretary: They chose an independent guy to do the job and that's exactly what I plan on doing," he added.

Trump repeatedly attacked Warsh's predecessor, Jerome Powell, for not cutting interest rates deeply enough, and his administration even pushed an investigation into brief Senate testimony by Powell on a building renovation by the Fed, raising widespread concerns about the future of the Fed's independence.

US producer prices drop 0.3% from May to June on lower energy prices, but outlook is cloudy

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. wholesale inflation fell from May to June on plunging energy prices, but intensifying hostilities with Iran are clouding the outlook.

The Labor Department reported Wednesday that its producer price index — which captures inflation before it reaches consumers — dropped 0.3% from May, biggest decline since April 2025 and a reversal from a 0.6% uptick the month before. Compared to a year earlier, wholesale prices were up 5.5% in June, decelerating from a 6% increase the month before. Gasoline prices plunged 12% in June but are still up nearly 43% from June 2025, pushed higher by the Iran war. Food prices also dipped in June.

Excluding volatile food and energy prices, so-called core wholesale prices were up 4.7% from June 2025 and 0.2% from May.

The producer price report came out a day after the Labor Department said consumer prices dropped 0.4% from May to June, the biggest monthly drop in four years. Compared to a year earlier, they were up 3.5% last month, down from 4.2% in May. The June inflation numbers were much cooler than forecasters had expected, reducing pressure on the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates this year. Still, inflation is running above the Fed's 2% target.

In his first appearance before Congress since becoming Fed chair May 22, Kevin Warsh said Tuesday

that the central bank has “no tolerance for persistently elevated inflation.”

Energy prices have ratcheted higher since President Donald Trump on Monday announced a new blockade in the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world’s oil and natural gas passes. Many Americans are already frustrated with the high cost of living, dimming the prospects of Trump’s Republican Party in November’s midterm elections.

“There’s no near-term pressure on the Fed, but oil is in the driver’s seat over the longer term,” said David Russell, global head of market strategy at the online brokerage TradeStation. “Energy saved the day in June, but that might become ancient history if the Strait of Hormuz doesn’t open soon.”

Wholesale prices can offer an early look at where consumer inflation might be headed. Economists also watch it because some of its components, notably healthcare and financial services, flow into the Fed’s preferred inflation gauge — the personal consumption expenditures, or PCE, index.

Biden will publish ‘Promise Me, America’ memoir after the November midterm elections

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Joe Biden will publish a memoir, “Promise Me, America,” which he says will touch upon everything from the economy to his decision to drop his bid for reelection.

The memoir is scheduled to come out Nov. 17, publisher Little, Brown and Company told The Associated Press. The timing of the book — two weeks after midterm elections in which Democrats seek to regain control of Congress — could raise concerns within Biden’s party by putting him back into the spotlight.

Democrats remain divided on Biden’s legacy, with many blaming his ill-fated determination to seek a second term for Republican President Donald Trump’s return to the White House. Leaders hope to keep the fall campaign focused on Trump and his record, and any leaks or promotional efforts before votes are cast could draw frustration.

“‘Promise Me, America’ is about the challenges we faced as a nation. It’s about the decisions I made and why I made them,” Biden said in a video statement accompanying Wednesday’s announcement. “It’s about why I chose to run for reelection and why I chose to step aside.”

Reports of Biden’s book have circulated for more than a year, and the former president himself has referred to it during public remarks, appearing to suggest at one point that it would be released before November’s election.

Biden, who will turn 84 three days after the publication of “Promise Me, America,” has long presented himself as an upholder of standards and traditions; presidential memoirs are one of them. With a handful of exceptions, modern presidents since Harry Truman in the 1950s have published books about their White House years. Like virtually all of his predecessors, Biden did not work on the book alone but was helped by a “small editorial team,” according to the publisher. Little, Brown declined to release financial details for “Promise Me, America,” although presidents have usually reached deals worth at least seven figures.

The book’s title echoes a 2017 memoir by Biden, “Promise Me, Dad,” which centered on the death of his son, Beau Biden.

Vowing as a candidate to “restore the soul” of his country, Biden was sworn into office in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the aftermath of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol by Trump supporters seeking to stop his certification as president. Biden’s term was defined by a wide range of conflicts and achievements, from his handling of wars in Ukraine and the Middle East to the passage of ambitious infrastructure and economic aid bills. But many readers will likely want to know more about his health while president, including the disastrous debate in June 2024 against Trump that led to his giving up his reelection bid. Then-Vice President Kamala Harris, who ran instead, lost decisively to Trump.

Former first lady Jill Biden wrote in her own book that her husband seemed so weak and disoriented during the debate that she feared he was having a stroke. In “View from the East Wing,” published in June, she noted that the White House had initially said he was suffering from a cold.

“The biggest lesson for us, I think, was that if you don’t explain something well enough then the ques-

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tion won't go away," she wrote. "There was never a satisfying enough explanation offered for Joe's debate performance, and a lot of people never got over it."

Biden was the oldest man to serve as president and his health was a source of speculation for much of his term; Biden and his White House advisers have faced intense criticism from Democrats and Republicans for allegedly concealing the extent of his problems. A notable book release from 2025, Jake Tapper's and Alex Thompson's "Original Sin," was subtitled "President Biden's Decline, Its Cover-Up, and His Disastrous Choice to Run Again."

That year, Biden announced he had been diagnosed with prostate cancer.

Biden's previous books also include "Promises to Keep," a campaign work published to boost his run for president in 2008, when Barack Obama was the eventual nominee and Biden his running mate. "Promise Me, America" comes out during a year when nonfiction sales have declined and few political books have caught on, although recent bestsellers have included Vice President JD Vance's "Communion" and an inside account of Trump's second term, by New York Times reporters Maggie Haberman and Jonathan Swan, "Regime Change."

A Little, Brown spokesperson said that Biden plans to tour on behalf of the book and give interviews. In his video announcement, Biden said that many people had been asking him how he was doing.

"I've been spending a lot of time with my family. I'm dealing with a cancer diagnosis, been getting treatment, and it's going really well," he said. "I want to thank all those who have offered their prayers and support and well-wishes. It's meant the world to me and to Jill."

More health workers strike as Ebola cases in Congo exceed 2,000, including 754 deaths

BUNIA, Congo (AP) — The number of confirmed cases of Ebola in Congo has reached 2,011, including 754 deaths, according to government data released overnight in what authorities say is the fastest-growing outbreak on record.

Health workers at Bunia General Hospital, the region's largest medical center, went on strike Wednesday and are the latest group to walk off the job at the epicenter over payment issues. Health professionals and other front-line workers barricaded the entrance to the hospital, claiming they have not received pay despite working under difficult conditions.

The World Health Organization says more than 100 healthcare workers have been infected since the beginning of the outbreak.

The Central African nation has been battling the Ebola outbreak caused by the rare Bundibugyo virus since May 15. A total of 753 patients remain in isolation or in hospitals, while 366 have recovered so far, according to data from Congo's Ministry of Health.

The outbreak continues to spread faster than health officials can track despite an expanding response. At least 80% of new cases are emerging from unknown chains of transmission, the WHO said Tuesday.

A key challenge is that health authorities have yet to identify the outbreak's patient zero, while displacement from armed conflict and mining-related movements have made it difficult to trace thousands who have come in contact with infected individuals.

The authorities have been able to trace 67% of the contacts of those exposed to confirmed cases, Congo's health ministry said.

Many of the newly reported deaths are of people who died in their communities without ever reaching a health facility and without receiving care, Dr. Chikwe Ihekweazu, the WHO emergencies chief, said Tuesday after returning from Bunia in Ituri, the worst-hit province in the outbreak.

The response is being hampered by a funding gap, attacks on health centers, an ongoing conflict in eastern Congo, and mistrust among local communities.

Dozens of healthcare workers at an Ebola virus treatment center in Rwampara, another hard-hit city in the Ituri province, went on strike over unpaid salaries and bonuses on Monday. On Tuesday, they agreed

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to resume work on condition the government pay them within 72 hours.

Some have told The Associated Press they have not received any payment since they started work at the onset of the outbreak.

Response efforts have also been challenged by the lack of approved vaccines or treatments for the Bundibugyo virus, unlike the more common Zaire virus for which there is a vaccine and which was responsible for most of Congo's past 16 outbreaks of the disease.

Enrollment in a highly anticipated study of two possible Ebola treatments recently started in Ituri.

Man arrested over threat to shoot Reform UK leader Nigel Farage

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A man who made a threat on social media to shoot Reform UK party leader Nigel Farage was arrested, police said on Wednesday, as concerns grow over the security of British politicians following the killing last week of former government minister Ann Widdecombe.

The man was held on Tuesday on suspicion of sending threatening communications to a member of Parliament, the Metropolitan Police said. He was held overnight and later released on bail.

"I am going to shoot you in the head if you win," the man allegedly told Farage in a post on X in May, according to the Telegraph newspaper.

The July 8 killing of Widdecombe at her rural home in southwest England shocked the political establishment and the public. The 78-year-old, who was Reform's immigration and justice spokesperson, was long known for her blunt-spoken socially conservative views opposing abortion and the expansion of LGBTQ+ rights.

Farage said her death showed that "things have become even more dangerous" for people in public life and his party has called for better protection. Other Reform politicians have suggested their party members are at greater risk than other politicians.

Outgoing Prime Minister Keir Starmer, in a tribute to Widdecombe in the House of Commons, said it was "chilling" that three sitting or former MPs had been murdered during his 11 years in Parliament.

"We must do more to defend our democracy" Starmer said.

Security has been tightened in the past decade after Labour lawmaker Jo Cox was fatally shot and stabbed in 2016 by a far-right extremist, and Conservative David Amess was stabbed to death in 2021 by an attacker inspired by the Islamic State group.

The alleged threat to Farage came during local and regional elections in May that saw his relatively new anti-immigration party win big and raise its hopes he could become prime minister after the next election, due in 2029. The poll results were so poor for the ruling Labour Party that its members forced Starmer to resign.

Police said the threat was reported May 8, but the arrest only came after they received information they requested from the social media company about the user's identity.

Farage has recently been embroiled in a scandal over a 5 million pound (\$6.7 million) donation he received from an overseas cryptocurrency billionaire that he said helped pay for his private security.

The Reform leader resigned his seat in Parliament this month but is seeking reelection to show he still has voters' support. Opponents have criticized the move as a ploy to dodge a parliamentary probe.

The investigation into Widdecombe's death is being handled by counterterrorism police. A 28-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of murder and terror crimes. He remains in custody but was not named because he has not been charged.

Devon and Cornwall Police have been criticized for originally saying the killing was not believed to be a terror-related crime and there was nothing to suggest it was politically motivated.

Widdecombe served in Parliament from 1987 to 2010, and was prisons minister in Prime Minister John Major's 1990s Conservative government.

She later found fame as a contestant on the reality television shows "Strictly Come Dancing" and "Celebrity Big Brother."

She joined the Brexit Party, briefly serving as a member of the European Parliament before Britain left the European Union in 2020. She had recently joined Reform.

Ukraine and EU aim for a weapons production partnership as war with Russia grinds on

By HANNA ARHIROVA and BARRY HATTON Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The European Union's top official signed an agreement Wednesday to move forward on joint weapons production with Ukraine, saying Kyiv's fight against Russia's 4-year-old invasion is a key part of the continent's defense.

Over the course of the war, Ukraine has gone from pleading for foreign military support to providing its cutting-edge and battle-tested weapons know-how to Europe, the United States and Middle East countries. But it still needs help expanding its domestic production, especially sophisticated air defenses that can stop Russia's ballistic missiles.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, attending ceremonies marking Ukraine's Statehood Day, and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy launched a new EU-Ukraine Defense Industrial Partnership. The move reflects European worries about Russia's broader intentions on the continent.

"Today, Ukraine's fight is not only a fight for your own freedom. It is an existential fight for Europe's freedoms — for its values, its self-determination," Von der Leyen said in a speech in Kyiv's St. Michaels' Square, where she received Ukraine's Order of Europe, a state honor.

"You are not only fighting for your own future but for the security of our entire continent," she told a crowd.

The EU and Ukraine signed a letter of intent that aims to establish joint drone and anti-drone production by the end of this year and joint anti-ballistic missile production by 2028, as well as broader support for defense manufacturing.

Ukraine wants to bolster its security by joining the EU. It has started that process, which could take years to complete.

U.S. President Donald Trump said at the NATO summit last week that the U.S. will give Ukraine a license to build its own Patriot air defense systems, essential to countering ballistic missiles.

Zelenskyy said Wednesday he expects Ukraine will have the technical capability to produce the sophisticated missiles by the end of the year, even though experts say it could take years.

Ukraine celebrates its sovereignty amid Russia war

Von der Leyen and other dignitaries, including the presidents of Moldova and Romania, marked Ukraine's Statehood Day, which celebrates the country's sovereignty and is a public holiday.

Ukraine has been under threat since Russian forces illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, followed eight years later by the all-out invasion in 2022. Statehood Day, celebrating the country's self-determination, is a public holiday in Ukraine.

The war has killed thousands of soldiers and civilians, forced millions to flee their homes, reduced some Ukrainian cities to rubble, and has fueled fears the confrontation could slide into an open conflict between Russia and NATO, whose member nations have supported Kyiv. No peace settlement is in sight.

Senior officials from southeastern European countries also were in Kyiv for a gathering focused on Black Sea and regional security. Last year's meeting in the southern city of Odesa reaffirmed their support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Zelenskyy has recently won important pledges of further support, including from the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations and the so-called Coalition of the Willing countries.

EU official says the 'tide is turning' in the war

Von der Leyen said her trip to the Ukrainian capital was her 11th in wartime. The EU has provided billions of euros to Ukraine as well as diplomatic support.

She promised EU help in preparing Ukraine's air defenses for the colder months. That's when Russia, often launching ballistic missiles, usually tries to knock out essential services like electricity and heat in

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what Kyiv officials call "weaponizing winter."

"Energy remains an unwavering priority," Zelenskyy said.

Western officials and analysts say Ukraine's drone and missile attacks are hitting high-profile targets deep inside Russia, severely disrupting Moscow's supply lines and causing civilian fuel shortages.

"It's a special moment," Von der Leyen said on social media. "Ukraine has built a strong military momentum. The tide is turning."

Washington appeared poised to increase economic pressure on Moscow as a proposed Russia sanctions bill was unveiled in the U.S. Senate following Saturday's death of Sen. Lindsey Graham, one of its chief backers.

The bill, which its authors had hoped to pass last summer but was held up by White House reservations, would impose steep tariffs on goods from countries that continue to buy Russian oil, gas and other exports.

Wednesday's official ceremonies came at a delicate political moment for Zelenskyy as he manages a major government reshuffle.

Meanwhile, Serbia's Moscow-friendly president, Aleksandar Vucic, was taking part in the Southeast Europe Summit in Kyiv. Serbia, which relies almost fully on Russia for its energy supplies, has refused to join Western sanctions on Moscow, although it officially supports Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Russian attacks kill 9 Ukrainian civilians

Ukrainian officials said Wednesday that at least nine civilians were killed and 13 others were injured in Russian aerial attacks.

Russian forces dropped six glide bombs mostly targeting infrastructure in the Sumy region of northern Ukraine, killing three people and wounding seven, said Oleh Hryhorov, head of the regional military administration.

Three people were killed and three others wounded in a Russian attack on Odesa, according to Serhii Lysak, the head of the city's military administration.

In the Chernihiv region of northern Ukraine, Russian drones killed two people and seriously wounded an 18-year-old, while one person was killed and two injured in the southern Zaporizhzhia region, officials said.

The Russian Defense Ministry said its air defenses overnight intercepted 93 Ukrainian drones over several Russian regions, as well as over Crimea and the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea.

Faint new planet is revealed around a young star after a decade in hiding

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Astronomers have discovered a faint, elusive planet orbiting a young star after more than a decade of cosmic hide-and-seek.

In an unusual twist, two groups working independently detected the cold gas giant a few days apart late last year using different telescopes. It's the dimmest planet ever directly imaged from Earth, scientists reported Wednesday.

A Scottish and German-led team spied the new planet around the star Beta Pictoris using the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope in Chile, then dug through archives to confirm its orbit. The planet had remained hidden in the data all this time, overshadowed by its considerably brighter star and two companion planets.

"It was very much playing hide-and-seek for 11 years," said the European Southern Observatory's Markus Bönse, co-leader of the first team.

The California-led team made the discovery with NASA's Webb Space Telescope. Two observations were all it took with Webb, the biggest and most powerful telescope ever launched into space. Both teams reported their findings in the *Astrophysical Journal Letters*.

The find was serendipitous. Each team was studying one of the star's already identified planets when they spotted a less massive one — 100 times fainter — lurking farther out. They deliberately kept their work from one another so as not to bias the results.

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The new planet is slightly bigger than Jupiter and takes 91 years to orbit its star, a little longer than it takes Uranus to orbit our sun. Born into a star system that's barely 20 million years old — a kid compared to the sun's 4.5 billion-year-old neighborhood — the planet is probably similar to a much younger Jupiter, said the University of California San Diego's Aidan Gibbs, who led the second team.

"The giant planets have formed, but smaller terrestrial planets could still be forming," Gibbs said in an email. Beta Pictoris "is probably our best look at a planetary system just after it has formed and is still in the process of stabilizing" from hurtling asteroids and comets.

Beta Pictoris is located in the easel-shaped southern constellation Pictor, or painter, and 63 light-years from Earth. A light-year is nearly 6 trillion miles (more than 9 trillion kilometers).

Fewer than 100 of the more than 6,000 confirmed exoplanets — planets around other stars — have been detected through direct imaging, according to NASA. Most were found while passing in front of their star, briefly dimming it.

"We've now built a picture of this planet," the University of Edinburgh's Ben Sutcliffe said in an email, "and we are very excited to see what more can be learned about it."

Today in History: July 16, Trinity nuclear weapon test

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, July 16, the 197th day of 2026. There are 168 days left in the year.

Today in History:

On July 16, 1945, the United States detonated its first experimental atomic bomb in the desert of Alamogordo, New Mexico; the same day, the heavy cruiser USS Indianapolis left Mare (mar-AY') Island Naval Shipyard in California on a secret mission to deliver atomic bomb components to Tinian Island in the Marianas.

Also on this date:

In 1790, a site along the Potomac River was designated the permanent seat of the United States government; the area became Washington, D.C.

In 1862, Flag Officer David G. Farragut became the first rear admiral in the United States Navy.

In 1951, the novel "The Catcher in the Rye" by J.D. Salinger was first published by Little, Brown and Co.

In 1957, Marine Corps Maj. John Glenn set a transcontinental speed record by flying a Vought F8U Crusader jet from California to New York in 3 hours, 23 minutes and 8.4 seconds.

In 1964, as he accepted the Republican presidential nomination in San Francisco, Barry M. Goldwater declared that "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice" and that "moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue."

In 1969, Apollo 11 launched from Cape Kennedy in Florida on the first manned mission to the surface of the moon.

In 1999, John F. Kennedy Jr., his wife, Carolyn, and her sister, Lauren Bessette, died when their single-engine plane, piloted by Kennedy, plunged into the Atlantic Ocean near Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts.

In 2004, Martha Stewart was sentenced to five months in prison and five months of home confinement by a federal judge in New York for lying about a stock sale.

In 2008, Florida resident Casey Anthony, whose 2-year-old daughter, Caylee, had been missing a month, was arrested on charges of child neglect, making false official statements and obstructing a criminal investigation. (Casey Anthony was later acquitted at trial of killing Caylee, whose skeletal remains were found in December 2008; Casey was convicted of lying to police.)

In 2015, a jury in Centennial, Colorado, convicted James Holmes of 165 counts of murder, attempted murder and other charges in the 2012 Aurora movie theater rampage that left 12 people dead.

In 2017, 10 people died at a popular swimming hole in Arizona's Tonto National Forest after a rainstorm unleashed a flash flood.

In 2018, after meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, President Donald Trump openly questioned the finding of his own intelligence agencies that Russia had meddled in the 2016 U.S. election

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to his benefit. (Trump said a day later that he misspoke.)

Today's Birthdays: International Tennis Hall of Famer Margaret Court is 84. Violinist Pinchas Zukerman is 78. Actor-singer Ruben Blades is 78. Rock composer-musician Stewart Copeland is 74. Playwright Tony Kushner is 70. Dancer Michael Flatley is 68. Former actor and teen model Phoebe Cates is 63. Actor Daryl "Chill" Mitchell is 61. Actor-comedian Will Ferrell is 59. Football Hall of Famer Barry Sanders is 58. Actor Corey Feldman is 55. Actor Jayma Mays is 47. Retired soccer star Carli Lloyd is 44. Actor AnnaLynne McCord is 39. Actor-singer James Maslow (Big Time Rush) is 36. Actor Mark Indelicato is 32. Pop singer-musician Luke Hemmings (5 Seconds to Summer) is 30.