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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: Clark vs. Redfield at 5 p.m. followed by the winner taking on Groton.

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

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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.

Smoke Over America

Millions of Americans are under air quality alerts this week as more than 800 wildfires continue to rage across Canada.

The wildfires are not due to a single cause and can be exacerbated by seasonal conditions, including drought and warm weather. Some were sparked by lightning, which can strike hard-to-reach areas of Canada's forests and is responsible for most of the total area burned in Canada. As fine particles enter the atmosphere, they can drift farther south. Chicago, Detroit, and New York ranked among the top five worst cities for air quality yesterday, with NYC officials working to distribute KN95 masks to commuters.

In areas with poor air quality, people are encouraged to stay indoors and run air-filtration systems if possible.

Nolan Meets Homer

"The Odyssey," Christopher Nolan's reported \$250M adaptation of Homer's epic poem, opens in theaters today with a global debut projected to top \$200M. The film is the first narrative feature shot entirely with IMAX film cameras, though just 25 US theaters have the equipment to show it as intended.

The movie marks Nolan's first release since "Oppenheimer" swept the Academy Awards. His take on the ancient Greek epic stars Matt Damon as Odysseus, the hero on a perilous 10-year journey home to Ithaca after the Trojan War, where Penelope (Anne Hathaway) waits while fending off aggressive suitors. The journey includes encounters with mythological creatures such as the one-eyed Cyclops Polyphemus, who may have been inspired by elephant bones. Tom Holland plays Odysseus' son Telemachus, and Robert Pattinson portrays the villainous suitor Antinous.

Learn about the real creatures that may have inspired the film's monsters, then trace Odysseus' journey with this interactive map.

Cholesterol Super Pill

The Food and Drug Administration yesterday approved a daily pill shown to help lower cholesterol levels by up to 60% in fewer than six months—a result previously only achieved with more expensive injectable drugs.

The daily pill, enlicitide, blocks PCSK9, a protein that weakens the liver's ability to clear cholesterol from the bloodstream. Cholesterol can accumulate in artery walls, forming plaque that restricts blood flow. Enlicitide is intended as a supplement to statins, widely prescribed pills that directly target cholesterol. Although PCSK9 inhibitors have been shown to reduce the risk of heart attacks by 20% among high-risk patients, only 1% of roughly 6 million eligible patients use injectable versions, which can cost more than \$500 monthly. Experts hope enlicitide, priced at \$315 per month and taken orally, will broaden access to PCSK9 inhibitors.

Over one in 10 Americans age 20 and older have high cholesterol. Doctors generally recommend that healthy adults have their levels checked every four to six years.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Rupert Murdoch biopic by "Slumdog Millionaire" director Danny Boyle selected to open the Venice Film Festival, which runs from Sept. 2-12.

Major League Baseball's 2027 season scheduled to have the earliest opening day in league history on March 24, pending successful labor contract negotiations.

British government urges FIFA to investigate after Argentine players celebrate 2-1 World Cup win over England with banner claiming sovereignty over disputed Falkland Islands.

Science & Technology

Mary-Dell Chilton, an American biochemist whose research team developed a now-widespread method for genetically modifying plants, dies at age 87.

Engineers create the "Phantom Twist," a drone that spins up to 25 times per second, making it nearly invisible to the human eye; previous efforts to create invisible drones focused on blending them into their surroundings (More, w/video)

Astronomers detect an atmosphere around a rocky, Earth-like planet for the first time, a promising sign the planet—LHS 1140 b—could host life; LHS 1140 b is 48 light-years away and about 1.7 times the size of Earth.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.5%, Dow -0.2%, Nasdaq -1.5%).

Alphabet shares drop 4% following report that its most powerful AI model, Gemini 3.5 Pro, is delayed.

Chevron pursuing investments in two major Iraqi oil fields and exploring a pipeline to bypass the Strait of Hormuz; about 20% of the world's oil moved through the strait before the Iran war.

Uber agrees to buy Germany-based Delivery Hero in \$14.8B deal; move could nearly double Uber's international footprint.

Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump calls for Congress to pass his SAVE America bill in address to the nation; alleges conspiracy to downplay vulnerabilities in US voting systems and Chinese election meddling.

Protests erupt in Ukraine after President Volodymyr Zelenskyy removes popular Defense Minister Mykhailo Fedorov from his post.

Former CEO of Italy's main highway operator is sentenced to 12 years in prison for the 2018 Genoa highway bridge collapse that killed 43 people.

Business Groups Concerned with Property Tax Scheme

Sioux Falls, SD – A broad coalition of business groups has expressed concern with statements made by gubernatorial candidate Toby Doeden regarding the elimination of nearly \$2 billion in local property taxes by cutting funding for schools, counties, and cities and implementing new taxes on visitors.

In response to survey questions and in conversations with business groups, Doeden has pledged “aggressive spending reductions” to local governments while seeking “additional sources of revenue.”

Doeden has claimed that families would “pay any price in the world” to come to South Dakota and that “it’s time for tourists and out-of-state visitors to pay their fair share . . . we will be obtaining new revenue from tourists that come here to enjoy our beautiful state.”

Eliminating nearly \$2 billion in funding for schools, counties, towns and other local needs – which is the equivalent of roughly 80 percent of the general fund budget for the State of South Dakota – with cuts and new taxes would negatively impact infrastructure and place even greater strain on local businesses.

“South Dakota’s business community has spent decades building a reputation for fiscal discipline and sound governance,” added Ryan Budmayr, President of the South Dakota Chamber of Commerce & Industry. “We support real tax relief, but any plan of this size needs to be grounded in real numbers so families and businesses can trust it will actually work.”

“A one percent statewide sales tax raises about \$350 million,” said Nathan Sanderson, Executive Director of the South Dakota Retailers. “To replace \$2 billion in local property taxes would require a nearly 6% sales tax rate on top of our current sales taxes and if it’s applied more narrowly it would need to be much, much higher. This would crush businesses and cripple our state’s No. 2 Industry.”

“Property taxes fund schools, counties, towns, and other local needs,” said Garth Wadsworth, Senior Public Policy Director of Elevate Rapid City. “We need to educate our kids, maintain county roads, and repair necessary infrastructure; we cannot cut all of these services.”

“Infrastructure is the backbone of commerce,” said Jeff Griffin, President and CEO of the Greater Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce. “Cutting infrastructure while raising taxes would have a very negative effect on South Dakotans.”

“A new consumption tax on visitors would make South Dakota less competitive, increase the cost of visiting our state, and reduce visitor spending—while the logistics of determining who is a visitor could also result in unintended costs and impacts for South Dakota residents,” said Carmen Schramm, Executive Director of the Tourism Coalition of South Dakota.

“This plan is simply not workable,” said Mike Bockorny, Executive Director of the Economic Development Professionals of South Dakota. “Small businesses, local restaurants, gift shops, hotels, coffee shops, book stores, and attractions across the state would be devastated. This is not the right approach for South Dakota.”

Groups expressing concern about Doeden’s property tax scheme include:

- Associated General Contractors of South Dakota
- Coalition for Responsible Taxation
- Economic Development Professionals Association
- Elevate Rapid City
- Experience Sioux Falls
- Greater Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce
- South Dakota Chamber of Commerce & Industry
- South Dakota Petroleum and Propane Marketers Association
- South Dakota Retailers
- Tourism Coalition of South Dakota
- Visit Rapid City

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Dakota Cash jackpot won in Sisseton

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Lottery's Wednesday drawings were highlighted by a Dakota Cash jackpot winner, while other jackpots continue to rise.

Wednesday's Dakota Cash drawing resulted in a \$184,223 jackpot winner. The winning ticket was purchased at Teal's Market in Sisseton.

The winning numbers were 1, 9, 10, 16 and 33. The odds of hitting the Dakota Cash jackpot are 1:324,632.

If you are Wednesday's winner, please sign the back of your ticket immediately and visit a South Dakota Lottery validation center to claim your prize. The Sioux Falls Lottery office is located at 3605 Western Ave., Suite B.

While the Dakota Cash jackpot was won, other lotto games are heating up for South Dakota Lottery players. Friday's Mega Millions drawing will feature a \$672 million jackpot.

In addition, the Saturday drawings will also have noteworthy jackpots. Saturday's Powerball drawing has a \$526 million jackpot and the Lotto America jackpot is currently \$34.12 million.

While jackpots of this magnitude create excitement for players and retailers, the South Dakota Lottery reminds players to play responsibly. It only takes one ticket to win.

Land for Sale

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Fact brief: Is it illegal for the South Dakota state government to run a deficit?

Yes.

South Dakota is one of 35 states that prohibits deficit carryovers from one fiscal year to the next. Article XII of the South Dakota Constitution outlines the requirements of the state to maintain a balanced budget. Section 7 says the governor's proposed budget must not "exceed anticipated revenue and existing funds available for expenditure or appropriation." The Legislature, similarly, cannot appropriate funds that exceed the same revenue limits.

South Dakota ended fiscal year 2026 with a \$69 million surplus. The state budget was \$7.5 billion.

The surplus in FY25 was \$63 million, while operating on a \$7.3 billion budget.

Vermont is the only state in the U.S. that does not have balanced budget requirements written into their constitution or state laws.

This fact brief is responsive to claims such as this one.

About fact briefs

Fact briefs are bite-sized, well-sourced explanations that offer clear "yes" or "no" answers to questions, confusions and unsupported claims circulating online. They rely on publicly available data and documents, often from the original source. Fact briefs are written and published by South Dakota News Watch as part of the Gigafact network. Submit a question for us to answer on the tipline.

South Dakota News Watch is an independent nonprofit. Read, subscribe for free and donate at sdnews-watch.org. Contact freelance reporter Emily DeCock: emily.decock@sdnewswatch.org.

Groton Post 39 opens regional tournament with two victories, advances to Friday night's final game

Groton Post 39 opened the South Dakota U14 American Legion Regional Baseball Tournament in impressive fashion Thursday at Locke-Karst Field, earning a pair of victories to advance into Friday night's semifinal.

Groton began the tournament by holding off Redfield 11-9 before rolling past Clark Area 16-1 in the second game of the day. With the two wins, Post 39 advances to face the winner of Friday's 5 p.m. elimination game between Clark Area and Redfield. That semifinal will begin approximately 30 minutes after the conclusion of the first game.

Against Redfield, Groton had to withstand a late rally after building a seven-run advantage.

Redfield struck first with a run in the opening inning, but Groton answered in the second when Asher Zimmerman singled to left to tie the game. Post 39 broke things open in the third, scoring four runs as Mason Locke delivered a two-run single, an error plated another run and Zimmerman added an RBI single for a 5-1 lead.

Redfield made things interesting in the sixth, scoring five runs to trim the deficit before Groton closed out the victory.

Tucker Leicht earned the win, allowing four hits and six runs — only three earned — over five innings while striking out six and walking five. Trayce Schelle recorded the save, and Kyson Kucker worked in relief.

Zimmerman led the offense by going 2-for-3 with two RBIs, while Locke finished 3-for-5 to pace Groton's seven-hit attack. Schelle added two hits, and Leicht showed patience at the plate by drawing three walks. Groton also displayed aggressive baserunning, stealing seven bases, with Schelle and Zimmerman each swiping multiple bags.

The momentum carried into Groton's second game as Post 39 overwhelmed Clark Area 16-1 in five innings.

After taking an early lead on an error in the first inning, Groton briefly saw the game tied in the third before erupting for six runs to regain control. Zimmerman delivered the biggest hit of the inning with a two-run single.

Post 39 then put the game away with a nine-run fourth inning. Easton Larson and Locke each drove in a run with singles, Hank Hill ripped a two-run double, Zimmerman added another RBI single, Schelle followed with a two-run single, and two Clark errors brought home two additional runs.

Schelle earned the victory on the mound, allowing just one run on three hits over 4 2/3 innings while striking out six and walking four. Bentley Ehresmann pitched in relief.

Groton pounded out 11 hits, led by three-hit performances from Schelle and Zimmerman. Keegan Kucker, Schelle, Zimmerman, Larson, Hill and Locke each drove in two runs. Kyson Kucker drew three walks as Groton again showed patience at the plate with 10 walks. Zimmerman stole two bases, while the defense turned a double play and played error-free baseball. Keegan Kucker anchored the defense with seven putouts.

With Thursday's sweep, Groton remains unbeaten in the regional tournament and is now one victory away from advancing to the state tournament. Friday's action begins at 5 p.m. when Clark Area and Redfield meet in an elimination game, with the winner advancing to face Groton approximately 30 minutes later. In the event Groton loses, there will be a rematch at 1 p.m. on Saturday.

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Trayce Schelle on the plate in U14 Region Tournament held Thursday in Groton. Groton defeated Red-field. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



Groton U14 infielders: Tucker Leicht at third base, Trayce Schelle at short stop and Mason Locke at second base. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



Outfielders Zach Fliehs and Xavier Ellenbacher. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



Tucker Leicht pitching. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



Groton U14 pitching is Kyson Kucker with Easton Larson at first base. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



Groton American Legion Post 39 provided the color honor guard prior to the first game of the U14 Groton American Legion Tournament. L-R Groton Legion members Bruce Babcock and Steve Dresbach. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)

Day County Fatal Crash

What: Single-vehicle, pedestrian fatal crash
Where: 130th Street and 412th Ave, 7 miles west of Pierpont, South Dakota
When: 10:43 p.m., Wednesday, July 15, 2026

Driver 1: 21-year-old male from Summit, South Dakota, no injuries
Vehicle 1: 2021 International MV607
Seat Belt Used: Yes

Pedestrian 1: 51-year-old male from Rochester, Minnesota, fatal injuries
Pedestrian 2: 53-year-old female from Bath, South Dakota, no injuries

Day County, S.D.- A Rochester, Minnesota man died Wednesday in a single-vehicle, pedestrian crash near Pierpont, South Dakota.

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

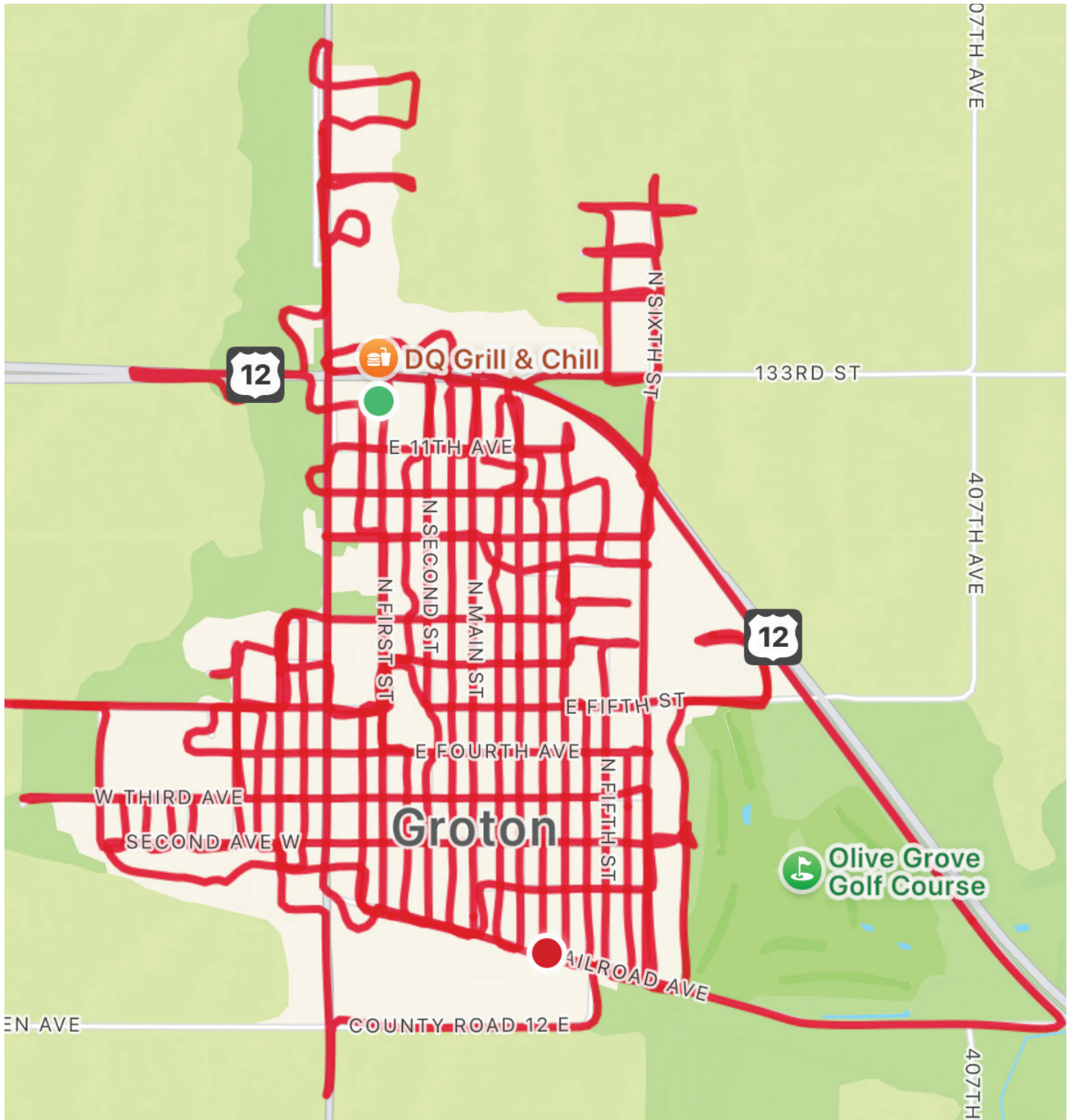
Preliminary crash information indicates the two pedestrians were driving westbound on 130th Street in a 2026 Kia earlier in the evening when they struck a deer. They returned in a second vehicle, a 1998 Honda CR-V, and parked in the westbound lane facing east. They exited the Honda, leaving the headlights on. At the same time, the driver of a 2021 International MV607 commercial truck was driving westbound on 130th Street when he approached the parked Honda. The driver of the International tried to avoid the vehicle and struck the male pedestrian, who was standing in the road, before striking the Honda. The male pedestrian sustained fatal injuries. The driver of the International and the second pedestrian were not injured.

The investigation is ongoing. All information released is preliminary.

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

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Adult Mosquito Control

The City of Groton conducted adult mosquito control Thursday night. The temperature was started at 86 degrees and went down to 79 by midnight with the wind out of the south-southeast at 5-10 mph. 9.8 gallons of MasterLine Kontrol 4-4 was used. Travel time was 2 hours and 47 minutes with a distance of 33 miles. Total cost of the application was around \$669.

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U10 Groton playing Aberdeen Smitty's at the NSU softball complex Wednesday night. Groton won the first game 6-5. (Photo by Karen Rose)



Nolan Rose is pitching. Sutton Swenson is on first. Quinton Ronning is on second. Jagger Penning is at outfield. (Photo by Karen Rose)

Enrich Groton's school supply drive equips nearly five dozen students for new school year

GROTON, S.D. — Nearly five dozen students will head back to class this fall with new school supplies thanks to the success of Enrich Groton SoDak Inc.'s fourth annual School Supply Drive.

The annual event provided free school supplies to students in the Groton Area School District, helping families reduce back-to-school expenses while ensuring children have the materials they need for a successful start to the school year.

The drive was made possible through support from Thrivent Action Teams, along with additional monetary donations that allowed organizers to purchase and distribute supplies.

The school supply drive is one of the organization's community outreach efforts and reflects Enrich Groton SoDak Inc.'s mission of supporting families and enriching the Groton community.

Volunteers assisted with organizing and distributing supplies during the event. Event Coordinator and Board Secretary April Abeln, along with Board President Topper Tastad, also played key roles in coordinating this year's drive.



Dorene Nelson and Ruby Larson
(Courtesy Photo April Abeln)



Mary Ann Martin
(Courtesy Photo April Abeln)



Karla Davidson from Dacotah Bank.
(Courtesy Photo April Abeln)



Kristie Gibbs
(Courtesy Photo April Abeln)



April Abeln
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Sue Stevenson
(Courtesy Photo April Abeln)



Heidi Locke from Dacotah Bank.
(Courtesy Photo April Abeln)



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Toby Doeden: A bitcoin evangelist and anti-property-tax crusader who wants to be governor

After decades striving to 'make a buck,' Aberdeen businessman succeeds and bets at least \$4 million of his own money on a campaign to lead South Dakota

BY JOSHUA HAIAR

Toby Doeden says he was born into poverty but climbed out of it through salesmanship, risk-taking and the force of his personality. He thinks those same traits could rescue South Dakota, a state he says needs saving.

The 51-year-old Republican businessman, landlord, developer, entrepreneur and bitcoin investor has put at least \$4 million of his own money into his campaign for governor, according to campaign finance reports. It's his first run for elected office.

"I'm risking literally everything I have to fight for the future of South Dakota," Doeden told South Dakota Public Broadcasting last year.

His critics, meanwhile, describe him as a pitchman whose confidence veers into overpromising about his campaign pledge to eliminate property taxes, and whose outspokenness has veered into offensive remarks on social media. A fellow Aberdeen resident and Republican, state Sen. Michael Rohl, is one of those critics.

"He enjoys the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought," Rohl said of Doeden.

Doeden stunned the political establishment by finishing first in the June 2 Republican primary ahead of the governor, a U.S. representative and the state speaker of the House. But Doeden failed to reach 35%, setting up a July 28 runoff with Gov. Larry Rhoden, the second-place finisher.

Neither Doeden nor his campaign team followed through on pledges to schedule an interview for this story, despite exchanging multiple messages with South Dakota Searchlight. Doeden sent written comments in some of those messages, including one accusing Rhoden of being unwilling to face the media. Rhoden, for his part, allowed a Searchlight reporter to interview him at his ranch in rural Union Center.

Rhoden has declined to debate Doeden ahead of the runoff, after they and the two other candidates in the June 2 primary all participated in three debates before that election. Doeden wants another debate.

"Someone unwilling to make themselves available to the press and to the people in advance of an elec-



Republican candidate for governor Toby Doeden speaks with members of the South Dakota NewsMedia Association on June 11, 2026, in Sioux Falls. (Photo by Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

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tion has no business holding an office as important as governor," Doeden wrote to Searchlight.

Although Doeden did not grant an interview for this story, he has revealed much about himself in past interviews and media appearances, including a podcast he started in 2024 called "Toby Doeden — Unfiltered."

Growing up in a 'loose environment'

Doeden grew up in Groton, a town of fewer than 1,500 people about 25 miles from Aberdeen in north-east South Dakota. He told SDPB he had a disabled father, a constantly working mother, and three much older siblings.

He said his parents left him "behind a little bit," explaining in his podcast that "by the time they get to their fourth child, especially when it's a 'oops,' so to speak," his parents were "kind of done with it."

That shaped him, he said.

"As a young kid, I remember always having to look for ways to entertain myself," Doeden said on the podcast. "From a very, very young age, I always had many entrepreneurial ideas. I was a daydreamer."

Doeden was interviewed in June for a YouTube show called "After the Call." He has been criticized for his outspokenness since childhood, he said in that interview. Teachers, bosses, coaches — and now political opponents — have all wanted him to act differently. Doeden's answer is that he can't turn it off.

"This is what you get," Doeden said. "I'm Toby 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and I'll never change. I don't care who likes it. I don't care who doesn't."

That brashness has manifested in controversial ways. Doeden has commented on Facebook that LGBTQ+ pride celebrations are a "smokescreen to distract the lost" from acknowledging "emptiness" and "loneliness," stemming from "hyper-sexualized narcissistic lifestyles." A string of Doeden's social media posts in 2023 encouraged the shooting of immigrants in gangs, used a profane insult to describe President Joe Biden, and labeled statistics about hatred of Jewish Americans as "fake."

During the 2024 campaign season, Doeden's political action committee hosted a rally featuring a video message from Mark Robinson, a Republican who was running for governor of North Carolina. CNN had just reported that Robinson made racist and sexually explicit remarks more than a decade earlier on a pornographic website's message board.

Doeden stood by Robinson. In response to Republican officials who condemned the event, Doeden told Searchlight at the time that the critics "aren't conservatives."

"These people are hacks. They're clowns. They're disgusting," Doeden said.

Doeden traces his outspokenness to his upbringing, saying in the YouTube interview that his parents allowed him and his siblings to grow up in a "loose environment." That upbringing became "the number one driving factor to my success today," Doeden said, "and nobody will ever convince me any different." The environment gave him the freedom to try and fail, he said, and to express his creativity.

Struggling to 'make a buck'

Doeden said on his podcast that he tried college, but it wasn't for him. He does not have a college degree. From there, he tried almost everything. Owning vending machines. Selling and installing satellite dishes. Factory work. Starting a paint business with his parents.

"If there was a way to try to make a buck, I tried it," he said on his podcast.

While newly married to Liz — his wife of 30 years — and expecting the first of their four children, Doeden was working at a gas station in Groton.

Then, in 1997, he landed a job as a car salesman at Aberdeen Chrysler Center. In his first month, he said on his podcast, he sold 20 vehicles.

"I had made more money than I had ever dreamed of," Doeden said.

He ultimately rose to become general manager, then a partner, and then bought out the mentor who hired him. Doeden said on his podcast that he eventually became uneasy with having all his wealth tied up in his vehicle dealership, and he wanted to diversify.

In an on-the-record meeting last month with members of the South Dakota NewsMedia Association attended by Searchlight, Doeden said he diversified by buying everyday businesses: rental properties, gas

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stations, a coffee shop, car washes, lumber yards, an event space, liquor stores and casinos.

"I've built thriving businesses and created thousands of jobs right here in South Dakota," Doeden said in one of his early campaign ads.

One of Doeden's critics, Jim Thares, founder and CEO of Primrose Retirement Communities, is a long-time businessman and developer in the Aberdeen area. He disputes Doeden's portrayal of himself as the creator of thousands of jobs, arguing that "most of his workers were already employed by businesses Doeden later purchased."

Doeden's adult children all work for his companies. He told the NewsMedia Association that his family life counters a popular caricature of him.

"How could he be crazy and angry?" he said, referring to himself. Reaching for Liz, he joked, "Why would she still be here?"

Charitable giving

Now that he has the means, Doeden said in the YouTube interview, he often opens the GoFundMe charitable giving website, searches "South Dakota," and looks for people in need.

Some GoFundMe donations are publicly viewable, though donors can give anonymously. Searchlight found \$3,000 from Doeden to an Aberdeen woman allegedly assaulted in her home and hospitalized, \$2,000 to a Sioux Falls child fighting leukemia, \$300 to help a couple care for their premature baby, and \$500 for a similar situation.

Kelsea Schwab said her family encountered Doeden when he made an unexpected \$2,000 donation for her seriously ill daughter who was dealing with liver failure in 2022, after the family had already lost a younger daughter to sudden infant death syndrome. Doeden kept checking in afterward, used his businesses to help raise money for the deceased child's headstone, and donated "thousands and thousands of dollars" during a Ronald McDonald House gala at her invitation, Schwab said.

"Yes, he has a lot of money, but he also uses it for a lot of good," Schwab told Searchlight.

Doeden founded a charity, the 4J Foundation, in 2020, primarily focused on Aberdeen-area children and pets in need. In 2021, the foundation gave \$250,000 to the Aberdeen Area Humane Society, which used the money to build the Doeden Family Animal Shelter.

"I've donated literally millions of dollars to charities, families, humane centers, humane societies," Doeden told the Aberdeen Insider newspaper in June, adding "nobody has been more generous, not just in giving money, but just giving my time to people."

Thares said he could not recall Doeden "contributing in a significant way to any of the projects" of which Thares has knowledge from his years of involvement in the community.

Harvey Jewett of Aberdeen is a philanthropist, attorney, entrepreneur, former president of Super 8 Motels, and former longtime member of the state Board of Regents, which oversees South Dakota's public universities. He disputes Doeden's characterization about the extent of Doeden's charitable giving.

"If someone had donated millions of dollars in the Aberdeen area, I would have known about it," Jewett said.

Fighting his own property taxes while pledging to eliminate them

Doeden has also invested extensively in real estate, including buying and renovating dilapidated apartments.

Searchlight located a total of \$39.8 million worth of property owned by Doeden or his companies in Brown, Spink and Edmunds counties, with the majority in Brown County, which includes Aberdeen as the county seat. Taxes on those properties total more than \$680,000, according to public records.

Property tax rates are applied to a property's value, which is assessed by county officials. Property owners who think their assessed value is too high can appeal to a local board.

One of Doeden's companies appealed the valuations of 47 Brown County properties this year, according to county Equalization Office records, but later withdrew all but nine of the appeals. The other nine were adjusted downward.

Doeden announced his bid for governor in May 2025 in Aberdeen with a pledge about property taxes.

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"As governor, I will fight to eliminate property taxes so that each and every resident — regardless of class, color, creed or profession — can truly own their home and their land once and for all," Doeden said.

He has continued to make similar pledges, sometimes saying he will "phase out" property taxes. More recently, Doeden's campaign spokesman told Searchlight the plan only applies to owner-occupied properties — in other words, homeowners, not agricultural or commercial properties.

South Dakotans paid \$1.86 billion in property taxes last year, including \$815 million from homeowners, but none of that money goes to state government. It all goes to schools, counties, cities and smaller units of government. Searchlight asked Doeden in a May podcast interview how he would make up that lost revenue for those jurisdictions.

"Once the economy starts growing, and it will; once I start collecting external revenue, which we will; and once I cut all the fat and pork out of our state budget, you are going to see, very quickly, within a matter of a couple years, a significant amount of annual budget surpluses," Doeden said. "And yes, I will use that money to target the phase-out of things like property tax."

One of the opponents Doeden beat in the June 2 primary, U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, criticized Doeden's tax plan in an April debate.

"The math just doesn't work," Johnson said. "Hopes and dreams didn't work for Obama and they're not going to work for eliminating property taxes either."

Bitcoin evangelism

Beyond his businesses and rental properties, Doeden is an evangelist for bitcoin. It's a cryptocurrency, which is a type of digital money secured by encryption technology. Cryptocurrencies enable the transfer of value online without a bank or payment processor, and some cryptocurrencies, including bitcoin, are used as investment vehicles.

In his podcast, Doeden said he began investing in bitcoin "very, very heavily" around 2020 after devoting around "500 hours" of research to it.

"I will buy bitcoin forever, every single day," he said. "We mine bitcoin, we buy bitcoin."

Investing in bitcoin means buying and later selling it when its value increases. New bitcoin is "mined" using large amounts of electricity to make trillions of calculations. The goal is to solve a puzzle that awards the "miner" a newly created bitcoin.

Doeden devoted an entire episode of his podcast to discussing and promoting bitcoin.

"As I learned more and more about it, I just kept essentially taking almost all of my cash reserves from all of my companies that I knew I wasn't going to need anytime soon, and we just converted it from cash to bitcoin," he said.

In 2022, Doeden's Plaza Rentals company and his son, Jackson, received permission from a local zoning board to operate a bitcoin mining facility in Aberdeen. When Searchlight sent Doeden messages asking for more information about that operation, Doeden responded by text message: "I don't think there's a single reader in the state that's gonna find this interesting."

He did not respond to a message asking how much of his current wealth is from or is invested in cryptocurrencies.

State Rep. Logan Manhart, R-Aberdeen — who lost in the June 2 primary election — has been working with Doeden's campaign. Manhart sponsored bills each of the last two legislative sessions to allow the South Dakota Investment Council to invest in bitcoin.

The council manages investments that fund the pensions of public employees in the state, ranging from teachers to state office workers to police, as well as other investment funds that produce revenue for the state budget.

Doeden supported Manhart's bitcoin legislation and took it a step further, posting on social media in January 2025 that "South Dakota needs a Bitcoin Reserve," while sharing Manhart's post about his legislation.

The Investment Council and the governor's budget office were among the opponents who testified against Manhart's legislation, saying bitcoin is too volatile and would damage the state's standing with bond-rating agencies. The value of one bitcoin has swung dramatically, from less than \$20,000 in 2023 to

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more than \$100,000 last year.

State law requires the council to prioritize the safety of its funds, "not speculation," explained Matt Clark, who leads the council.

"Bitcoin does not have any underlying physical use," Clark said in his testimony.

Doeden shared a theory on his podcast about resistance to bitcoin.

"I think the system has programmed regular people to scare the bejeezus out of them because they don't want you and me buying bitcoin. Because they want to own all of it, right?" Doeden said. "The globalists in this world that want complete control of the world."

Politically activated by a pandemic and a pipeline

Doeden said on his podcast that he was not politically engaged until around the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is also when he and his wife became empty nesters, and when both of Doeden's parents died — one of cancer and the other of heart disease.

In his June YouTube interview, Doeden said he started thinking about running for office after attending a pandemic-era rally supporting landowners fighting a carbon sequestration pipeline. Doeden recalled standing up at the rally and declaring that U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, would become governor "over my dead body." The crowd's response, Doeden said, was an "aha moment."

Johnson, who led in several early polls, finished third behind Doeden and Rhoden in the June 2 Republican governor primary, ahead of state House Speaker Jon Hansen.

Doeden said he decided to run for governor after the assassination attempt against President Donald Trump in July 2024 at Butler, Pennsylvania. Doeden told the NewsMedia Association that he looked at his wife and said he had "never felt more like a coward."

"Here I am, living the good life in Aberdeen, South Dakota," Doeden said. "Who the hell is Toby Doeden to be too good to run for public office?"

His message has resonated with some Republicans looking for change. Abram Naber, 42, of Rapid City, said in a primary day polling place interview with Searchlight that he didn't cast a vote in the congressional, legislative or local races: "Just Toby."

"He's an outsider of the political spectrum," Naber said. "I think we need fresh meat, fresh blood in the Governor's Office."

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Larry Rhoden: Rancher, welder and three-decade politician makes his case to earn SD's trust

Republican is seeking nomination in runoff election and a chance to win his own four-year term after taking over for Noem

BY MAKENZIE HUBER

South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden leaned forward in a leather recliner in his living room, considering the criticism from a former colleague about their disagreements.

"I think there's probably some fair statements in there," Rhoden finally said.

In his late 30s and early 40s while on the Meade School District Board, Rhoden couldn't back up his opinions effectively during debates, Terry Koontz said. She served with him on the board more than 25 years ago.

"Of all the board members I worked with, he's the worst," Koontz said.

The two clashed over policies ranging from rural education and homeschooling to the proposed location of a rodeo arena near Sturgis Brown High School. Rhoden became frustrated and angry when the board didn't vote his way — which Koontz said was often.

Koontz's characterization of Rhoden stands at odds with the reputation he's built in state politics over the last two decades as a convener and collaborator. Rhoden, 67, said he's changed.

"At that age, I wasn't patient with people, especially when I thought they were stuck on stupid. It got me angry."

That frustration, he said, pushed him to be more considerate of others' opinions as he continued in politics. He believes those and other life lessons have prepared him to seek his own four-year term as South Dakota's lead executive, after being elevated from lieutenant governor 17 months ago when Gov. Kristi Noem resigned to join President Donald Trump's administration.

"Every step of the way you learn, you mature," Rhoden said.

Koontz's experience colored her impression of Rhoden, pushing her to vote for "anyone but him" as he climbed South Dakota's political ladder. In the four-way race for the Republican nomination for governor in the June 2 primary, she voted for political newcomer Toby Doeden. She plans to vote for Doeden again — and against Rhoden — in the July 28 runoff between the two.

Ranch provides roots and a refuge

Walking along the gravel road winding through his ranch, Rhoden points out a small white house hidden behind trees and overgrown shrubs. He grew up there with his father, mother, three brothers and twin sister.



South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden drinks a cup of coffee on June 26, 2026, in the living room at his ranch near Union Center. (Photo by Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

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Rhoden learned how to drive at 8 years old on a tractor pulling a mower in a nearby field, and he attended a two-room country school down the road in Union Center. One of his first memories of chores on the ranch was gathering and washing chicken eggs with his sister to sell at a Sturgis grocery store about 45 miles away.

He knew his future was on the family ranch spanning a couple thousand acres. Both sets of grandparents homesteaded within 20 miles of his home, and he can point toward the location of the log cabin his mother grew up in nearby.

He surrounds himself with reminders of his family history, including furniture he crafted from his mother's childhood cabin, and a gavel and knife handles he made from a black walnut tree that shaded his childhood summers.

His ancestors came to South Dakota with "big ideas and big hopes, and then they got slapped in the face with reality the first winter they spent out here," Rhoden said.

His family stuck it out, and he sees that same determination in his neighbors today.

"It was the ones who were the toughest and the most industrious, that gutted it out, the smartest that were able to find a way to eke out a living, and that became the foundation for our state," Rhoden said. "I think about that a lot."

But as Rhoden's career in politics has advanced, his time on the ranch has dwindled.

During his 16 years in the Legislature, he struggled to keep up with chores at home. A neighbor drove several miles to his ranch daily to feed his cattle during the three-month legislative sessions. When Noem asked Rhoden to temporarily add interim secretary of agriculture to his duties as lieutenant governor, he sold the cattle to that neighbor's son and leased some of his land out to him.

Rhoden's father taught him to weld, and Rhoden started a business years ago on the ranch making custom branding irons. Since he became governor, the youngest of his four sons has largely taken that over.

Now, welding serves as therapy.

"Anytime we come home, if there's still daylight, I'll change clothes and come out to the shop and light up the forge," Rhoden said.

National Guard, political experience

Rhoden graduated from high school at the private Sunshine Bible Academy in 1977. He attended a vocational ranch management program in Rapid City but dropped out, saying he didn't think the vocational classes were practical enough for ranch life. Rhoden is one of 12 governors in South Dakota history to lack a college degree.

He joined the South Dakota National Guard in 1978, went to welding school for his occupational specialty and served for six years, mostly in a maintenance battalion in Sturgis as part of the 842nd Engineering Company.

His time at basic training tested his mental and physical limits, he said. Being "yelled at in the face" taught him to keep his cool in stressful situations, something he said served him well while leading lawmakers in the "pressure cooker" of the Legislature as assistant House majority leader and then House majority leader. He served as a legislator from 2001 to 2014 and again from 2017 to 2018.

Rhoden's wife, first lady Sandy Rhoden, learned alongside him in his political career. The two met and married each other in their early 20s, raised their four sons and now have nine grandchildren. Though Sandy, a former teacher, said she didn't expect her husband to become governor, she saw he was "cut out for leadership" positions early on.

"There've been times I've had to encourage him to do things because I feel like I have a really good perspective of his abilities. If it's not something I think he'd be good at, I'm not going to encourage him to do it," Sandy said. "But if I think he should, then I do. And with the governor's race, I don't know of anybody else who I think is more capable of governing right now."

Rhoden suffered some setbacks while attempting to win higher offices. He lost a bid for majority leader in the state Senate in 2011 and said he learned how to "be effective because of who you are and not what your position is" as a rank-and-file member. He described learning how to "lose well" in his failed bid

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for the U.S. Senate in 2014, when he finished second in a five-way primary that included former governor and eventual U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds.

Rhoden introduced and endorsed Rounds at that year's Republican convention, and called for party unity.

"That paid dividends for me for years after that," Rhoden said, "because they had all of the leaders of the party there, and my stock went up in value because of that. And I think it ultimately had an impact on Kristi's decision to ask me to be a running mate."

It took Rhoden "probably a total of three seconds," he said, to accept Noem's invitation to be her running mate in 2018. The two had previously served together as legislators.

"It's that sense that God put you on the planet to do more than serve yourself," said Rhoden, a lifelong Baptist.

"I remember an old-timer who told me, 'You should run for office for what you can do, not what you can be,'" Rhoden added. "I think there's a lot of wisdom in that. Too many people want a title rather than want to make a difference in serving the state."

After he took over for Noem when she departed in January 2025, she sparked national controversy as secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. Federal agents under her authority fatally shot two people during immigration enforcement operations in Minneapolis.

"There are people that think it's a detriment to be tied to Kristi, and people that think it's an advantage," Rhoden said. "For me, it doesn't really matter, because other people's opinions aren't going to change the way I view my relationship with her, my past working experience with her, and how much I valued the job she did."

Trust and relationships

Rhoden said his faith is what makes him effective as governor.

"Having the moral compass of speaking the truth all the time and putting that ahead of any political agenda is central for me when I talk about my ability to build relationships and bring people together," Rhoden said. "That's all predicated upon trust and people's trust in your integrity."

But he acknowledged he can still get frustrated and angry like he did when he served on the school board. Some of his modern colleagues have observed that.

Republican former Senate President Pro Tempore Lee Schoenbeck, of Watertown, said he's gone "toe to toe" with Rhoden behind closed doors.

"But the thing with Larry is I always knew even if we disagreed about one thing he'd have my back as far as the institution went on another thing," Schoenbeck said.

Schoenbeck added that Rhoden was accessible to make deals and talk through issues during Noem's administration when she was not. Schoenbeck expects an inclusive decision-making process if Rhoden is elected.

"Larry understands that when you live in Union Center, you can see a lot of land but not many people," Schoenbeck said. "He gets that he needs a lot of those other folks that come from a lot of different places and perspectives to make sure he's making good decisions."

Nancy Turbak Berry, a Democratic former legislator who served with Rhoden, said she has appreciated Rhoden's commitment to civility in difficult situations. She is a plaintiff in a lawsuit attempting to invalidate anti-abortion-pill legislation that Rhoden signed into law in March.

Despite their political differences, Turbak Berry said Rhoden has been "open and respectful" to her input through the years — including her unsolicited text messages to him during his governorship and on the campaign trail.

"A lot of people in Republican politics in South Dakota have become so arrogant about the power that comes with a one-party state that they think they don't have to deal with anybody outside of the party," Turbak Berry said. "A lot of people would ignore me or respond with hostility. Rhoden has never done that."

That dynamic has earned her vote — she temporarily switched her party affiliation ahead of the primary to vote for him, she said. She plans to vote for him again in the runoff before switching her registration back.

"I trust him," Turbak Berry said.

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Rhoden was registered as a Democrat early in his life. Both of his parents were children of the Great Depression and “beholden,” he said, to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his Depression-era federal work programs.

“I always say I was Democrat by birth and Republican by choice,” Rhoden said, adding that Ronald Reagan (who was also a former Democrat) had the largest political influence on him as a young man.

It wasn’t until the 1990s, a few years before he made a run for the Legislature, that he switched his party affiliation to Republican.

Legislative record

During his legislative career, Rhoden worked to support what he called “conservative values.”

He sponsored a successful bill in 2004 that exempted trucking services from sales taxes, saving trucking companies and costing the state about \$4 million annually.

He worked for years to restrict the Department of Game, Fish and Parks’ use of the open fields doctrine, which allowed the department’s law enforcement officers to enter private land without a landowner’s permission while enforcing hunting and fishing laws. In 2021, while Rhoden was lieutenant governor, lawmakers passed legislation he supported that specified when the department’s officers can enter private land and when they must obtain permission or a warrant.

Rhoden was the main sponsor of a bill to change the taxable valuation of agricultural land from a market-based system to a productivity-based system, which helped to limit the growth of property taxes on farm and ranch land.

Rhoden supported pro-gun bills and anti-abortion legislation. That included the 2005 abortion trigger ban that went into effect after the U.S. Supreme Court’s Dobbs decision in 2022. The law prohibits all abortions except those deemed medically necessary to save the life of the mother.

“It’s kind of laughable when I see stuff on Facebook of people trying to brand me as moderate or whatever,” Rhoden said. “I think people get confused. They think you can’t be conservative if you get along with people, or that if you’re not picking fights then you’re not a conservative.”

Rhoden also introduced the successful legislation in 2003 that designated rodeo as the official sport of South Dakota.

‘Steady hand at the helm’

After taking over for Noem, Rhoden said, he didn’t decide to seek his own term as governor until he proved to himself that he could do the job.

His potential candidacy ultimately hinged, he said, on his ability to win approval for the construction of a \$650 million men’s prison in Sioux Falls — the largest capital project in state history, which had already failed in the Legislature once — during a special legislative session in September of last year. Rhoden argued a new prison is needed to replace dangerously out-of-date facilities at the state’s 145-year-old penitentiary, and to provide more programming space to help people avoid returning to prison after their release.

By the time of the special session, there were already three other Republican candidates for governor, all with lawmakers supporting them who didn’t particularly want Rhoden getting a policy win and joining the race, he recalled. Lawmakers approved the prison plan, using money set aside during the prior several years to avoid taking on debt.

That was the last of what Rhoden has called the “three P’s” that he inherited as unresolved issues when he became governor: the prison, a pipeline and property taxes.

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

Dave Knudson served as Senate majority leader in the Legislature while Rhoden was House majority leader. Knudson said he voted for Rhoden in June and plans to do so again this month.

“I think the important thing is we have a steady hand at the helm of state government that won’t run us

off the road at all and just continue to make life better on an incremental basis for the average citizen," Knudson said. "I think Rhoden has the ability to do that."

If he makes it past the runoff and is elected in November against Democratic nominee Dan Ahlers, Rhoden said the next four years will look similar to the last year and a half: task forces and roundtables to seek understanding and collaboration on divisive issues, conservative fiscal policy, and investment in South Dakota's industries and workforce.

"It's hanging meat on the bones of the visions we've laid out," Rhoden said.

"I'm not just talking big talk. We've delivered results," he added. "I've been doing the job, and we've been doing a pretty good job of delivering results for South Dakota, and that's what we'll continue to do if they give me another four years."

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.

Indigenous violence survivors see fewer services after federal cuts

A US House committee hearing raised questions about public safety resources

BY NADA HASSANEIN



Friends and family members hold posters of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Duluth, Minn., in February. A new report found American Indian and Alaska Native survivors of violence say reductions in federal funding have led to over 1,000 unmet requests for help. (Photo by Frank Zufall/Wisconsin Examiner)

were for children, according to the survey, which collected responses between May and June 28 of last year.

Between 36% and 41% of various services provided by the surveyed groups, ranging from healthcare to legal assistance, "have been or will be reduced due to funding cuts," according to the report. About 20% of services for active duty or veterans were reduced, according to the survey.

The Trump administration cut millions of dollars from and rescinded grants across multiple federal agen-

Organizations serving American Indian and Alaska Native survivors of violence say reductions in federal funding have led to over 1,000 unmet requests for help, according to a new report.

The Urban Indian Health Institute, an Indigenous health research group, surveyed 201 tribes, tribal organizations and urban Indian organizations and nonprofits about how funding cuts are affecting the survivor support and safety services they offer. These include safe housing, counseling, transportation, direct cash assistance, and court accompaniment for survivors of crime and violence. Other services include advocacy for victims of elder abuse, people with disabilities or people who had been trafficked.

Democratic U.S. Rep. Adelita Grijalva of Arizona discussed the report at a congressional hearing Tuesday.

Amid cuts under the Trump administration, tribal organizations reported being unable to fulfill 690 safe housing-related requests and 466 requests related to other services. Almost a quarter of those

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cies, including the departments of Justice and of Health and Human Services. Following backlash, some grants were restored, but many, including domestic violence and victim services funds, remain slashed. While some of the funds may have been reinstated since the survey was conducted, the uncertainty and reductions have resulted in staff layoffs or hesitancy to reinstate programs.

For the majority of organizations and tribes surveyed, federal funding covered over half of their program budgets, with the U.S. Department of Justice funding 46%, followed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services at 36%. Stateline didn't receive a response from either agency by publication time.

Congressional testimony

During a U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources hearing Tuesday, the Urban Indian Health Institute's director, Abigail Echo-Hawk, testified about violence disparities Native communities face, as well as how organizations surveyed in the report are worried about rehiring laid-off staff due to financial uncertainty. Echo-Hawk, a member of the Pawnee Nation, also spoke about her group's work helping trafficking survivors and other victims of violence. The hearing was focused on resources to address the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous people, or MMIP.

Grijalva asked whether the Bureau of Indian Affairs' public safety and justice budget request of \$560 million, a decrease of \$9.7 million from the prior fiscal year, was enough. She pointed to a 2024 report that showed the BIA estimated that in 2021, \$3.5 billion would have been needed to meet Indian Country's public safety and justice needs. The agency spent \$446.7 million that year, the report shows.

Cherokee Nation member Charles Addington, principal director of justice services and law enforcement for Indian affairs at the U.S. Department of the Interior, said the federal government is doing the best it can with limited resources.

"We are trying to take in all of our resources and make sure that we are meeting the needs the best we can with what we are provided," Addington said in response. "We're looking at ways of streamlining our resources and working smarter with what we have."

During the hearing, Echo-Hawk also shared her own story of surviving sexual assault as a child. When the assault was reported, "Law enforcement made the decision to not prosecute as a result of what they said was 'lack of resources,'" she said during her testimony.

In the institute's report, nearly half of surveyed organizations said they struggle to recruit tribal law enforcement officers, and 43% said they struggle with keeping them after training.

"I hope that every single one of you recognizes that my rape was not partisan," Echo-Hawk testified. "And you all now have a responsibility to stand with us. This is in your hands to uphold treaty and trust obligations."

Violence against Native women

Violence is a public health issue across Native communities, and Native women and girls suffer disproportionately higher rates than other racial groups.

A federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report showed over half of American Indian and Alaska Native women and men experienced intimate partner violence during their lifetimes. Violence inflicted by an intimate partner was a factor in 38% of homicides among Native women, and 44% of Native women reported being raped.

Native sexual assault victims were most often girls, aged 12 to 17, according to an FBI analysis of crime victim data between 2021 and 2023.

According to the Urban Indian Health Institute survey, more than 25,000 Native survivors received services over the course of a year. Over a quarter — 28% — were Native children, while 8% were women who were pregnant or postpartum.

The Arizona-based Southwest Indigenous Women's Coalition works with tribes serving domestic violence and sexual assault survivors. Director of Policy Rose Quilt, of the Yakama Nation, noted that under treaty and trust responsibilities, the federal government has a debt to tribes. "This was already prepaid by the blood of our ancestors, and through the strength of their negotiation for treaties," she said.

"Programs today are stretching everything," she continued. "They are delaying hiring, cutting travel,

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reducing their hours, and trying to prioritize emergency needs in order to fill these gaps.”

Echo-Hawk told Stateline that recently, an 80-year-old sexual assault victim came to her team for help. The woman had needed a change of clean clothes, but Echo-Hawk’s team only had 5X-sized sweatpants to give the frail, petite woman.

“We simply don’t have what we need to provide the basic dignity that these people deserve,” Echo-Hawk said. “She deserved clothes that fit her in one of the most horrifying times in her life.”

Stateline reporter Nada Hassanein can be reached at nhassanein@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.

Nada Hassanein is a health care reporter for Stateline with a focus on inequities.

US House panel approves \$95B GOP-only budget blueprint BY JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — Republicans on the U.S. House Budget Committee approved their budget resolution Thursday, marking one small step forward in the complicated process that could allow the party to enact a third party-line bill.

The 20-14 vote followed hours of debate over amendments from Democrats that sought to roll back pieces of the earlier Republican packages and change how the upcoming process would work. None of the Democratic changes were approved.

Texas Republican Rep. Chip Roy, Texas Democratic Rep. Veronica Escobar and Virgin Islands Democratic Delegate Stacey Plaskett didn’t vote.

House Republican leaders are likely to bring the budget resolution to the floor next week before that chamber leaves for its five-week August recess, now expected July 23.

The Senate will be in session for an additional two weeks after that before beginning its summer break, though it isn’t clear if GOP leadership in that chamber will bring the budget measure up for a vote.

Process to provide funds for defense, farms

Both chambers of Congress must adopt a budget resolution in order to unlock the budget reconciliation process that will allow them to move another bill without Democratic support.

House Republicans said during committee debate they hope another package would provide up to \$95 billion. That currently unreleased measure would bolster aid to farmers, provide more funding to the Defense Department and implement pieces of a voter identification bill they’ve dubbed the SAVE America Act.

“We are going to use reconciliation to make a run at doing what we think will save this country for our children’s future and for the remainder of this century,” Budget Committee Chairman Jodey Arrington, R-Texas, said. “I can’t think of a more important thing to work on.”



A potential Republican budget reconciliation package would provide up to \$60 billion for the Department of Defense. Shown is an aerial view of the Pentagon. (Photo by Air Force

Tech. Sgt. Brittany A. Chase/Department of Defense)

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Pennsylvania Democratic Rep. Brendan Boyle, ranking member on the committee, criticized Republicans for not focusing on how to make life more affordable for everyday Americans.

"Over the last 18 months, we have seen where Republicans' priorities are: trillions of dollars in tax cuts for billionaires, tens of billions of dollars for war and absolutely nothing for the American people," Boyle said.

Democratic changes rebuffed

Democrats offered more than a dozen amendments during debate, including one from Vermont Rep. Becca Balint that would have removed the instructions for the Armed Services Committee and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

Republicans' budget resolution, once approved by both chambers, would allow the Armed Services Committee to spend up to \$60 billion and the Intelligence panel to spend up to \$13 billion.

"My colleagues use the deficit as a pretext to excuse increasing hunger and deepening poverty in this country," Balint said. "They preach fiscal responsibility, and yet, when it comes to approving tens of billions of dollars in additional Pentagon spending, they are a rubber stamp."

Michigan Republican Rep. Jack Bergman spoke against the proposal, saying the additional defense funding "is necessary to support our troops and supply them with the munitions and anything else they need to fight, win and return home safely."

In addition to providing instructions for more defense spending, the budget resolution would allow the Agriculture Committee to write a bill that would provide up to \$12 billion in additional aid to farmers.

The Administration Committee would be able to spend up to \$10 billion, likely to create a grant program for states that institute voter identification requirements.

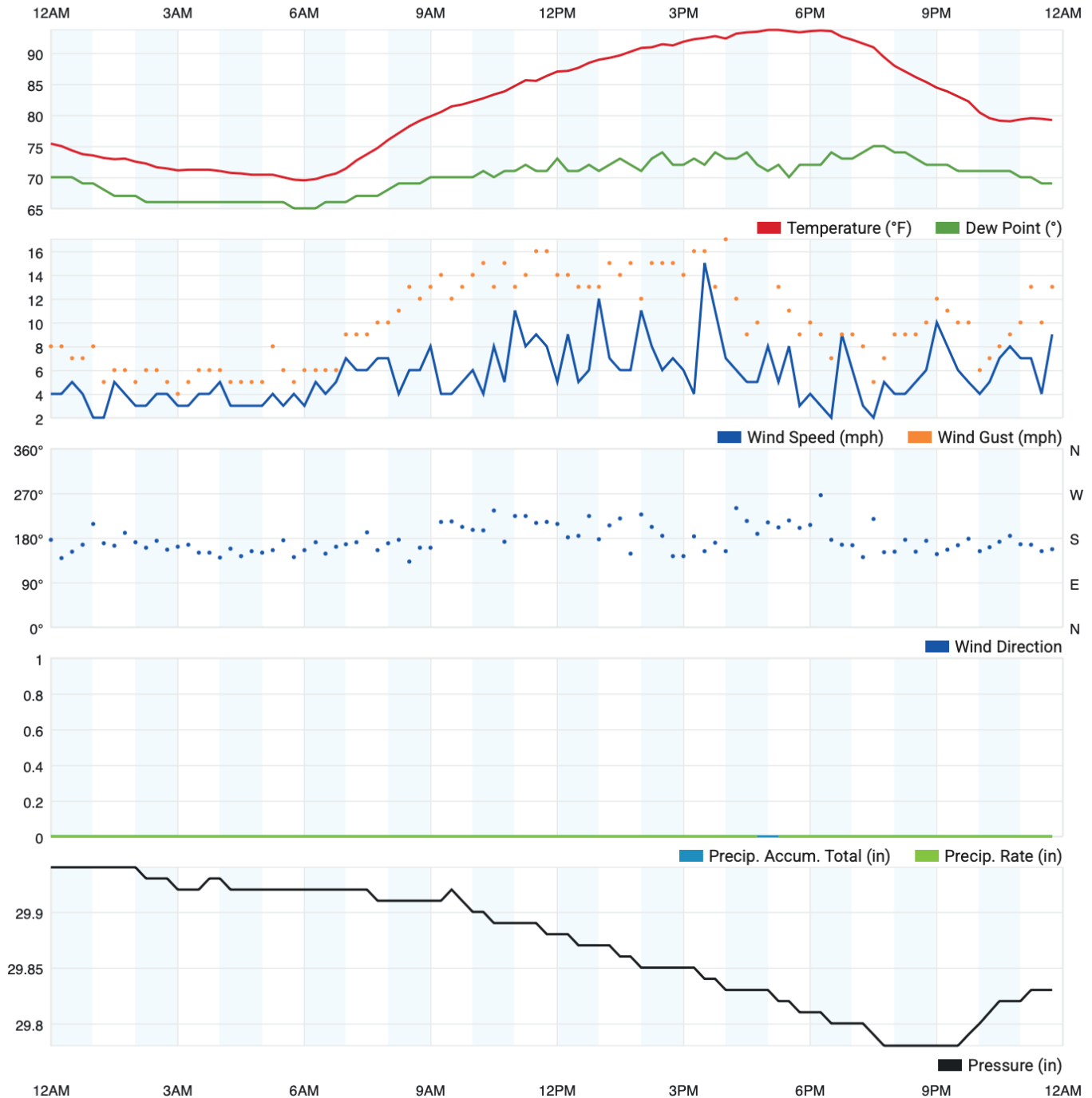
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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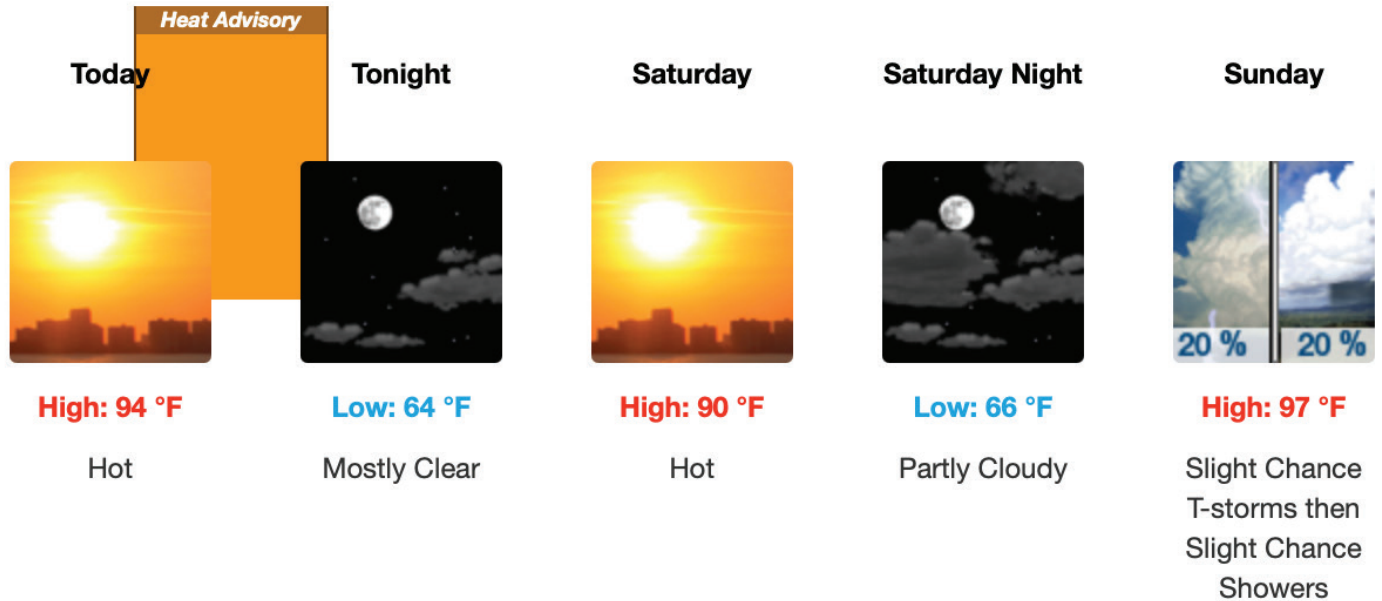
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

July 16, 2026



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Heatwave Continues Through the Weekend

July 16, 2026
2:24 PM

Key Messages

- Temperatures and humidity remain consistent the rest of the week and weekend.
 - ◆ **Overall highs in the upper 80s to the lower 100s, hottest across central SD.**
- Dewpoints in the upper 50s to upper 60s, highest James Valley and eastward.
 - ◆ **Heat Index Values from 90s to low 100s.**
- While the heat continues, it's expected to drop below heat advisory criteria, so the heat advisory will be allowed to expire this evening.
- *The ongoing 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

		7/17	7/18	7/19	7/20
		Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon
Aberdeen	Max Temp	96	91	98	96
	HeatIndex	100	89	101	94
Britton	Max Temp	91	86	92	91
	HeatIndex	95	85	94	90
Chamberlain	Max Temp	102	96	102	100
	HeatIndex	103	95	104	98
Clark	Max Temp	94	86	92	90
	HeatIndex	96	85	94	89
Eagle Butte	Max Temp	96	92	100	96
	HeatIndex	96	90	100	93
Eureka	Max Temp	94	90	97	93
	HeatIndex	94	87	97	90
Gettysburg	Max Temp	98	92	100	96
	HeatIndex	98	89	101	93
McIntosh	Max Temp	92	90	98	93
	HeatIndex	91	88	97	91
Milbank	Max Temp	95	86	91	90
	HeatIndex	100	86	94	90

		7/17	7/18	7/19	7/20
		Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon
Miller	Max Temp	98	91	99	96
	HeatIndex	98	89	101	94
Mobridge	Max Temp	97	94	100	96
	HeatIndex	97	91	101	93
Murdo	Max Temp	99	94	101	97
	HeatIndex	99	93	101	95
Pierre	Max Temp	101	97	104	100
	HeatIndex	102	96	105	98
Redfield	Max Temp	99	92	99	97
	HeatIndex	100	90	100	95
Sisseton	Max Temp	93	86	91	91
	HeatIndex	97	86	93	90
Watertown	Max Temp	96	88	93	91
	HeatIndex	99	87	95	91
Webster	Max Temp	92	85	90	88
	HeatIndex	95	84	93	87
Wheaton	Max Temp	93	87	90	91
	HeatIndex	97	86	91	90

Maximum Temperature Forecast (°F)

Maximum Heat Index Forecast (°F)



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Hot temperatures continuing Friday and through the weekend as the region remains under the heat dome. High temperatures remain in the upper 80s to the lower 100s. Saturday is expected to be a bit cooler, with highs and heat index values in the mid 80s to mid 90s, before it heat up again Sunday and Monday.

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Maximum HeatRisk

July 16, 2026
2:24 PM CDT

Key Messages

- Maximum HeatRisk is expected to be **Moderate** to **Major** for Friday and potentially dropping into **Minor** for some areas this weekend before increasing again.
- 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.

Average HeatRisk Forecast

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



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

HeatRisk is expected to be in the Moderate to Major category for Friday and potentially dropping into Minor for some areas this weekend before increasing again. No overnight relief is expected and impacts to anyone without cooling/hydration or sensitive to heat could occur. Make sure to be on the lookout for any symptoms of heat related illnesses. Never leave children or pets unattended in a hot vehicle. Look before you lock!

Practice HEAT SAFETY Wherever You Are

Heat related deaths are preventable.
Protect yourself and others from the
impacts of heat waves.



weather.gov/heat



Job Sites

Stay hydrated and
take breaks in the shade
as often as possible



Indoors

Check up on the
elderly, sick and those
without AC



Vehicles

Never leave kids or
pets unattended -
LOOK before you LOCK



Outdoors

Limit strenuous outdoor
activities, find shade,
and stay hydrated

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 94 °F at 4:59 PM

Low Temp: 70 °F at 5:55 AM

Wind: 18 mph at 3:58 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 111 in 1936

Record Low: 44 in 1895

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 1.90

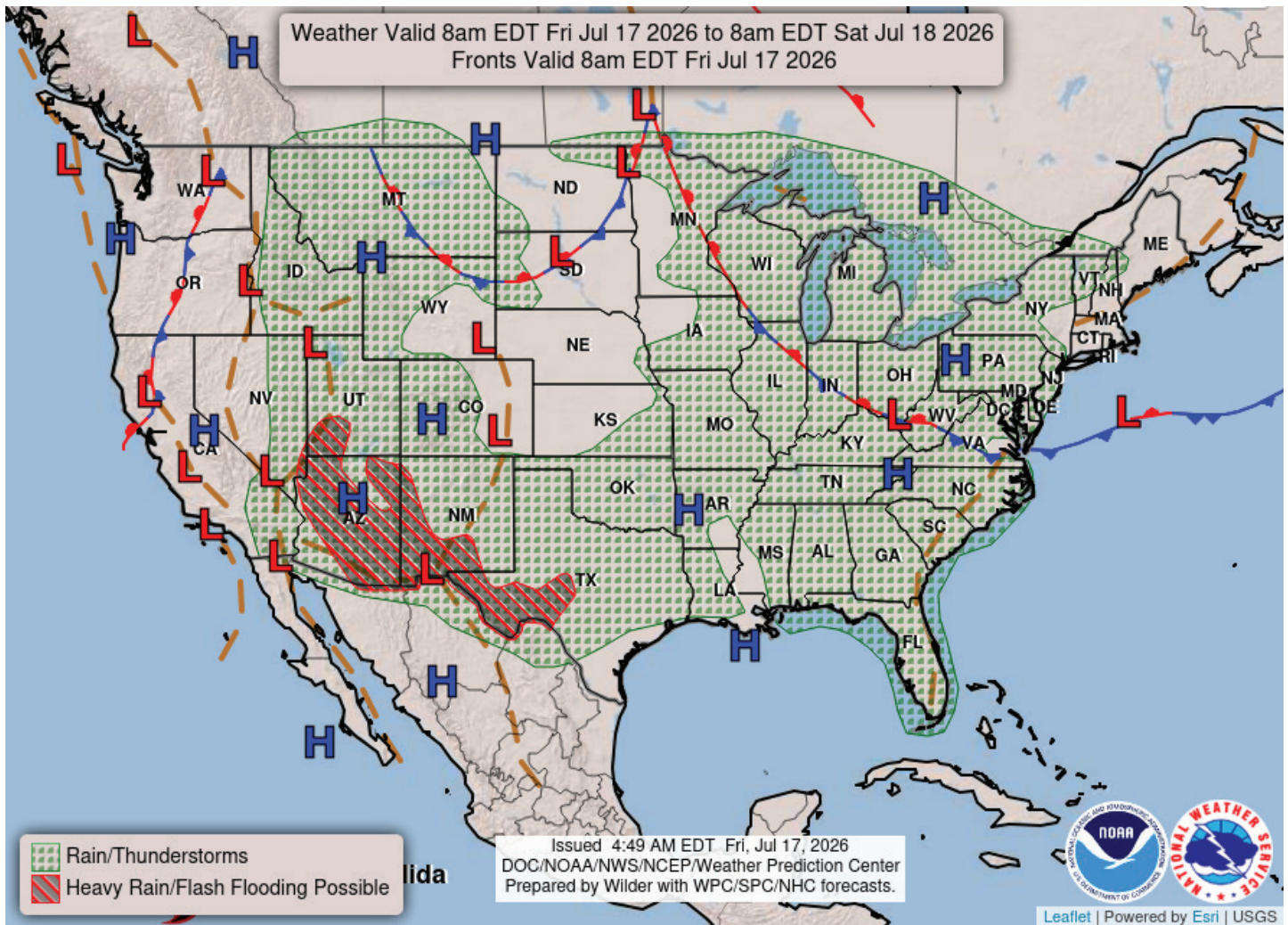
Precip to date in July.: 4.72

Average Precip to date: 12.91

Precip Year to Date: 14.19

Sunset Tonight: 9:16 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:01 am



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Today in Weather History

July 17, 1985: An F1 tornado touched down, ten miles east of Raymond, in Clark County, destroying two cattle sheds and damaged several buildings. A garage was moved off its foundation. Heavy rains, high winds and hail up to 2.75 inches in diameter produced considerable damage to farm buildings between Raymond and Garden City. Rainfall amounts of three to six inches caused additional crop losses from erosion. In the city of Clark, some basement flooding occurred, and water ran across Highway 212 west of Clark. Some storm total rainfall amounts include; 3.77 inches in Clark; 3.15 in Clear Lake; 2.85 in Redfield; and 2.31 inches in 3 miles NE of Raymond. This thunderstorm began near Kennebec, in Lyman County, where winds gusted to 80 mph, and small hail was observed. A few trees were uprooted, and numerous branches were downed. Several car windows were broke from the winds and small hail. A half inch of rain fell in ten minutes, filling ditches. High winds continued into Spink County where extensive damage to a farm estate east of Redfield occurred. Heavy rains of three to five inches caused road and basement flooding. A damage path from wind and hail continued to Clear Lake, to the south of Gary and into Minnesota to the east of Canby. Winds gusted to 70 mph, and hail ranged from one to almost two inches in diameter. In Clear Lake, four businesses were damaged, and power poles were downed. One building had the fiberglass siding and roofing torn off. A second building had a metal roof blown off. Highway 77, south of Clear Lake was impassable due to hail on the ground.

July 17, 1993: Torrential rains of three to seven inches fell in Grant County resulting in the overflow of Lake Farley into the city of Milbank. The dam held, but an emergency dike broke on the evening of the 17th releasing water into residential streets and a trailer court in Milbank. The broken barrier forced the evacuation of at least 200 people. Damage included 120 mobile homes, and 26 houses were affected by floodwaters. Also, a man died when his pickup truck hit a washout on a gravel road south of Milbank and was swept into the floodwaters of a nearby creek.

July 17, 2010: Several supercell thunderstorms moving southeast across the region brought large hail up to softball size along with damaging winds to parts of northeast South Dakota. Numerous homes, vehicles, along with thousands of acres of crops were destroyed. Hail up to the size of softballs occurred near Westport, in Brown County. Golf ball to baseball size hail fell at the National Weather Service office causing damage to several vehicles. The rear window was broken out of one of the vehicles. A supercell thunderstorm was tracking southeast across Clark County produced anywhere from a quarter to baseball size hail along with wind gusts over 70 mph from Crocker to Clark to Naples to Vienna. The large hail and winds caused extensive damage to homes, outbuildings, vehicles, and thousands of acres of crops. Many trees and gardens were also damaged or destroyed by the hail and high winds. The storm entered western Hamlin County. Winds measured at 90 mph in Hayti along with some large hail broke numerous windows out of several homes and vehicles, damaged several roofs, and downed many trees. A concrete silo was also destroyed. The highway shop lost half of its roof along with severe damage to the ceiling of a trucking business in Hayti.

1942: A great flood developed over the Smethport area in Pennsylvania, resulting in an estimated 34.50 inches of rain in just one day, including 30.60 inches in only six hours, setting a world record. The official observing site, Smethport Highway Shed, reported only 13.08 inches for the entire month because the flood consumed the gauge after 6.68" of rain. The total results from the substitution of the officially estimated amount for the amount measured.

1981: Severe thunderstorm winds ripped a 10,000 square foot hole in a 90-foot high pavilion at Sea World in Orlando, FL. The storm panicked a crowd of 550 tourists. One death occurred due to injury and heart attack, and 15 people were injured. The canopy was made of fiberglass and Teflon, designed to withstand 120 mph winds.

1987: Slow moving thunderstorms caused flooding on the Guadalupe River in Texas resulting in tragic loss of life. A bus and van leaving a youth summer camp stalled near the rapidly rising river, just west of the town of Comfort, or about 50 mile northwest of San Antonio. The powerful surge of water swept away 43 persons, mostly teenagers. Ten drowned in the floodwaters. Most of the others were rescued from treetops by helicopter.

1994: Atlanta, Georgia saw a record-tying, 14 straight days come to an end on this day. The entire month of July had 17.71 inches, the wettest month ever in the Georgia capital.



Certainty About Salvation

Our salvation isn't something we strive to earn. It's a gift we're meant to receive.

1 John 5:10-15: 10 The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son.

11 And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

God gave us the Bible so we could know Him and live in ways that honor Him. He wants us to truly understand His teachings and how they apply to our life. Simply put, the Lord invites us to trust in Him with complete confidence.

Yet many of us know what it's like to stumble into sin and immediately feel our assurance crumble. Regret and shame whisper their accusations: There's no way I can be saved. If I were truly saved, I'd never have done such a thing. We find ourselves trapped in an exhausting cycle—questioning our salvation each time we fail rather than resting in what Christ has already accomplished.

But the Lord wants us to operate on the basis of truth, not feelings. Whenever our emotions contradict the Bible, we can trust that the Scriptures are reliable. In today's passage, John writes with remarkable clarity, "I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Notice he doesn't say "hope" or "wonder about"—he says know.

Salvation isn't something we must re-earn with each fresh start. Rather, it's a settled reality we can embrace confidently (John 6:37-40). So lay your feelings of regret and shame before the Lord, and rest in the certainty that comes only with His truth.

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.16.26

9 21 29 52 57 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 21 Hrs 53 Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.14.26

2 4 10 48 56 22

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$672,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 21 Hrs 38 Mins 46 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: 1 Days 20 Hrs 53 Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.15.26

1 9 10 16 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 21 Hrs 8 Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.15.26

14 15 23 33 42 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 21 Hrs 37 Mins 46 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: 1 Days 21 Hrs 37 Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

US strikes bridges and collapses a tower at a key port as its Iran campaign expands

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The United States expanded its airstrike campaign against Iran early Friday by hitting more bridges, electrical equipment and collapsing a tower at a key Iranian port, part of U.S. President Donald Trump's threats to start striking infrastructure to pressure Tehran to ease its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran launched new missile attacks against U.S.-allied nations in the Middle East, including Qatar, a key mediator in the war. It also damaged a power and water desalination plant in Kuwait — something crucial in the small, desert nation.

The interim ceasefire agreed to last month has collapsed, and the region has endured days of back-and-forth attacks by the U.S. and Iran as they battle for control of the strait. Iranian officials say U.S. strikes have killed dozens of people and wounded hundreds of others, with new casualties reported in Friday's strikes.

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 soaring and gave Iran major leverage in negotiations.

Speaking in a primetime address to the American public, Trump insisted the war was going well.

"We are likewise winning big in Iran, and you will see the fruits of that labor very, very shortly," Trump said.

Bridges and 'electrical infrastructure' hit in Iran

The U.S. airstrikes hit bridges overnight into Friday in Iran's southern Hormozgan province, killing at least seven people, Iranian state television reported. The attacks hit Bandar Khamir, a city on Iran's coast on the Strait of Hormuz.

The highway and railway bridge strikes appeared aimed at cutting off Bandar Abbas, Iran's main port, from roads leading into the Islamic Republic's central region onward to Tehran, the capital.

While other routes still are open, the U.S. strikes could expand further, potentially disrupting both the movement of military materiel and goods needed for Iran's 90 million people.

Iran also acknowledged "attacks on power infrastructure" during the U.S. airstrike campaign for the first time Friday when its Energy Ministry issued a call for people to use less power in southern provinces.

It said those areas "are currently experiencing extreme heat and attacks on power infrastructure." The ministry did not elaborate on whether it was power plants, transmission lines or other equipment that had been attacked.

Such strikes on power infrastructure had been suspected for days. Tehran city councilman Mehdi Chamran told journalists asking about electrical problems on Tuesday, "Just look at how many power facilities they hit ... and you wouldn't be asking that question."

Tower at key port collapses in US strike

The U.S. military's Central Command said it hit dozens of targets in its latest airstrikes, which concluded at dawn Friday, the sixth night in a row of American attacks.

The strikes also collapsed a tower at Iran's Chabahar port on the Gulf of Oman, a key trade route for landlocked, neighboring Afghanistan, the state-run IRNA news agency reported.

Chabahar port, which Iran had been running with support from India, has been a repeated target of American airstrikes. Iranian state media acknowledged a third round of strikes on the facility without immediately acknowledging the tower's collapse.

Iran described the tower as overseeing commercial traffic into the port. However, Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard also operates at ports across the country.

As of 6 a.m. Friday, the U.S. strikes had killed at least 38 people and wounded more than 400 in Iran,

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Health Ministry spokesperson Hossein Kermanpour said.

Iran retaliates by targeting Qatar, a mediator in the war

On Friday, Qatar twice warned the public to take shelter as a barrage of Iranian missiles targeted the nation. People heard explosions overhead as air defenses fired to intercept the missiles. Qatar's Interior Ministry said falling debris wounded a child.

Qatar, along with Pakistan, is a key mediator in trying to reach an end to the Iran war. But talks have broken down over Iran's chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran also targeted Bahrain and Kuwait early Friday. In Kuwait, authorities said Iran attacked a power and water desalination plant, causing widespread damage to the station. About 90% of drinking water comes from desalination — and any disruption can threaten life.

Kuwait said it extinguished the blaze and was working to assess the damage and get the station working again.

Jordan's military said it intercepted three incoming missiles Friday morning launched by Iran.

Explosions also could be heard Friday morning in Irbil and Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region as air defenses targeted incoming fire. The attack apparently targeted the Iranian Kurdish dissident group Komala, killing at least nine people and wounding others, said an official who spoke on condition of anonymity for security reasons.

Iran did not immediately claim the attack but has targeted Komala in the past.

Also on Friday, a tanker came under attack traveling through the Strait of Hormuz taking the route closest to Oman, the British military said.

The report from the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said the ship sustained minor damage without any of its crew being injured.

Iran has been attacking tankers traveling on the route near Oman but did not immediately acknowledge any attack.

Strikes come as Iran and US vie for Strait of Hormuz

Trump has returned in recent days to his threats to target Iranian power stations and bridges to try to compel Iran to loosen its hold on the strait, through which about a fifth of all oil and natural gas traded once passed in peacetime. The U.S. also reimposed a naval blockade on Iranian ports to halt its shipments of crude oil.

Week-to-week cargo shipments through the strait dropped by almost a quarter at the beginning of the month, according to maritime data firm Lloyd's List Intelligence. And that was before the recent surge in violence.

Given the risks, some oil shippers are transiting the strait with their location devices turned off, but many are just staying put, Lloyd's said Thursday. A growing amount of the region's energy is being shipped through pipelines, but not nearly enough to offset the decline in shipping through the strait.

Asian shares sink, with Tokyo down more than 5% as slumping AI stocks drag world markets lower

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — World shares were mostly lower on Friday, with Tokyo's Nikkei 225 losing 4% as heavy selling of computer chipmakers and other AI-related shares dragged markets lower.

South Korean markets were closed, but shares in Taiwan fell 6.5% a day after its TSMC, the world's biggest contract manufacturer of computer chips, announced it plans to spend an extra \$100 billion on building fabrication plants in the U.S.

TSMC dropped 7.3% on Friday.

In early European trading, Germany's DAX dropped 0.3% to 24,841.19 and the CAC 40 in Paris fell 0.4% to 8,346.09. Britain's FTSE 100 advanced 0.4% to 10,615.71.

The future for the S&P 500 declined 0.8% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was 0.5% lower.

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Stocks related to artificial intelligence have been under pressure for weeks because of worries that their prices have shot too high and that voracious demand for computer memory and processors may not be sustainable if AI ends up not producing as much profit and productivity as promised.

Oil prices surged as fighting in the Middle East intensified.

The United States expanded its airstrike campaign against Iran early Friday by hitting more bridges and collapsing a tower at a key Iranian port, part of U.S. President Donald Trump's threats to start striking infrastructure to pressure Tehran to ease its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz.

In other Asian trading, the Nikkei lost 4% to 64,141.12, at times trading near its lowest level in over a month, as shares in computer chip equipment maker Tokyo Electron sank 8.2%. Chip testing equipment maker Advantest tumbled 7.2%.

SoftBank Group shed 9%.

The Hang Seng in Hong Kong gave up 2% to 24,505.38, while the Shanghai Composite index lost 3.1% to 3,764.15, dipping to its lowest level in nearly 11 months.

In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 declined 0.5% to 8,796.70.

"Now investors are taking profits from the first-half winners and moving toward areas that were left behind," Stephen Innes, of SPI Asset Management, said in a commentary.

On Thursday, the S&P 500 fell 0.5% even though nearly three out of every four stocks in the index rose after more of the country's biggest companies reported better earnings for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 0.2%, and the Nasdaq composite lost 1.5%.

Nvidia fell 2.4%, making it the heaviest weight on the index. Other stocks that have benefited from strong demand for AI also sank, giving back some of their stellar gains.

Micron Technology fell 5.6% to shave its gain for the year so far below 199%. SanDisk fell 12.6% but is nevertheless up 494% for the year. Western Digital sank 9.2% but is still up 171% for the year.

Oil prices are near their highest level in a month because of worries that the war with Iran will keep oil tankers out of the Strait of Hormuz and block shipments of crude from the Persian Gulf to customers worldwide.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude, the international standard, rose 1.1% to \$85.13 per barrel. U.S. benchmark crude oil was up 1.3% at \$79.95 per barrel.

Reports on the U.S. economy Thursday came in mixed. One said shoppers spent less at U.S. retailers last month than economists expected.

A separate report said fewer U.S. workers applied for unemployment benefits last week, an indication of a solid job market, while a third report said manufacturing in the mid-Atlantic region is better than economists expected.

In other dealings early Friday, the U.S. dollar was nearly unchanged at 162.38 Japanese yen. The euro fell to \$1.1440 from \$1.1443.

China's Xi calls for more global efforts to guide AI, chides US for its curbs on tech sharing

By HAN GUAN NG and CHAN HO-HIM Associated Press

SHANGHAI (AP) — Development and governance of artificial intelligence should be a global effort, Chinese President Xi Jinping said Friday, while reiterating China's objections to what he called the "overstretching" of national security concerns.

Speaking at a conference in Shanghai, Xi said AI should not be dominated by any single nation. American-led restrictions have blocked China from accessing some of the world's most advanced technologies, spurring China's efforts to build its own know-how and intensifying the rivalry between the world's two biggest economies.

"The development of artificial intelligence should not be a solo performance by any single country but rather a symphony of global cooperation," Xi said at the opening of China's annual World Artificial Intel-

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ligence Conference in Shanghai. Others attending included the leaders of Kazakhstan, Cambodia and Thailand and U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres.

Xi opposes the 'overstretching' of national security in AI

"We should together oppose the practice of overstretching the concept of national security in the field of artificial intelligence, and of placing one's own security above that of other countries," he said, repeating a longstanding Chinese complaint.

China will expand AI cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the League of Arab States, the African Union, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the BRICS countries, Xi said. He promised to provide access for 30 countries to a Chinese-developed AI meteorological tool that provides early warning systems.

Over the next five years, Xi said China will provide 5,000 AI training opportunities to developing countries.

Closer partnerships can help prevent "historical injustice in AI," he said.

China's new AI cooperation body seen as response to the U.S.

Ahead of the conference, 29 countries including Pakistan, Russia and Kazakhstan signed an agreement with China to establish a World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization. State media described it as an intergovernmental organization headquartered in Shanghai promoting global AI governance.

The new AI cooperation organization can be viewed as China's answer to the U.S.-led Pax Silica initiative, said George Chen, partner and chair of digital practice at Washington-headquartered consultancy The Asia Group.

The Pax Silica framework, launched late last year, focuses on strengthening collaboration with U.S. allies and partners on AI-related supply chains. Signatories include Japan, the U.K., Australia, the Philippines, Israel and India.

Following a visit by U.S. President Donald Trump's to Beijing to meet with Xi in mid-May, China and the United States also agreed to conduct a dialogue on AI development and governance.

Chen, who was at the conference in Shanghai, also said Xi's speech can be seen as a signal that China can be a reliable partner to the developing world, or "Global South" countries. "China will not let America be the monopoly of AI technology."

China's advanced tech showcased as it steps up self-reliance

More than 1,100 companies and 1,400 guests are participating in the annual AI conference this year, Chinese state media said.

During the conference that runs until Monday, tech giant Huawei is showcasing its powerful AI computing system, the Atlas 950 SuperPoD.

Some technology analysts now believe China has become an innovator in AI and is no longer just catching up with the U.S. China's five-year plan until 2030 has prioritized progress in frontiers of science and technology including AI.

China's open-source AI models, like DeepSeek, are seen, especially across the developing world, as appealing and often more affordable than U.S. AI models, which are largely closed-source.

Coinciding with the conference, the Chinese AI startup Moonshot released its latest AI model, Kimi K3. It said Kimi K3's 2.8 trillion parameters — one of the measurements of an AI model's capability — will make it the world's largest open-source model. DeepSeek's V4 Pro version has 1.6 trillion parameters.

Last month, another Chinese AI company Zhipu, or Z.ai, rolled out its new flagship GLM-5.2 open-source model in a challenge to U.S. rivals including Anthropic's models.

But U.S. politicians and several major U.S. AI companies including Anthropic have accused Chinese AI models of illicit "distillation" of their models to extract their technologies, a claim that Beijing says is "groundless." U.S. policymakers have also raised concerns over Chinese AI posing an economic threat to the United States.

A former prime minister who led Israel out of Lebanon fears mistakes are being repeated

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — It was just before sunrise when the last columns of Israeli tanks crossed from Lebanon back into Israel and then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who ordered the withdrawal, said the homecoming of Israeli troops sent “shivers down his spine.”

That was May 24, 2000, the day Israel ended its 18-year occupation of southern Lebanon.

By then, many Israelis had grown to view the invasion — initially aimed at ousting Palestinian militants — as a strategic failure, akin to the U.S. military quagmire in Vietnam.

Now, 26 years later, Israel is again occupying much of southern Lebanon, and while polling shows that a majority of Israelis currently support an extended military presence in Lebanon, some, including Barak, who remember the pitfalls of the last occupation, are afraid that Israel is falling into the same trap.

“Our very presence will become the only goal,” Barak said in a recent interview, recounting what he said he thought of the occupation in 1985, when he was a general in the Israeli military, and Israel was shifting from active fighting to long-term deployment in Lebanon.

“We will protect our fortresses, we will protect our convoys of supply, the logistics, the patrols, everything,” he said he warned. “But we were not serving Israeli security, we were not serving the state. There was no logic to this in 1985, and there was no logic in 2000, when we pulled out.”

An open-ended occupation

Israel again invaded Lebanon in March and now controls more than 600 square kilometers (230 square miles) of territory. It began the operation after Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Lebanese militant group, launched a wave of drone and missile attacks in retaliation for the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran.

Last month, Israel signed a framework agreement with the Lebanese government to use at least two areas in southern Lebanon as “pilot zones” for removing Hezbollah weapons and infrastructure and handing over security to Lebanon’s army. Israel would then redeploy or withdraw its forces from those areas. Hezbollah was not part of the agreement and has vowed to oppose it.

In the meantime, Israeli officials have vowed to keep troops inside a broader “security zone” in Lebanon as long as Hezbollah retains its weapons. After the Oct. 7, 2023, attack by Hamas that sparked the war in Gaza, Israel has maintained smaller “security zones” in Gaza and Syria, which it says are needed to prevent future attacks by militants.

“We didn’t ask anyone’s permission to enter Lebanon, and we don’t need anyone’s permission to stay in Lebanon,” Defense Minister Israel Katz said recently, calling it Israel’s “right and our duty” to protect residents in northern border towns.

A former prime minister warns of similar pitfalls

Barak, who served as Israel’s military chief before coming prime minister, still considers the pullout one of his proudest achievements.

As a general, he recalls visiting soldiers stationed in Lebanon in the early 1980s. He said they told him, “We are fighting to remove the threat from Hezbollah so that our children will be safe and won’t have to serve here.”

But when Barak ordered the withdrawal nearly two decades later, he said some of the children of those same soldiers were serving in Lebanon.

Israel’s self-declared security zone inside Lebanon did not deliver for Israelis during the previous occupation, and it is unlikely the new zone will either, Barak said. Even in the 1990s, rudimentary Katyusha rockets launched by Hezbollah could easily bypass it and hit northern Israel.

“In order to destroy, totally destroy Hezbollah, you’d have to conquer the whole of Lebanon,” Barak said, something most Israelis consider to be impractical.

But even Israel’s presence in the south, and the widespread destruction of villages there, runs the risk of rallying Lebanese support for Hezbollah, he said. Israel says the group embeds fighters and weapons in these border towns, but Israeli operations since March had displaced around 1 million Lebanese.

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About 40% of them have since returned home, according to the Lebanese government. More than 4,300 people have been killed since hostilities began on March 2. Nearly 40 Israeli soldiers have also died, as well as a defense contractor and two civilians in northern Israel.

Same place, different war

Hezbollah was founded in 1982, as a response to the Israeli occupation, and fought a deadly guerrilla war that included high-profile suicide bombings and assassinations, roadside bombs and ambushes.

Israel carried out bombing campaigns and airstrikes against the militant groups. It also helped establish a local proxy force, a mostly-Christian militia known as the South Lebanon Army that carried out patrols and provided a buffer between Israeli troops and Hezbollah. Thousands of SLA fighters and their families fled to Israel following the withdrawal.

But the type of warfare between the two sides has also changed.

Israel is now operating without a local proxy, instead relying on monitoring and strikes either by air or from vantage points on ridges and hilltops. And Hezbollah, which once relied on insurgent tactics, now uses high-precision missiles and drones, including fiber-optic drones that are hard to defend against and have caused Israeli casualties.

Unique diplomatic opportunity could shift balance

One key difference from 2000 is the possibility of a diplomatic solution with Lebanon, said Orna Mizrahi, former deputy director of Israel's National Security Council.

Israel has an opportunity in Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, Mizrahi said. Since he was elected last year, he has publicly condemned Hezbollah and expressed readiness to negotiate a permanent ceasefire with Israel.

"The military operation needs to complement a diplomatic process," said Mizrahi, now a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies, an Israeli think tank.

Although Hezbollah is unlikely to agree to disarm, it has been severely weakened by wars with Israel, she said, adding that its main sponsor, Iran, is also busy weathering U.S. strikes and battling for control of the Strait of Hormuz.

Mizrahi said this has created an opportunity for a new balance of power inside Lebanon, by strengthening the Lebanese government and military. Israel will never destroy Hezbollah completely, she said. But while the group is scrambling to reorganize, Israel can work with international powers to empower Lebanon to confront it, she added.

4 mothers against the war

By the time Israel withdrew from Lebanon in 2000, the occupation had become deeply unpopular, in large part because of the more than 1,200 Israeli soldiers killed in operations.

In 1997, four mothers of soldiers serving in Lebanon founded a grassroots movement advocating for withdrawal.

Brurya Sharon, now 84, one of the founding members, recalls sending both of her sons off to fight in Lebanon. At the time, she said she felt like Israel's government and military were maintaining the occupation out of inertia, without stopping to consider if it was effective.

The "Four Mothers" movement has been widely cited as a major factor in Israel's withdrawal in 2000. They tried to steer clear of politics, instead focusing on the soldiers' lives, a bipartisan issue, Sharon said.

But now, the country is so divided, especially after the Oct. 7 attack, that Sharon says she sees no option for a broad-based public movement to pressure Israel to withdraw.

Israelis, still traumatized from the Hamas attack, are also concerned about leaving the country's borders vulnerable. Currently, more than seven in 10 Israelis support a permanent security presence in southern Lebanon, according to a recent poll by the think tank Israel Democracy Institute.

"I don't see a sunbeam of hope, I don't even see a speck of light," Sharon said.

Lawmakers demand answers after 'bombshell' report of ICE officer shooting in Maine

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic members of Congress demanded answers about Homeland Security's vetting and training of immigration enforcement agents after it was disclosed Thursday that the ICE officer involved in a deadly shooting this week in Maine had a history of mental health issues and violent behavior.

The Associated Press reported that David Brouillette, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer who shot a Colombian man in Maine, is an Army veteran who has struggled with serious mental health issues since early childhood, according to several of his close relatives.

The AP reached out to congressional leaders and several key lawmakers of both parties for response.

The top Democrat on the House Homeland Security Committee, Rep. Bennie Thompson of Mississippi, said Brouillette's history of violence and mental health issues, as well as the death in Maine, "directly call into question the supposed vetting and training ICE does of its recruits."

"This senseless tragedy must be investigated and the officer responsible should be taken off our streets and face justice for his actions," Thompson said in a statement to the AP.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer, who led a shutdown of the Department of Homeland Security earlier this year as Democrats tried to impose restraints on immigration enforcement operations, said the consequences of failing to put guardrails on ICE are now being measured in lives.

"The Trump administration rushed 12,000 agents onto our streets without ensuring they were fit to carry a badge and a gun — and Republicans gave this rogue agency vast power and no accountability," Schumer said in a statement. "They empowered ICE. Now they must work with us to prevent more killings."

The report on Brouillette's troubling past comes as the Department of Homeland Security has been on a hiring spree, fueled by vast sums from Republicans in Congress to help carry out President Donald Trump's mass deportation agenda. It raises fresh questions about the department's efforts to quickly hire, vet, train and dispatch recruits who are being sent to patrol communities across America.

Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, the Republican chair of the powerful Appropriations Committee, referred back to her prior statement that "an impartial investigation into the shooting in Biddeford needs to proceed, as the details surrounding this tragedy are important."

Collins had said earlier that it is "extremely unfortunate" that the agent did not have a body-worn camera.

The senator ensured \$20 million for expanded use of body-worn cameras and \$2 million for deescalation training as part of the Homeland Security funding bill that Republicans approved to end the department shutdown.

"The Democratic government shutdown delayed enactment and implementation of these important safety measures," she said.

At least 10 people have died in encounters with immigration agents since Trump launched the crackdown after retaking office, including 25-year-old Johan Sebastián Durán Guerrero, a Colombian national who was shot and killed by Brouillette on Monday while in his car near his home in the coastal Maine city of Biddeford.

"This bombshell is absolutely appalling — exactly the intolerable danger that we feared as a result of arrest quotas and inadequate training," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., in a statement to the AP.

"This agent clearly should never have had a gun — let alone one provided to him by the United States government. And now a man is dead. I'm going to continue demanding answers and accountability," he said.

Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Calif., said Trump and his administration "have encouraged ICE and CBP to enter and terrorize our communities, even if those agents are untrained, improperly vetted, or lack experience," referring to Customs and Border Protection.

"The killing of Johan Sebastián Durán Guerrero was horrifying," he said in a statement to the AP, "and there must be a credible, independent, and transparent investigation so that those responsible are held accountable."

Trump uses primetime address to raise doubts about US elections ahead of midterms

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, ERIC TUCKER and COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump used a primetime address to the nation Thursday to elevate his yearslong push to raise doubts about the legitimacy of U.S. elections and dispute his 2020 loss in an appeal for more restrictive voting laws ahead of the midterms.

Trump's amplification of debunked theories about the election six years ago and his inability to accept his loss led to one of the darker moments in American history when a mob of his supporters led a violent attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, in the final days of his first term.

Now back in power, Trump opted to revisit the subject, despite persistent voter concerns about the cost of living, American forces escalating strikes on Iran in a conflict for which there is no end in sight, and an immigration crackdown facing bipartisan scrutiny for its sometimes deadly tactics.

His address Thursday hinged on contradictions.

A twice-elected president complained about his one personal defeat, alleged a cover-up by officials in his own first administration and surfaced claims about countries attempting to harm his own prospects while staying silent on steps taken by other nations to boost him.

Trump used the remarks to justify his push to pass a strict voter ID bill in Congress that has not advanced because it lacks enough support from Republicans.

"America is back and doing really well, but we still have a major challenge that must be urgently addressed, because no country can be great without fair and honest elections," he said.

Trump doesn't raise doubts about his election wins

Trump began Thursday night with a stark warning about what he described as flaws in the voting system and said he was releasing previously classified documents related to the 2020 and 2018 elections, when he lost the presidential election and his party suffered losses.

Trump's speech presented allegations of interference and influence in ways that lacked key context, and did not produce evidence that votes had been manipulated or that the election outcome had been altered.

Notably, Trump focused on China but glossed over Russia, a country that intelligence officials have said favored Trump in 2016 and 2020 and engaged in wide-ranging influence campaigns aimed at boosting him over Democrat Joe Biden in the latter campaign.

Despite focusing on China in his speech, Trump did not criticize or issue a warning to Chinese President Xi Jinping, whom he has long praised.

Election security experts say America's decentralized voting system, with the power over elections residing with the states instead of the federal government, is a strength. Americans vote in more than 10,000 different jurisdictions with different rules, making the nations' elections extraordinarily complicated but safe from widespread fraud.

No credible intelligence has emerged showing that the vote count in 2020 was manipulated by foreign actors. Repeated audits and reviews -- many run by Republicans, including Trump's own then-attorney general -- have found no significant fraud occurred in 2020.

Even if substantiated, Trump's claims did not amount to conduct that would have altered the outcome of any race, let alone the 2020 race for the White House.

He also did not raise doubts about his election wins in 2016 or 2024.

As Trump spoke, the White House unveiled a website containing documents that were presented without context and included selectively released pieces of investigation files, intelligence analysis and correspondence.

Former intelligence official calls address 'dangerous'

Sue Gordon, principal deputy director of national intelligence in Trump's first term, called the president's address "a dangerous speech about an incredibly important topic." She said the intelligence community throughout Trump's first term was alarmed about foreign interference in elections, but Trump scoffed at them, angered at the investigation of his campaign's relationship with Russia.

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"He had an entire term to deal with it and I don't know how you can believe how the same community that told him about it, that was excoriated about it" wouldn't warn him in 2020, Gordon said on CNN.

Conservative commentator John Solomon, who joined the White House staff last month and was seated in the East Room for Trump's speech, later told MS NOW that "the intelligence community has zero evidence that someone has flipped – that a foreign power flipped -- a vote in 2020, '22 or '24."

But, he added, "We're not through all the documents."

Trump urged the Justice Department to conduct investigations and prosecutions, though it was unclear from his speech what sort of criminal conduct — if any — could be identified, proven and charged.

In a contrast with his concerns about foreign interference in elections, Trump in his new budget proposes a \$707 million cut in the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency, the group charged with protecting American election systems from overseas cyberattacks. Trump and other conservatives have been frustrated that the organization pushed back on election claims in 2020 and beyond.

Some networks did not air it live

In past presidencies, primetime addresses have typically been reserved for major milestones or nationally significant events.

Trump last spoke to the nation in April, giving an address on the Iran war a month after it started. He said then that the U.S. would accomplish its objectives "very shortly" and that "the hard part is done, so it should be easy." The war, however, has dragged on and strikes between the U.S. and Iran have intensified this week.

Trump also delivered a politically charged primetime speech in December in which he sought to blame the challenging economic climate on Democrats.

ABC, NBC and CNN did not air Thursday's remarks live but carried them in full on their streaming services.

CBS and MS NOW both cut away from Trump's speech before he finished, while Fox News continued to carry his address.

Trump called out the media outlets for not carrying it live, accused them of being "part of a plot" and suggested their broadcast licenses be revoked.

Networks typically — but not always — carry presidential addresses to the nation live. In 2022, when Biden delivered a primetime address full of warnings about Trump and his adherents' "extreme ideology," the networks did not carry it live.

In 2014, the major networks chose to stick with their primetime programming instead of airing an address by President Barack Obama on his plans for immigration reform.

Democrats accuse Trump of seeking to discredit next election

Democrats warned that Trump was trying to revive false claims of past stolen elections in order to delegitimize the 2026 midterm elections, in which Trump's Republican Party is facing headwinds.

Democratic Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia called Trump's claims "totally bogus."

"The fact is our intelligence agencies unanimously agreed that China did not even try to change a single vote in the 2020 election," Warner said in a statement on X. "A single concurring opinion suggested China may have tried to sway voters' opinions ... but that's been public knowledge since 2021."

Rep. Joseph Morelle of New York, the ranking Democrat on the administration committee that handles federal voting issues and elections, said Trump is trying to sow confusion before the midterm elections.

"This is a pretext for the president, I think, calling into dispute the 2026 elections," Morelle said on C-SPAN, adding that "we have secure elections."

"I heard no concrete allegations that foreign actors actually changed the results of an American election," Democratic Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware said on CNN.

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Andy Burnham, a mayor from England's north, is poised to become Britain's next prime minister

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Andy Burnham got to the top through a mix of patience and risk-taking.

A decade ago, Burnham abandoned a 20-year climb up the Labour Party ladder in London to head north and run for mayor of Greater Manchester. A month ago, he returned to Parliament by winning a risky special election. On Monday, he will become Britain's 59th prime minister.

The sudden downfall of Prime Minister Keir Starmer after just two years in office has swept the 56-year-old Burnham into office — unelected and largely untested. He will enter No. 10 Downing St. carrying the heavy weight of expectation, and big questions about how he will shoulder it.

"A whole range of people across the Labour movement and in the country have projected onto Andy Burnham their hopes and their fantasies about how the country should be run and what Labour should stand for and what Andy Burnham stands for," said Joshi Herrmann, founder of Manchester news site The Mill, who has covered Burnham for years.

"He has got lots of people's hopes up."

He was born in Liverpool and attended Cambridge

Burnham has made his name in Manchester, but he was born in Liverpool, and grew up in a commuter village between the rival northwest English cities.

His father worked as a British Telecom engineer and his mother as a receptionist, and he was raised in a close-knit Catholic family. Burnham has said he's "not particularly religious," but Catholic teaching, along with the center-left Labour Party, helped forge his values and sense of social justice.

Burnham and his brothers were the first generation of their family to go to university. And not just any university — Burnham attended Cambridge, one of the country's oldest and most prestigious institutions.

"He needed a lot of persuading to apply because he felt that as a working-class boy, going off to Cambridge wasn't for him," Stephen Harrington, Burnham's former English teacher at St. Aelred's Catholic High School, told the BBC. "He didn't believe in himself. But he did it, and the rest is history."

Burnham has said he felt out of place at Cambridge, where many of his classmates had gone to posh private schools in the more affluent south of England. But he got a degree in English and met his future wife, Dutch fellow student Marie-France Van Heel, now a marketing executive. The couple married in 2000 and have a son and two daughters.

After graduating, Burnham worked as a journalist at trade magazines before becoming a researcher and adviser to Labour politicians.

Elected to Parliament for the Manchester-area district of Leigh in 2001, he rose through the government ranks under Labour Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. He served in Brown's Cabinet between 2007 and 2010 as chief secretary to the Treasury, culture secretary and health secretary.

A formative experience came in 2009, when he was heckled at a commemoration of the 1989 Hillsborough Stadium disaster, when 97 Liverpool soccer fans were crushed to death. Bereaved families had fought for years to overturn a false narrative offered by police that unruly fans had been to blame.

Burnham became a champion for the families and helped push for a new inquest, an apology and a law that imposes a duty of candor on public officials to tell the truth about tragedies whatever the impact on their reputation.

As mayor, he became known as King of the North

After Labour lost power in 2010, Burnham ran for leadership of the party that year and in 2015, losing both times. He quit Parliament in 2017, a low ebb for Labour nationally, to run for mayor of Greater Manchester.

Being mayor played to his strengths: an ability to bring people together, a sharp eye for opportunities and a wide streak of pragmatism. His approach became known as "Manchesterism," a brand of business-friendly socialism that aims to harness private and public money to invest in areas like transport, housing and infrastructure.

Manchester was a former manufacturing powerhouse — known as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolu-

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tion — that had been hollowed out as British industry crumbled. During his tenure the city boomed, with skyscrapers blooming on vacant post-industrial sites. Burnham won praise for taking a piecemeal public transport system under public control and improving it.

He shed suit and tie for jeans and dark T-shirts, spoke about his love for Oasis, The Smiths and New Order and spent spare time playing soccer or spinning 1990s tunes during DJ battles.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, he harangued Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson over what he called a “London-centric” approach to the crisis that was punishing northern cities. That’s when he gained the nickname King of the North, a “Game of Thrones”-inspired nod both to his championing of his home region and his political ambition.

He has said he saw his work in central government as “unfinished business,” and got his chance when Starmer was pushed to resign by Labour colleagues alarmed at the party’s unpopularity.

But Burnham still needed a seat in Parliament. A Labour lawmaker agreed to resign, triggering a special election for the Manchester-area district of Makerfield. Burnham trounced the candidate from anti-immigration party Reform UK, cementing his credentials as a winner.

In the subsequent contest to replace Starmer as Labour leader, he was the only candidate.

He’s promising to restore hope

Now he says he will deliver “a new politics based on unity and hope” and “an economy that works for everybody,” no matter where they live. A key plank is giving regional leaders more powers, and he plans to move part of the prime minister’s office to a “No. 10 North” in Manchester.

Herrmann said Burnham has clear strengths, especially an ability to tell a persuasive story and a sense of empathy that many politicians lack.

He added that the incoming prime minister has “a set of principles about trying to make the country fairer, trying to bring people out of poverty, that he really does believe in.”

Critics claim Burnham’s politics are vague on key points, such as where the money will come from to pay for his pledges. He will face many of the same political and economic challenges that stymied Starmer, including a sluggish economy, overstretched public services and a cost-of-living squeeze. He has little experience of foreign policy issues, from the Ukraine war to dealing with U.S. President Donald Trump.

And running a country of 70 million is a lot different from overseeing a region of 3 million.

But Sacha Lord, a Manchester music entrepreneur who served as Burnham’s nighttime economy adviser, said the politician has a steely side that will help him rise to the occasion.

“He’s not scared of locking horns with people,” Lord said. “Everybody thinks Andy’s this nice, cheeky-chappy guy. But trust me, when he wants something ... he tends to get it.”

To air or not to air? Nation’s TV networks struggle to find the right balance for Trump speech

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

As President Donald Trump threatened sanctions for those who didn’t cover his address live Thursday night, the nation’s broadcast and cable news operations wrestled with the thorniest of questions: To air or not to air?

Networks and their news operations, broadcast and cable alike, spent the hours leading up to Trump’s address debating how to cover it — and struggling to balance delivering the news with handing over their airwaves to potential falsehoods about the 2020 elections.

In the end, a patchwork quilt of coverage was largely united by one common strategy: real-time fact-checking as much as was possible even while the president was still speaking.

The dilemma took place against a backdrop of deep tension between the media and a president working to exert control over it by whatever means he can. Even in his speech itself, Trump excoriated networks that chose not to carry it live, saying that “NBC and ABC fake news” avoided it because they “don’t like the topic.” He also threatened them with consequences, using the presidential pulpit to suggest they should

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be sanctioned for their editorial decisions.

"They and others in the media are part of a plot," Trump said, offering no evidence for his assertion. There is also no evidence of fraud in the 2020 elections.

"They want to continue this fraud for whatever reason. They want to keep it going," he said. "Fraud like this should mean a revocation of their licenses. They use our public multibillion-dollar-in-value airwaves for absolutely no money. They pay nothing. All we want is honesty in our elections and honesty in reporting."

The tension between Trump and the news media during his second term has taken many forms, from sanctions against members of the White House press corps to regulatory actions through the Federal Communications Commission to outright lawsuits.

There were a variety of approaches to coverage

The media outlets' decision-making — seemingly last-minute, for many, with networks divulging their plans minutes beforehand — produced a variety of coverage scenarios for the 24 minutes of Trump's address.

CNN's Kaitlan Collins anchored her nightly program. "We aren't taking it live," she said of the speech, given the president's "well-documented history" of falsehoods. Panelists were on hand for analysis and fact-checking. "Sadly, we have no choice to be skeptical when this president talks elections," said the network's veteran correspondent John King.

Fox News and Fox Broadcasting aired the president's speech live. But ABC and NBC did not, sticking with regular programming — "Press Your Luck," in ABC's case, and an animal show featuring alligators in NBC's. But they were ready to cut in as they deemed newsworthy, as well as offering special reports afterwards.

Both ABC and NBC, however, provided live coverage on their streaming channels — NBC News NOW and ABC News Live — as well as ABC News Radio. In the still-young era of streaming, that is increasingly a decision that allows network news to play it both ways.

As for CBS, the network did preempt regular programming — a summer rerun of "Georgie & Mandy's First Marriage" — to air a special report anchored by Tony Dokoupil. The report joined the live speech a few minutes in, at 9:06, and left it before the end, at 9:23.

MS NOW started airing the speech, then cut away for analysis and commentary after 17 minutes on host Jen Psaki's show. Psaki used the split screen for a bit, with her speaking on the right and a muted Trump appearing on the left.

By the end, of the top networks, the speech was continuing live only on Fox News.

Robert Thompson, director of Syracuse University's Bleier Center for Television and Popular Culture, said coverage of the 24-minute address made for "a weird evening, where the reporters quote and describe the speech but show little of what they're quoting." Thompson said full coverage was the way to go even — and perhaps especially — if the speech was believed to contain falsehoods.

"When the president of the United States makes an announcement that there is going to be a major speech with major information, however cynical we are ... I think that is, by definition, important civic news significant to the citizenry," he said. "It's the president making the speech, and if the president does what everybody's worried about him doing, that is a real reason to be covering it, to bear witness on exactly what gets said."

Networks had been urged beforehand to carry it live

Earlier Thursday, at the White House briefing, press secretary Karoline Leavitt had urged TV networks to carry the speech live. And Fox News Channel's Sean Hannity said on his show that major networks not going live was "pretty unheard of for a primetime address for a president."

Broadcast networks, though, have previously declined primetime coverage to President Barack Obama for a 2014 speech on immigration, and President Joe Biden for his speech on democracy, "Battle for the Soul of the Nation," in 2022.

The backdrop of Thursday's speech was an ever-increasing tension between the media and the administration. Broadcast networks have been under close scrutiny by the Trump-appointed chair of the FCC, Brendan Carr, who has launched early reviews of licenses of some ABC-owned stations and threatened to revoke the long-held exemption from equal time rules for the popular talk show "The View."

Trump's animosity toward news outlets whose agenda runs counter to his own isn't new. But in his second

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presidential term, he has launched an escalation, often harnessing the levers of the federal government or attempting to do so. The efforts have taken place both in actual courtrooms and in the court of public opinion.

Why American elections are so complicated — and secure

By ALI SWENSON Associated Press

In a speech to the nation Thursday evening, President Donald Trump said Americans deserve secure elections, and he claimed to be using federal authority to prevent them from being “stolen.”

In fact, one of the strongest security features of U.S. elections is the fact that they aren’t conducted at the federal level. America votes in more than 10,000 different election jurisdictions, each with different rules set by state and sometimes local governments.

That structure makes the nation’s elections extraordinarily complicated — and also safe from widespread fraud. And when misconduct does happen — rarely — security protocols frequently catch it.

Decentralized elections date back to the nation’s founding

America’s highly decentralized system of voting exists because the nation’s Founding Fathers gave authority over elections to the states, rather than the federal government. While Congress has the power to regulate elections — and has used that authority to pass such laws as the Voting Rights Act — the Constitution makes clear that states have primary authority to set the “times, places and manner” for elections.

There also is no national election agency that administers the presidential contest, something that’s different from many other countries. And when it comes to doing the day-to-day work of running an election, the responsibility falls to officials at the local level — usually a clerk or election supervisor — with help from staff and volunteers.

While differences in election laws can get confusing, election security experts say this structure is a strength. That’s because to pull off stealing a presidential election — as Trump falsely claims was done to him in 2020 — it would require large numbers of election workers in the most competitive counties across the country who are willing to risk prosecution, prison time and fines while working with officials from both parties willing to look the other way. And everyone somehow would have to keep quiet — a highly unlikely scenario.

There are also shared practices and security measures in place across the country that together work to ensure that only eligible voters can cast a ballot and only one ballot is counted for each.

Voter fraud can happen, but it’s rare and there are safeguards to catch it

Most Americans by now have probably heard stories about someone casting multiple ballots, or voting in the name of dead relatives, or stealing mail ballots from mailboxes.

When these incidents happen, they are often caught and prosecuted.

Voting more than once, tampering with ballots, lying about your residence to vote somewhere else or casting someone else’s ballot are crimes that can be punished with hefty fines and prison time. Non-U.S. citizens who break election laws can be deported.

For anyone still motivated to cheat, election systems in the United States are designed with multiple layers of protection and transparency intended to stand in the way.

For example, for in-person voting, most states either require or request voters provide some sort of identification at the polls. Others require voters to verify who they are in another way, such as stating their name and address, signing a poll book or signing an affidavit.

For absentee voting, all states require a voter’s signature, and many states have further precautions, such as having bipartisan teams compare the signature with other signatures on file, requiring the signature to be notarized or requiring a witness to sign.

That means even if a ballot is erroneously sent to someone’s past address and the current resident mails it in, there are checks to alert election workers to the foul play.

AP review found there was too little voter fraud to tip the 2020 election

Trump has spent six years insisting he won the 2020 election, a campaign he lost to former President

Joe Biden.

An Associated Press review in 2021 dug into every potential case of voter fraud in the six battleground states that Trump disputed. It found fewer than 475 cases — a number that would have made no difference in that race.

Allegations from Trump of massive voting fraud have been refuted by a variety of judges, state election officials and an arm of his own administration's Homeland Security Department. In 2020, then-Attorney General William Barr, a Trump appointee, told the AP that no proof of widespread voter fraud had been uncovered. "To date, we have not seen fraud on a scale that could have effected a different outcome in the election," he said at the time.

Maine shooting and officer's background raise new questions about ICE's rapid hiring

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Immigration and Customs Enforcement has been rapidly expanding its workforce, hiring thousands of new officers as part of the Trump administration's attempt to ramp up immigration arrests and deportations.

The supersizing of ICE -- fueled by an infusion of billions of dollars granted by Congress — has raised concerns about the agency's hiring practices and whether officers being brought on are receiving proper vetting. Those concerns have been rejected by the Department of Homeland Security.

Relatives of the ICE officer who shot a Colombian man in Maine this week told The Associated Press he struggled with serious mental health issues since early childhood and never should have been given a badge and gun to patrol American streets.

The precise circumstances surrounding the officer's hiring were not immediately clear. But the revelations about the man, David Brouillette, shine a new spotlight on ICE's hiring spree and the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

Here is a look at the agency's hiring and training practices:

A surge in new hires at ICE

In January, Homeland Security said it had hired 12,000 new officers and agents since the hiring surge began and said thousands of those new officers were already out on the streets assisting with investigations. The number includes both deportation officers and agents for Homeland Security Investigations, a separate agency that falls under ICE.

ICE has said the majority of new hires are police and military veterans. But evidence has been mounting that applicants with questionable histories were either not fully vetted before they were brought on or were hired in spite of their past, an investigation by The Associated Press earlier this year found.

At the time, Homeland Security, ICE's parent agency, would not answer questions about specific hiring decisions. It did say some applicants received "tentative selection letters" and offers to begin working on a temporary status before they had been subjected to full background checks.

It defended its hiring practices, saying it does rigorous vetting.

ICE's former acting director, Todd Lyons, said during a congressional hearing in February that he was proud of the hiring campaign, which drew more than 220,000 applications.

"This expansion of a well-trained and well-vetted workforce will help further ICE's ability to execute the president's and secretary's bold agenda," he said.

The vetting process includes reviewing applicants' criminal histories and credit scores and conducting background investigations that include interviewing prior employers and other associates, which can take weeks. ICE also promised signing bonuses of up to \$50,000, advertised that college degrees were not required and lowered the age of new recruits to 18.

An internal memo, first reported by Reuters in February, told ICE supervisors that if they receive "degradatory information about a newly hired employee's conduct" they should refer the allegations to an

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internal affairs unit for investigation. Such information could include the employees' termination or forced resignations, the memo said.

The DHS inspector general last August announced plans to audit ICE's hiring and training processes, but no findings have been released.

Applicants have to get a security clearance

Recent job advertisements for deportation officers spell out the current qualifications, including that the person must be a U.S. citizen to apply and will have to pass a background investigation and a drug test.

New deportation officers also have to take a physical fitness test and be able to obtain and maintain a security clearance. Once hired, new deportation officers may have to serve a one-year probationary period.

According to the job advertisement, deportation officers are required to carry a firearm, which means anyone convicted of domestic violence is ruled out.

Applicants undergo a medical exam and should be prepared to possibly be polygraphed. The application cautions that any false statements on the application can translate into the job offer being pulled or, if the person has already started work, they can lose their job or go to prison.

The background investigation can include a credit check, reviews of any financial problems like failure to pay child support or taxes and a look at the person's criminal and drug history.

Claire Trickler-McNulty, a former ICE official under the Obama, first Trump and Biden administrations, said hiring a new deportation officer is similar to any other federal hiring.

Generally, applications are reviewed by a hiring manager who decides which candidates to advance. Once someone gets a tentative offer, the agency conducts a background check.

When people are applying for jobs that involve getting a security clearance, Trickler-McNulty said, they have to disclose on their application any drug use, interactions with police, groups they're affiliated with, mental health concerns, prior addresses and job history.

Depending on the clearance level, they'll also ask for references that a background investigator will contact. If there's a red flag such as a DUI or a history of debt, that can trigger a deeper investigation.

"You want to make sure the person is appropriate for a public trust position," she said.

Concerns over changes to ICE training schedule

Generally, new candidates for deportation officer positions have to go through a 50-day immigration law enforcement training program, according to the job advertisement.

Ryan Schwank, a former lawyer at ICE who was responsible for training new deportation officers, told The Associated Press that the agency reduced the overall amount of training new recruits received and reduced the testing needed to pass before graduating. Homeland Security has denied that it has removed any training requirements or lessened requirements for officers.

Trickler-McNulty said she has concerns over reports the agency shortened training as it was aiming to hire thousands of new officers. ICE officials revamped the training as part of efforts to swiftly hire and train an additional 10,000 deportation officers with an infusion of billions of dollars last summer from Congress.

At the time, the agency had about 6,500 deportation officers. That led to allegations that the department was cutting corners in an effort to get more officers in the field, which Homeland Security and ICE repeatedly denied.

In June, Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin said the agency would be increasing the amount of training for new officers starting this month. In a statement Thursday, the Department of Homeland Security said all new academy training classes beginning July 1 will last for 71 days and officers who graduated under the previous curriculum would get more training under a separate field officer program.

The department also said it was adding new training in crowd control measures, high-risk vehicle stops, live-fire exercises and medical training, in response to what they called coordinated attacks against their officers and ICE facilities.

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Texas flash floods leave at least 2 dead in region devastated a year ago

By JESSE BEDAYN, JAMIE STENGLE and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — Catastrophic flash floods in Texas have killed two people and forced hundreds of rescues in areas still reeling from devastating floods a year ago, Gov. Greg Abbott said Thursday.

Rescuers aboard boats and helicopters have saved more than 200 people, including stranded drivers and people trapped in homes, Abbott said.

The governor said the hardest-hit areas are expecting more rain into Friday and are not out of danger yet, with some rivers expected to reach historic levels.

After days of pounding rain, the National Weather Service said a large wave on Thursday barreled down the same river wrecked by flash floods last summer when two dozen children and counselors died at Camp Mystic.

Much like last year, the floods came in the middle of the night. But this time some residents in the Texas Hill Country said they received more warnings.

Forecasters urgently warned, "Move to higher ground now!" as rivers rose hour by hour. Some spots of the Guadalupe River rose by more than 30 feet (9 meters).

The governor said more than 2,000 first responders had been deployed and some evacuations began before the worst of the flooding.

"What happened last year was a warning to people on or near rivers," Abbott said. "No one can be complacent."

As much as 28 inches (74 centimeters) of rain fell over the past three days in Uvalde County, which was spared from the worst flooding a year ago, the weather service said Thursday. Other areas saw roughly a foot of rain.

Victims in Texas floods were swept away

The governor said one of the victims was driving on a flooded road and was swept away near Uvalde while the other died in Kerr County.

Jennie Steward said the body of her husband, 65-year-old John Mark Steward, of Kerrville, was found Thursday.

She was visiting her parents when a neighbor called overnight, saying her husband was missing after water had risen to the door of their mobile home, which stood off the ground.

The entire home was swept off the platform and floated down Goat Creek on the Guadalupe, she said.

"It's really hard that I wasn't there with him," she said. The two last spoke by phone Wednesday to celebrate their third anniversary.

Hill Country residents say they were better prepared

The unfolding crisis brought back haunting memories of last summer's unimaginable Hill Country floods that killed more than 100 people over the July Fourth holiday.

"It's crazy happening two times in one year," said Josiah Rodriguez, who awoke to the sound of heavy rain around 2 a.m. Thursday in Kerrville. He navigated flooded roads to help evacuate relatives.

"Last year there was no warning of it," he said. "It just kind of happened overnight and it took everyone by surprise. This year, a lot more alerts have gone into place, a lot more safety measures."

Residents said they were caught off guard a year ago and didn't receive any warning when floods overtopped the Guadalupe. Some local leaders were criticized for not acting quickly.

The storms and flooding this time threatened multiple counties close to the Mexico border and in the Hill Country near San Antonio. Roughly 6 million residents across Texas were under a flood watch this week, and many were expected to remain in effect into Friday.

Several agencies sent rescue helicopters to the flood zone, including Travis County in the state capital of Austin.

Residents rush animals and campers to higher ground

At a wild animal rescue, Katie Buck evacuated several dozen animals to higher ground in the dark Thurs-

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day as the normally dry Lazy Creek overflowed. She got all of the animals to safety, but flooding destroyed several enclosures at the Buck Wild Animal Rescue and Wildlife Rehab near Ingram in Kerr County.

"We were just starting to get back on our feet again," Buck said. "To have to go through this again is just devastating."

Residents at an RV park in Comfort moved their trailers as sirens sounded, manager Duke Earwood said.

Water rose over the hoods of vehicles parked near the river at the Comfort RV Resort. Markers showed the flooding already matched last July's big flood.

"Too familiar for sure, and too soon," Earwood said.

Uvalde residents isolated by floodwaters

Floodwaters also overran the city of Uvalde overnight, cutting off most outside routes. The Leona River, normally dry most of the year, filled streets with water.

"People really can't get anywhere," said Carmen Rodriguez, who nervously watched water engulf her neighborhood as a helicopter roared overhead. "We have a place to go, but all the streets are closed."

Rodriguez said authorities seemed to be prepared, ordering mandatory evacuations and notifying people directly.

After staying up most of the night, Casy Sanford and her husband felt like things were OK at their home in Uvalde as the downpour and heavy winds let up. Texas Game Wardens were outside their door just a few hours later, evacuating the couple, Sanford's son and three daughters, her mother-in-law and two dogs by boat Thursday morning.

Sanford said she felt "mere shock" as they left most everything and closed the door behind them, water seeping into the ground floor of the only home her little girls have known.

"My little one was scared. She kept grabbing my hand real tight," Sanford said of her 8-year-old. "I'm not sure what we'll see when we get back."

Sanford later said a neighbor had visited her family's home and found water had climbed as high as their kitchen counters.

Texas Game Wardens rescued close to 150 people by the afternoon, according to a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department spokesperson. Video released by the agency showed crews hoisting children from a house surrounded with water into a helicopter.

Uvalde resident Jose Maldonado said water reached the first step to the entrance of his RV on Wednesday and rose above the door on Thursday. Floodwaters took down nearby walls, moved cars, flipped a trailer and left behind debris, he said.

He and his wife planned to stay with his parents until they could return to clean up.

Flooding hasn't reached last year's deadly high

So far, the Guadalupe has remained below the record levels reached in 2025. Close to Camp Mystic, which hasn't reopened since last year's tragedy, the Guadalupe near Hunt reached about 20.5 feet (6.3 meters), which is enough to cause flooding, according to U.S. Geological Survey and National Water Prediction Service data.

In Kerr County, where summer camps dot the river's shores, the sheriff's office said all campers were safe. Several camps said the children were staying inside, with one camp reporting normal flooding.

While the water didn't rise as high as a year ago in Ingram, Mayor Claud Jordan believes this round of flooding was more widespread in his city.

"There are a bunch of businesses that haven't reopened from last year," Jordan said. "This doesn't help."

The Hill Country is especially prone to flash floods because the area's signature limestone is covered by just a thin layer of soil. During heavy rains, water can quickly shoot downhill before filling the narrow river basins.

AP Exclusive: ICE officer in Maine shooting has history of violent behavior, family and records say

By JACK BROOK, MICHAEL R. SISAk, AMANDA SWINHART and CLAIRE GALOFARO Associated Press/Report for America

AUGUSTA, Maine (AP) — The Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer who shot a Colombian man in Maine this week is an Army veteran who has struggled with serious mental health issues since early childhood and never should have been given a badge and gun to patrol American streets, several of his close relatives told The Associated Press.

David Brouillette has a history of terrifying and violent behavior, according to those relatives. They accuse him of attacking women in his life over the years, and one shared a voicemail with the AP from last winter in which he told her that he thought someone should slit her throat.

Brouillette's troubling past further challenges how thoroughly the Department of Homeland Security has vetted recruits as it went on a hiring spree to help carry out President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown.

At least 10 people have died in encounters with immigration agents since Trump launched the crackdown after retaking office, including 25-year-old Johan Sebastián Durán Guerrero, a Colombian national who was shot and killed by Brouillette on Monday while in his car near his home in the coastal Maine city of Biddeford.

DHS, which hasn't released the name of the officer who killed Durán Guerrero, has said the "vehicle attempted to flee the scene and, fearing for public safety, an officer discharged his weapon."

Brouillette didn't respond to text messages or an email seeking comment. Three relatives who said they had spoken to him since the shooting, including an ex-wife and daughter, said he told them he acted in self-defense.

When reached for comment about Brouillette's record and his role in Monday's shooting, ICE spokesperson Lauren Bis said in a statement that, "We will never confirm or deny attempts to dox our law enforcement officers," and that "The ICE officer in question has nearly a decade of federal law enforcement experience with required training including use of force training."

The White House referred all questions about the shooting and Brouillette to ICE.

A new career in ICE

Brouillette, 37, told his ex-wife Ashley Brouillette late last year that he had been hired by ICE. She said that because of his long history of psychiatric issues, she thought he was having a mental health episode and she didn't believe him. She didn't realize he'd been telling the truth until this week, when videos began circulating online of the moments surrounding the shooting.

Ashley Brouillette told the AP that she spoke to her ex-husband in a Facebook audio call, and he acknowledged that he had killed Durán Guerrero. Their 18-year-old daughter, Madison Brouillette, also told the AP that her father called her Wednesday and said that he shot and killed Durán Guerrero.

David and Ashley Brouillette were high school sweethearts who got married in 2007. She said she divorced him in 2009 because he had become physically violent with her, which began after she got pregnant with their daughter.

According to Ashley Brouillette, he once threw boiling water at her while she was holding their child — an incident her mother Avis Collins also recounted.

The abuse continued after she left him, she said.

David Brouillette doesn't appear to have a criminal record in Maine, as a check with the Maine Department of Public Safety returned no records for him.

But hundreds of family court records obtained from the Augusta District Court clerk's office detail years of allegations of physical and verbal abuse raised by his second ex-wife on behalf of herself and his daughters.

The ex-wife — whom the AP is not identifying because she fears retaliation — alleged that he had stalked and harassed her and physically and verbally abused his daughter, according to multiple requests for temporary protection orders. Brouillette tackled his teenage daughter and smashed spaghetti in her hair, and

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during another outburst, he dragged his daughter around the house as she cried, she said.

"Dave needs counseling or something for his PTSD & depression," she wrote in an application for a temporary protective order on behalf of his teenage daughter which a judge granted in 2021.

In court filings, David Brouillette said that his second ex-wife had slandered him.

His oldest daughter, Madison Brouillette, said she also witnessed her dad's volatility.

"I watched my dad struggle a lot with a lot of things," she told the AP. She said she came home from school once and he told her he had been sitting on a tree stump with a gun to his head.

"If you don't really, truly take care of yourself, there's no way you can protect other people. And with my dad, he never wanted to get help," she said.

An immediate relative of David Brouillette who spoke on the condition that their name not be used said he was diagnosed with severe bipolar disorder and attention deficit disorder as a child — a diagnosis that Ashley Brouillette confirmed. The immediate relative described him as "extremely mentally ill" and said he attempted suicide twice at age 12 and was hospitalized multiple times.

The relative said they've been estranged for years, after they broke off contact because they feared he would harm them. He did not respond to their outreach this week, the relative added.

A military deployment and law enforcement aspirations

Growing up in Gardiner, a city of about 6,000 people roughly 60 miles (97 kilometers) northeast of Biddeford, where Monday's shooting occurred, David Brouillette was enchanted by law enforcement and the military, his relatives said.

High school yearbook photos show he was a member of the school's Naval Junior ROTC, and he wrote that he planned to go to college and become a police officer.

Brouillette was initially rejected by military recruiters because of his mental health diagnoses, but recruiters encouraged him to go off his medications for a year and reapply, which he did, his immediate relative said.

He was eventually able to enlist.

According to U.S. military records, Brouillette enlisted as a chemical equipment repairer in the Maine Army National Guard but then changed jobs to be a medical logistics specialist. He was in the Guard from November 2007 until January 2010, according to records provided by the Pentagon.

A 2009 article in the Kennebec Journal listed Brouillette as a private in the Maine Army National Guard's 152nd Maintenance Company in Augusta.

In January 2010 he joined the regular Army as a human intelligence collector. Brouillette deployed to Afghanistan from May 2012 to February 2013 and eventually left the Army as a sergeant in December 2015.

His immediate relative believes Brouillette's time abroad worsened his emotional struggles: "Afghanistan destroyed him -- trained him to be a killing monster, a machine. They took someone who was extremely mentally ill and turned him into a killing machine."

Life after the Army

After his discharge, Brouillette held a hodgepodge of jobs — some in or adjacent to law enforcement — and was injured in an accident while training to become a firefighter, public records and court documents show.

Brouillette worked for the Maine Correctional Center — a medium-security prison — and for the state's Health and Human Services Department, spending less than a year at each.

In 2019, court documents show, he was a police officer at a Department of Veterans Affairs medical center near the state capital, Augusta. A Veterans Affairs department spokesperson on Thursday referred questions about Brouillette's employment to DHS.

But by the end of 2021, he wrote in a text message included in court filings, he was broke, going to school full-time and making money delivering food for DoorDash.

Brouillette was enrolled in a firefighting program at Southern Maine Community College and was struck in the head by a steel beam while unloading a trailer at a training facility, according to a lawsuit he filed over his injury.

He sustained a concussion and post-concussive syndrome, with symptoms including impaired memory, cognitive deficits, headaches, vertigo and light sensitivity, and was unable to complete the program, ac-

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cording to the lawsuit, which was settled out of court.

In recent years, court filings show, he was collecting disability pay through the VA. He also drove a truck, but quit in January 2025, citing health issues.

In March 2025, Brouillette passed an exam to become a real estate sales agent. His license was active until December. In a Facebook post, Realty of Maine announced Brouillette would be working in the firm's Bangor office.

"David lives in Maine after retiring from the United States Army," said the post, which has since been deleted. Brouillette is no longer listed as an agent on the firm's website. Messages seeking comment were left for Realty of Maine.

In March, the Maine agency that handles child support matters filed a lien against him, public records show. The filing suggests that Brouillette may have been in line for a permanent impairment or disability settlement.

'I don't think he sees himself as a killer'

In late 2025, around the time he joined ICE, his ex-wife Ashley said he left a three-minute voicemail mocking her for taking out a restraining order against him. According to the message she shared with AP, he repeatedly called her "disgusting" and suggested that she and the other women and girls in her "bloodline" should die.

"And all of you should have your f-----g throats cut," the voicemail said. "Yeah, you should. Am I threatening that I'm gonna do that? Nope. Nope. But do I think that you should have your f-----g throats cuts? Or should have had them cut? Yep."

She said she cut off contact with him until Wednesday, when his picture began circulating online.

Ashley Brouillette reached out to his current wife on Facebook and they spoke on the phone for several minutes. Her ex-husband spoke with her, according to cellphone screenshots of the phone exchange she shared with the AP. He acknowledged he had fatally shot Durán Guerrero.

"He was asking if I could tell them that he was a good person and not to talk about the abuse and stuff that I had endured while with him and he said that the most important thing is his character right now," she said.

She said he told her he is now hiding in protective custody.

"I asked him why he did it," she said. "He said it was a justified shooting. The guy was trying to run him over with a car."

His daughter also said he told her it was justified.

"I don't think he sees himself as a killer," Madison Brouillette said.

"I think he thinks that he genuinely did the right thing," she added. "All he said was that he did what he had to do. He said that he had to protect himself."

Blanche meets with Epstein accusers after demand from Republican senator crucial to confirmation

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche met Thursday with accusers of convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein following the demand by a Republican senator whose support is crucial to advancing his nomination to lead the Justice Department.

Blanche spent about an hour at Justice Department headquarters in Washington with the group of Epstein accusers, who have criticized the Trump administration's handling of the disgraced financier's investigation and a trove of files related to his sex trafficking case.

After the meeting, Blanche told reporters that he encouraged the accusers to come to the FBI with any information that could help investigators build cases against additional figures tied to Epstein.

But Blanche acknowledged he couldn't assure them additional prosecutions could be brought. The Justice Department has repeatedly said it will investigate further if new information surfaces, but the government

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doesn't currently have evidence to support prosecutions against others in Epstein's orbit.

"It wasn't all cordial," Blanche said of Thursday's meeting. "Because there's something that they want that I don't think I can give them, which is some form of justice. And I want to be able to give justice in the form of prosecutions, and maybe we can do a prosecution at some point," Blanche said.

But Blanche added, "I don't know."

The political firestorm over Epstein has been a persistent headache for the Trump administration, which released millions of investigative documents over the last year in response to right-wing clamoring for answers about the disgraced financier's crimes and connections to high-profile people.

One accuser is disappointed in Blanche meeting

One accuser, Dani Bensky, expressed frustration after the meeting, saying Blanche appeared to treat it as "a mere 'check-the-box' exercise intended to secure votes for his confirmation."

"He danced around his wording, repeatedly interrupted us and could not commit to anything that would demonstrate good faith or begin to restore trust," she said in an emailed statement. She said Blanche offered "no credible plan to investigate and pursue accountability" beyond Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell, who was convicted of luring teenage girls to be sexually abused by Epstein.

Earlier Thursday, Bensky told lawmakers on the Senate Judiciary Committee that women harmed by Epstein repeatedly asked to meet with Blanche "through multiple channels and he never responded."

"We deserve to be heard directly, not dismissed and ignored," Bensky said.

Blanche has pushed back on suggestions that the Justice Department has been dismissive of the Epstein's accusers, saying officials have spoken with more than 30 representatives of the women over the course of their sweeping review of the files.

"The Department of Justice will always meet with victims or their representatives, and if those victims or their representatives have evidence that anybody committed a crime — whether it has to do with Jeffrey Epstein or anybody else — we will of course move forward and investigate and prosecute," Blanche told reporters.

Blanche needs key Republican support to get confirmed

The meeting came hours after Republican Sen. Thom Tillis said it needed to happen before Blanche could earn his vote.

Without Tillis' support, Blanche's nomination won't make it through the Senate Judiciary Committee, which questioned Blanche for hours Wednesday about the Epstein files as well as the creation of a fund to compensate President Donald Trump's allies, a tax immunity deal for the president and a slew of other issues.

Another Republican, Sen. John Cornyn, has also expressed concern over the fund and has said he remains undecided about his vote.

Tillis indicated during Blanche's confirmation hearing Wednesday that he was leaning toward backing Blanche, who has been leading the department in an acting capacity since April. But after lawmakers heard Bensky's testimony, Tillis said he expected a meeting between victims and Blanche to occur before he's "willing to vote out of this committee."

Tillis later Thursday commended Blanche for holding the meeting, writing in a social media post, "I appreciate his willingness to directly engage and listen to them."

After missteps by then-Attorney General Pam Bondi that enraged Trump's base, Blanche as deputy attorney general oversaw a massive review and the release of millions of files related to the investigation into Epstein. The case has captivated internet sleuths and conspiracy theorists for years, in part because of Epstein's connections to other powerful individuals.

Blanche has also defended 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.

Blanche said during his confirmation hearing Wednesday that he takes responsibility for mistakes that were made, but noted that department lawyers were given a "herculean task" to quickly review millions of files for release. Blanche said department lawyers took pains to protect the women involved, and quickly

fixed any errors that were found.

"I am sorry that in about 1% of the documents mistakes were made," Blanche said Wednesday. "But what I will say on top of that is we put tons of resources to rectifying those mistakes immediately, including pulling down documents within minutes of being informed that there were mistakes."

Weather conditions again brought devastating floods to a vulnerable swath of Texas

By MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Long before sunrise in Texas, a shallow spot of the Guadalupe River rose above the height of a two-story house in just five hours on Thursday, sending a rush of water through a region still weary from last summer's fatal flash floods.

The dangerous flooding for a second consecutive year set off hundreds of high-water rescues, washed out roads and killed at least two people, authorities said. Relentless downpours served as another frightening reminder of the flood-prone Texas Hill Country, following what experts say was fueled this time by the right mix of air and lots of available moisture.

"Last year, it was one big wave that came through. And it wiped everything out, and then it receded, and then we could deal with the damage. This time, we're on day three of heavy rain and everything keeps continuing to rise, and it's expected to rain today and tonight," said Suzanne Sutphin Gschwind of Kerrville, where some of the worst flooding took place.

Hot weather over the middle of the continental United States ensured storms that formed would move slowly, and rounds of rain over roughly the last three days at times reached several inches an hour. The flooding is "about as bad as it gets" — conditions that are typically rare, said Bob Oravec, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

"Obviously, something like this doesn't occur every year, but it has occurred over two years in a row and it has occurred over a region that is prone to flash flooding by its topography," Oravec said.

Nearly 1 trillion gallons of water fell on the three hardest-hit counties in Texas over three days — Uvalde County alone got more rain in that period than California has seen over the last month, according to Ryan Maue, former chief scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association.

Flooding over the Fourth of July weekend last year killed more than 100 people, including roughly two dozen children and camp counselors at Camp Mystic, a now-shuttered Christian camp for girls. These storms dumped rain on a wider area, overlapping with some of the places where floodwaters overturned cars, ripped down trees and sent rescuers hustling to save lives last July.

A local official in Travis County, which includes Austin, said people were trapped on barn roofs and in trees. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said drones and helicopters were airborne for rescues.

"We are looking at every square inch of the entire area for anybody who may be stranded anywhere. And there will be help coming very rapidly to whoever may be displaced, wherever they are," Abbott said.

The flood in Texas Hill Country

The rain hit Texas Hill Country, a part of central and south Texas with steep terrain. Shallow soil covers limestone hills that have been soaked for days. Instead of the land absorbing the water, it shoots into rivers with steep banks.

That causes water to rise fast, a dangerous scenario that catches people by surprise.

When rivers rise so fast "it's almost like a river tsunami," said Tyler Roys, a senior meteorologist with the forecasting company AccuWeather. These conditions are so deadly because water is heavy and moves quickly. Just one cubic foot of water — imagine a box a bit larger than the size of a basketball — weighs about 62 pounds (28 kilograms).

Compared to last year's flood, the rain fell hard, but in some places it wasn't quite as intense and rivers in many places didn't rise quite as quickly, Texas State Climatologist John Nielsen-Gammon said. Plus, the previous days of rain previewed the flood threat.

"This one is producing greater overall precipitation totals, but it is mostly doing it with lower rain rates.

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They are still fairly high, but they aren't as high as they were last year," he said.

While swollen from rainfall, so far Guadalupe River levels have largely remained below record levels, some of which were reached during last year's deadly floods. The river did surpass last year's mark at the small community of Comfort, rising to 37 feet (11.3 meters) early Thursday, a mark 1.5 feet (0.5 meters) higher than it reached last year. At its height then, water weighing as much as the Empire State Building flowed downstream roughly every minute.

The river's record at this spot is 42.3 feet (12.9 meters) set in 1869.

Climate change and forecasting

It is difficult, especially as storms are happening, to know whether climate change has made the event more likely or worse.

Oravec said that the conditions that created this storm — hot air that steers and slows storms — have long occurred, but that climate change could make these conditions more common. A warmer atmosphere also has the potential to hold more moisture and heavier rains.

Last year's flooding did raise awareness of the dangers floods create, especially when they occur at night, Oravec said.

"I think overall it has been a good forecast. The effects are catastrophic, but the signal was there for potential heavy rainfall," he said.

Wildfire smoke makes air unhealthy from the US Midwest to East Coast. Officials say stay inside

By TAMMY WEBBER and PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Heavy, pungent wildfire smoke darkened skies in the U.S. on Thursday from the Great Lakes to parts of the East Coast, reducing visibility and prompting warnings that breathing the air outside could be dangerous.

Officials in many cities urged residents to stay inside or wear masks outside as air quality reached unhealthy to hazardous levels, meaning it's unhealthy for anyone, regardless of health conditions. The smoke is coming from fires that are burning primarily in Canada but also in northern Minnesota. A lingering high pressure system has trapped the smoke close to the ground, said Steven Freitag, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Detroit, where air quality was among the worst in the world for major cities.

"Sure enough, it arrived in force here and it's really pretty extreme levels," said Freitag, who noted that visibility in some areas was reduced to a half mile.

"It's scary," Omar Mitchell, 50, said as he looked to the sky. He wore a mask while walking to his restaurant in Detroit. "You don't know necessarily what the side effects may be. That's days or months later."

Microscopic particles can lodge deep in the lungs and enter the bloodstream, leading to heart and lung problems and contributing to other long-term health issues.

The air stinks and the sky glows yellow in some places

All of Michigan and much of Minnesota were under a hazardous air quality alert. In the Chicago area, air quality ranged from very unhealthy to hazardous.

National Weather Service meteorologist Jake Petr said even if winds from the northwest clear skies as expected later this week, the smoky air could keep returning until the fires are out. That could take months, until it snows in Canada and northern Minnesota, officials have said.

Bill Ostrowski, 76, wore a mask as he walked through downtown Chicago, where wildfire smoke shrouded skyscrapers. "It stinks. It's not a good sign when you wake up in the morning and you can smell the air," said Ostrowski.

In St. Paul, Minnesota, the sky was "glowing yellow," said Brent Williams, head of the soil, water and climate department at the University of Minnesota. The area "could be looking at weeks to months of continued smoke and flare-ups off and on as the winds blow in different directions," he said.

A study published this year found that long-term exposure to tiny particles from wildfire smoke contributed to an average of 24,100 deaths a year in the lower 48 states. Long-term exposure can make existing

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health problems worse and lead to a range of chronic and deadly issues, including respiratory illness, cardiovascular and neurological diseases, and premature death.

New York City cancels activities and hands out masks

In the New York City area, a thick haze tinged the morning sky orange and yellow and partly obscured Manhattan's skyline.

City officials opened cooling centers as health officials urged New Yorkers to limit strenuous and prolonged outdoor activities. The city's schools, parks and other agencies moved activities indoors, rescheduled events and adjusted operations. State officials distributed tens of thousands of face masks at transit hubs and other major locations.

Gwen Moseley, 65, was among the first patrons at Rosedale Library in Queens to take advantage of the free masks, saying she's on the road much of the day working as a therapist for children with autism.

"Who wants to be breathing this? It's not healthy," Moseley said as she waited to meet a young client. "When I'm out walking, I can feel the scratchiness in my throat."

Smoke eased a bit but was expected to thicken again by late afternoon or evening, possibly lasting overnight, weather service meteorologist Maureen Hastings said. She said it might move south for a while on Friday but return at night.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation warned that there was a potential for temporary spikes of "very unhealthy" air quality from Buffalo in the state's western corner to Rochester by Lake Ontario, Syracuse in the central region and down to the greater New York City area.

Philadelphia officials urged people to avoid strenuous activity and stay inside or wear N95 or KN95 masks outside.

"Today is not the day to start your marathon training plan," said Dr. Palak Raval-Nelson, the city's public health commissioner.

Minnesota fires are spreading

In Minnesota, forest rangers on Thursday combed a remote wilderness area for anyone who might still be there days after wildfires led to its closure.

Officials closed the Boundary Waters along the U.S.-Canada border on Tuesday. At the time, 6,000 to 10,000 people were inside, but Superior National Forest staff estimated Wednesday that they'd reached 90% of them, said Karen Harrison, a spokesperson for state and federal agencies involved in the response.

She said Thursday that smoke is making it difficult for helicopters to fly and that fires are spreading despite firefighting efforts.

"There will be fire on the landscape until fall, and some fire will be burning until snow cover," Harrison said.

The Royal Canadian Air Force successfully evacuated 11 Minnesota teenagers and four staff members Wednesday from wildfires in an Ontario provincial park about 175 miles (282 kilometers) north of the Minnesota border.

FDA approves a first-of-its-kind pill to cut cholesterol in high-risk patients

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Food and Drug Administration has approved a first-of-its-kind pill that can drastically reduce cholesterol in a way that's previously only been available with expensive, injectable drugs.

The drug from Merck was OK'd on Thursday for patients with artery-clogging cholesterol that persists even after taking statins, the standard medications for cutting heart attack risk. Merck will market its pill under the brand name Lipfendra.

It's the first noninjectable medication that works by blocking a liver protein called PCSK9. That protein limits the body's ability to clear cholesterol from the blood, and biotech injectables targeting it have been available from Amgen and other drugmakers for more than a decade. But patient access has been stymied for years by high prices, insurance restrictions and limited prescribing by doctors.

Statins block some of the liver's production of cholesterol and are the cornerstone of treatment. But even

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at the highest doses, many people need additional help lowering their LDL, or bad, cholesterol enough to meet medical guidelines.

Merck, which has headquarters in Rahway, New Jersey, won approval based on two studies in high-risk patients who added the company's pill to their standard treatment, including statins. In one study of 3,000 patients, those taking Lipfendra saw their levels of LDL cholesterol drop more than 55% after six months. In a second study, patients averaged a reduction of 59% compared with patients who received a dummy pill.

That benefit dropped only slightly over a year, and side effects — including dizziness and diarrhea — were similar between those taking the pill or a placebo, researchers found. One caveat: The pill must be taken on an empty stomach.

The FDA reviewed the drug under its program that promises ultra-fast reviews for promising medications that serve the public interest. The pathway was created by then-FDA chief Dr. Marty Makary, who resigned from the agency in May after months of pressure from drugmakers, patients and other outside groups.

Heart disease is the nation's leading cause of death, and high LDL cholesterol, which causes plaque to build up in arteries, is a top risk factor for heart attacks and strokes. While an LDL level of 100 is considered fine for healthy people, doctors recommend lowering it to at least 70 once people develop high cholesterol or heart disease — and even lower for those at very high risk.

House Republicans' \$95 billion Iran war package clears first hurdle

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans on the House Budget Committee advanced a \$95 billion package Thursday for the Iran war, farm aid and President Donald Trump's push for strict new voter ID requirements, moving forward on a party-line vote despite trouble in the full House — and the Senate.

Budget Committee Chairman Jodey Arrington framed the proposal as one last push to deliver for voters ahead of the midterm elections that will determine control of Congress. It advanced on a vote of 20-14.

"We are rallying to finish what we started when the American people sent us here," said Arrington, R-Texas.

With Iran war funding making up the bulk of the package, some \$60 billion, Arrington acknowledged that people can debate "why we're there" in the overseas conflict. But he said the money is needed for basic supplies — "just the bombs, bullets and battlefield readiness for our men and women in uniform to finish the fight successfully and return home safely — that's it."

The resolution, which sets out instructions for the various congressional committees to draw up proposals, also calls for \$13 billion for Intelligence, \$12 billion for Agriculture, and \$10 billion for Administration, which handles voting and elections.

Speaker Johnson goes it alone, trying to push past Democrats

The proposal is the third budget reconciliation package Republicans in control of Congress have put forward this session to steamroll Trump's priorities past Democratic objections using a legislative procedure that allows for simple majority votes for passage.

It's the same process House Speaker Mike Johnson used to pass Trump's big tax cuts bill last year and to advance Homeland Security money after Democrats refused to fund the department following the deaths of Americans protesting Immigration and Customs Enforcement actions earlier this year.

Johnson is pushing the effort almost single-handedly, without full backing from his slim House Republican majority or the Senate. He held lengthy meetings with Trump this week at the White House and hosted a private session for Republicans at the president's Camp David retreat to hash out details.

But the 47-page package remains a long-shot effort — too meager for some, too costly for others — ahead of voting in the full House expected next week.

Key Republican Rep. Chip Roy, an influential member of the Freedom Caucus who has expressed reservations about the package, did not vote at the Budget Committee session, as his home state of Texas deals with flooding.

Democrats argue Americans are paying for Trump's plans

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Democrats are ready to vote against the proposal, as they did Thursday during committee action.

Rep. Brendan Boyle of Pennsylvania, the ranking Democrat on the Budget Committee, said the document, some 6,500 words, never once mentions the issue that's top of mind for many Americans: affordability.

"People know this is a failed presidency, and a failed Republican majority," Boyle said.

Democrats offered more than a dozen amendments to the package during the hourslong Budget Committee session and raised questions about how the new spending will ultimately be paid for — either via budget cuts to other programs or by piling onto the nation's debt.

Boyle offered an amendment to reverse healthcare cuts from the Republicans' big tax breaks bill. Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., sought to reinstate funding for food stamps under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Rep. Scott Peters, D-Calif., suggested funding for immigration enforcement at Department of Homeland Security could be used to offset costs elsewhere.

Rep. Lloyd Doggett, D-Texas, blamed the high costs of living on the Iran war and said every time Americans open their refrigerators or go to the gas pump they are "paying for a war that should never have been started."

Senate pans House plan, leaving next steps uncertain

Next steps are highly volatile, as the House holds a rare Saturday pro forma session, which is a largely administrative meeting that will allow the resolution to be filed in time for consideration next week.

Johnson can only lose a few detractors on his side of the aisle as he relies on Republicans only, without Democrats, for passage.

But the resolution would also have to be agreed on by the Senate, and Republican senators have largely panned the House effort, waiting to see if Johnson can heave it to passage.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune said senators have "a lot of questions" about it — from defense hawks concerned about the military to deficit hawks who want to offset costs.

"It's a very uneven path," he said. "We'll see what the House can execute on," he said, but "I can't make any guarantees over here."

Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., who is expected to take over the Senate Budget Committee after the sudden death of Sen. Lindsey Graham, has been a leading budget hawk concerned about the nation's rising deficits.

The House plans to have its committees work on bill text over the August recess and bring the whole package back to the floor for a final vote in the fall.

Rubio gathers countries on left-wing political violence as it becomes a Trump focus in elections

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Thursday convened leaders from more than 60 countries to take part in the Trump administration's latest effort to quell what it calls "left wing" political terrorism, a marquee issue for Republicans heading into the midterm elections.

This focus comes even as studies show that there are very few reported cases of such incidents in the U.S., especially compared to historically higher levels of far-right violence.

With sweeping statements about the "alarming rise" of political violence by the left, Rubio and other U.S. officials painted a dark image of the future if the "communists and Marxists" perpetrating these supposed acts are not defeated. He urged officials in attendance — mostly from European and Latin American countries — to unite to address the issue, which he says has been a "blind spot" in counterterrorism doctrine.

"So many people in positions of power have repeatedly dismissed acts of violence and even terrorism as legitimate forms of political expression, so long as they served a left-wing cause," Rubio said in opening remarks. "A bomb planted by a neo-Nazi group was 'a nefarious and murderous act of evil.' It is, but a bomb planted by a Marxist revolutionary; well, that's just merely a tragic excess of idealism."

A report published last year by the Center for Strategic and International Studies found that left-wing terrorism attacks as of July 4, 2025, had surpassed those from the far right for the first time in more than 30 years. However, a closer look at the data reveals that the uptick reflects a very low starting level and

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a concurrent drop on the far right.

There was an average of 0.6 left-wing incidents annually from 1994 through 2000, compared with an average of 20.6 on the right, the report shows. From 2016 to 2024, there were an average of four per year on the left and 22.7 per year on the right. Those numbers had dropped dramatically on the right as of early July 2025, with only one incident. Meanwhile, there had been five from the left.

But the report's authors note that right-wing terrorism could easily return to elevated levels and that it is important to fight terrorism on both sides of the political spectrum.

A Republican push before midterm elections

President Donald Trump and his allies have prioritized talking points against the far left ahead of the congressional elections this November. Trump has repeatedly stated that the Democratic Party's ascendant left are communists who want to "completely destroy the traditional American way of life" and even engage in assassinations.

Vice President JD Vance has similarly called out communism as a political shift that is "something we haven't seen in the U.S." House Speaker Mike Johnson has decried "radical candidates" who are "self-described, self-identifying Marxists."

For Rubio, his worldview on this issue has been largely shaped by his own history: He is the son of Cuban immigrants who arrived in Miami in May 1956, a few years before communist leader Fidel Castro rose to power in Havana. The former Florida senator said Thursday that it was that same government's sprawling intelligence and ideological network that "helped to build the far left in our country and in our hemisphere."

Stephen Miller, Trump's deputy chief of staff and main architect of the administration's immigration policy, followed Rubio's remarks, aiming to drive home the immediacy of the perceived threats he saw to American institutions coming from the left, and what response is needed in return.

"If your civilization is your home, you must defend it with the same passion and force as if an enemy intruder is inside your own house where your family lives," Miller said. "That is the level of dedication and urgency that is required."

This ideological focus has repeatedly conflated democratic socialism — which often centers on securing universal healthcare, higher taxes on the wealthy and stricter corporate regulation — with communism, under which private ownership is largely eliminated.

It has only intensified in the last year, following the election of democratic socialist Zohran Mamdani to become New York City mayor and several of his proteges winning their New York City congressional primaries last month, beating out incumbents.

One of the ways the administration has started to target left-wing efforts is through sanctions. In November, the State Department designated four antifa or anti-fascist groups in Europe as foreign terrorist organizations. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said in his remarks Thursday that targeting these groups and entities' financial networks is the best way to circumvent their efforts.

Later Thursday, Rubio announced a new policy that would give the department a wide latitude to restrict visas to members of these supposed groups who have supported or incited acts of terrorism, including those who have supported those efforts financially, aided recruitment or provided logistical assistance.

"We have spent decades developing the world's most sophisticated financial counterterrorism capabilities, and now we are mobilizing some of the same tools that we have deployed against terrorists abroad to confront this emerging threat here at home," Bessent told the conference.

Slumping AI stocks drag down markets around the world

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Drops for computer chipmakers and other winners of the artificial-intelligence boom dragged down stock markets worldwide on Thursday.

The S&P 500 fell 0.5%, even though more stocks rose within the index than fell. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 105 points, or 0.2%, and the Nasdaq composite sank 1.5%.

Nearly three out of every four stocks rose within the S&P 500 after more of the country's biggest com-

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panies reported better earnings for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

Abbott jumped 10.7% after the healthcare company delivered a fatter profit than expected and raised its forecast for earnings over the full year. J.B. Hunt Transport Services climbed 8% after the freight company likewise topped analysts' expectations for the latest quarter.

But a 1% move for Nvidia's stock packs more punch on the S&P 500 than a 1% move for any other company because it's the largest on Wall Street by value.

And Nvidia fell 2.4%, making it the heaviest weight on the index. Other AI winners also sank, giving back some of their stellar gains.

Micron Technology fell 5.6% to shave its gain for the year so far below 199%. Sandisk fell 12.6% but is nevertheless up 494% for the year so far. Western Digital sank 9.2% but is still up 171% for the year so far.

Such stocks have been under pressure for weeks because of worries that their prices shot too high and that voracious demand for computer memory and processors may not be sustainable if AI ends up not producing as much profit and productivity as promised.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 38.63 points to 7,533.77. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 105.67 to 52,552.97, and the Nasdaq composite sank 387.28 to 25,881.95.

The losses came even though Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., a bellwether of the chip industry, reported a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. Its stock in Taiwan rose 1.2%, but its stock that trades in the United States fell 2.3%.

In South Korea, drops for AI winners like Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix dragged the Kospi index down 6.4%. It's been among the world's shakiest markets in recent weeks because of how dominant the two AI winners are in it.

The day before, the Kospi jumped 6.2%, but it's had drops of 8.9%, 7.8% and 5.3% in the last couple weeks.

A hike to interest rates by the Bank of Korea also weighed on stocks in Seoul, the first by the bank since 2023.

Higher interest rates can keep a lid on inflation, but they also slow the economy and hurt prices for all kinds of investments. And worries are rising that the Federal Reserve and other central banks around the world may have to raise rates to rein in the effects of expensive oil.

Oil prices are near their highest in a month because of worries that the war with Iran will keep oil tankers out of the Strait of Hormuz and prevent shipments of crude from the Persian Gulf to customers worldwide.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude briefly climbed above \$86 per barrel in the morning before erasing the gain and falling back to settle at \$84.23, down 0.8% from the day before.

In the bond market, the 10-year Treasury yield edged up to 4.56% from 4.55% late Wednesday and just 3.97% before the war with Iran began. Higher yields have already sent the average 30-year mortgage rate to its highest level in nearly a year.

Reports on the U.S. economy came in mixed, which added to the eddies swirling through the bond market. One report said shoppers spent less at U.S. retailers last month than economists expected. But after ignoring sales at gasoline stations, spending by U.S. consumers remained resilient.

A separate report said fewer U.S. workers applied for unemployment benefits last week, an indication of a solid job market, while a third report said manufacturing in the mid-Atlantic region is better than economists expected.

In stock markets abroad, indexes fell across much of Europe and Asia, including drops of 1.8% in Shanghai and 2.8% in Tokyo.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng was an outlier and rose 1.3%. Alibaba rose after China's cyberspace regulator said Wednesday it had approved the Apple Intelligence AI tool for use in China. An Alibaba spokesperson said its Qwen model will be integrated into Apple Intelligence.

Jackson Suber leads a day of surprises at Birkdale with a 65 in his first British Open

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

SOUTHPORT, England (AP) — Jackson Suber got his first taste of links golf — on his first trip to Europe — when he arrived at Royal Birkdale. Three days later, he proved to be a quick study with a superb par save and a 6-foot eagle late in his round for a 5-under 65 to lead the British Open.

Bryson DeChambeau might be getting the hang of this, too, no matter what three-time British Open champion Nick Faldo thinks about his strategy.

An opening round lasting some 15 hours included just about everything during a warm and breezy start. Five of the leading 12 players were playing the British Open for the first time. Rory McIlroy missed three 4-foot putts in a four-hole span and had six bogeys in his round of 72. Scottie Scheffler opened with four birdies in six holes and didn't make another the rest of the way for a 68.

Most startling was Suber, a 26-year-old American who has yet to win anywhere since leaving Ole Miss and is playing in only his third major. He made a tough par save on the new par-3 15th with slopes off severely on both sides. He followed with a 6-foot birdie on the 16th and then choked up on a 4-iron from 233 yards and hit it to 6 feet for eagle.

Not bad for his seventh round in any major, and first on a links course as tough as Birkdale.

"Just kind of kept the ball in good spots and didn't put much pressure on my game to make pars," Suber said.

He led by one shot over Sungjae Im and Dan Brown of England. The nine players at 67 include four Open debutants — Alex Smalley, Ryan Gerard, M.J. Daffue, Pierceson Coody.

And then there was DeChambeau, who has missed the cut in all three majors this year and has chosen not to speak to the media since Friday at the Masters, except for on LIV Golf.

Turns out he had enough strategy to get in the mix, often ripping driver to take the fearsome bunkers out of play and doing enough right for a 67 that left him two shots behind.

Strategy became a talking point when Faldo told the Sky Sports Golf Podcast this week, "DeChambeau has zero clue of strategy. He said last year, 'I'm going to go out and attack the links'. Well, I've never attacked a links. You thread it, don't you? You feed it down the fairway. ... You don't think, 'Oh, I'll just blast it down there.'"

DeChambeau hit only four fairways but missed only three greens, though he was rarely in big trouble when he wasn't in the short grass.

He twice blasted tee shots over the trouble and close to the green at the par-4 second and the par-4 10th, the latter a blind shot. He made birdie on both. And while Jon Rahm was among those who said going long can lead to trouble at some point, the only two shots DeChambeau dropped came from his putting (the par-5 14th) and chipping (the par-4 18th).

He was tied for the early lead until going from wispy rough over the back of the 18th, chipped weakly to 8 feet and missed the putt. He missed three birdie chances from around 10 feet or under, one of them on redesigned, 321-yard fifth hole, when he drove it just over the green.

DeChambeau agreed to take a few questions from the R&A and said, "I feel like I did a really good job today of being incredibly strategic and focused super hard on placing it in the right places. Besides 18, I placed the ball in some good areas. I just need to hit more fairways. Other than that, I feel like my strategy was nice today."

Cameron Young, one of the hottest players in the spring but quiet the past two months, also was at 67 along with Robert MacIntyre, Thomas Detry and Francesco Molinari, the 2018 Open champion at Carnoustie, which also featured a baked links course.

Scheffler had few complaints after a 68, even not making a birdie over his last 12 holes, playing the two par 5s in 1 over and making a pair of soft bogeys. He also missed a 5-foot birdie putt. Whether he could have gotten more out of his round was of little concern.

"If I continue to strike the ball the way I did today and just keep giving myself looks, that's part of it,"

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Scheffler said. "Golf is played over 72 holes, and I definitely liked what I saw today."

Smalley, who took a two-shot lead into the final round at the PGA Championship, was leading until his drive on the 18th was fading with the wind and then the luck of links golf took over. One wild bounce sent it further right and out of bounds. He finished with a double bogey for a 67.

"Got up to where the ball was supposed to be and was told it hit a spectator fence and kicked another 15 yards right out of bounds. All three of us in our group actually hit it over there, and mine just got an unlucky break," Smalley said. "Poor tee shot, poor break. Sometimes that's how it goes."

Scheffler played in the group with DeChambeau and they traded birdies early. For six holes, the world's No. 1 player had total control of his shots and looked as though he couldn't miss. He got to 4 under when he gave a leg kick as his 40-foot birdie putt dropped on No. 6.

But then he missed the seventh green — 139 yards, downhill — to the left between a pair of bunkers, and his pitch was so strong it flirted with going in a bunker on the other side. He missed a 5-foot birdie chance on the 11th, and then made a mess of the par-5 17th when his ball was buried so deep in the grass he thought someone might have stepped on it during the search.

"Sometimes you hit it over there and you get a clean lie and you're able to give yourself a look, and then other times like today, you pay a pretty severe price," he said. "But I guess don't hit it offline."

Trump administration revives rule that could deny green cards to immigrants who use public benefits

By GISELA SALOMON Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — The Trump administration is reviving a rule that could deny green cards to immigrants who use public benefits that could include food stamps, Medicaid, housing vouchers and others.

The policy, known as "public charge," appeared on Thursday in the Federal Register. It will be formally published on July 20 and take effect Sept. 18. Under the policy, applicants for green cards have to show they wouldn't be burdens to the country or "public charges."

The policy was first implemented in February 2020 as one of President Donald Trump's moves to limit legal immigration during his first administration, but it was reversed after Democratic President Joe Biden came to power.

Its return comes when the Republican administration is implementing a hard-line policy to curb both illegal and legal immigration, and when the cost of healthcare and food is rising.

The federal government "is reaffirming the requirement of self-reliance, protecting public resources and ending policies that encouraged dependency on the backs of hard-working American taxpayers," U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services said in a post published on its X account.

"Under President Trump, USCIS is restoring the basic principle that immigrants must be able to support themselves," the post said.

While the administration's crackdown on immigration has an increased focus on deportations and immigration enforcement in cities across the country and at borders and entry points, it has also taken actions that target legal immigrants and mixed-status families, in which the parents are foreign nationals with U.S.-born children.

The rule expands disqualification options

Federal law already requires those seeking permanent residency or legal status to demonstrate that they will not become a public charge. The Trump administration's rule, however, broadens the grounds for disqualification.

The new rule does not describe or specify by name the benefits and programs that could be considered a public charge. Instead, it says that officers who would implement the policy will make "individualized, fact-specific public charge inadmissible determinations, based on a totality of the alien's circumstances."

It says that, "using good judgment and discretion, officers will more accurately assess an alien's likelihood at any time of becoming a public charge."

The Trump administration first promoted the rule in 2018 as a way to ensure that only those who were

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self-sufficient came to the U.S. Immigrant rights advocates criticized it, saying it amounted to a “wealth test.” Public health experts said it would lead to worse health outcomes.

Manatt Health, a group that provides advice to state and federal governments, estimated the policy would have deterred as many as 26 million people from seeking healthcare, food, housing or other aid through programs for which they qualified under federal law. About half were U.S. citizens, mostly children or adults living in a mixed-status family, according to the group.

Experts also noted that most people who receive benefits from the government are already legal residents. A 2020 study from the Migration Policy Institute said that while the “chilling effects” may be vast, the number of immigrants who could be deemed ineligible for legal permanent residence based on use of one of the public benefits under the rule was small.

The institute estimated that no more than 167,000 people — less than 1% of the 22.1 million noncitizens residing in the United States at that time — could be determined ineligible for a green card based on their current use of a listed benefit.

There were 22.8 million noncitizens living in the U.S. in 2023, according to the Census Bureau.

Critics say the rule creates fear in the community

Nongovernmental organizations said the policy generated confusion and fear and caused many immigrants and their U.S.-born relatives to decide not to apply for benefits and services to which they were entitled.

Immigrant advocates condemned the government’s decision to revive the “public charge” rule and expressed concern.

“This regulation is a direct assault on immigrant families, and a threat to our country’s health and economic security,” said Adriana Cadena, executive director at the Protecting Immigrant Families Coalition. “The Trump administration is basing immigration decisions on bias and politics, regardless of the resulting harm.”

Sarah Krieger, senior policy counsel at the National Immigration Law Center, said the rule would make immigrants afraid to go to the doctor, buy food at the grocery store and file taxes.

“With this new rule, they are sowing fear and chaos to ultimately reshape America into a country where only the few who are white and ultra-wealthy are welcome,” Krieger said. “The rule is not just deeply harmful, it also violates the law.”

Hopes for US-Iran diplomacy still alive as fighting intensifies over the Strait of Hormuz

By BEN FINLEY, FARNOUSH AMIRI, SAMY MAGDY and MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fighting between the U.S. and Iran has intensified over control of the Strait of Hormuz, but hopes for a possible diplomatic solution have shown stubborn signs of life.

Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry on Thursday rejected suggestions that Islamabad had abandoned efforts to bring Washington and Tehran back to the negotiating table after brokering an initial ceasefire agreement last month that has now collapsed.

“Let me dispel the impression that Pakistan has done hands up, and this is not the case,” ministry spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said at a news conference, adding that the parties eventually “will have to come to the negotiating table to settle all outstanding issues.”

Even the top negotiators for Iran and the U.S. signaled they have not walked away from talks. In a podcast interview with Joe Rogan that aired Wednesday, Vice President JD Vance said the Trump administration is “not going to bomb and bomb and bomb” and noted that “you’ve got to actually be willing to talk and to try to figure out the problem.”

“We’re going try to use our military force as one of the many tools that we have to solve the problem,” Vance said, adding that “diplomacy is another tool.”

Mediators from countries that include Pakistan, Qatar and Egypt have been working to resume talks, according to regional officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive diplomacy. They noted that neither side has notified Pakistan that it was officially withdrawing or terminating the

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initial ceasefire agreement.

The backchannel efforts have been overshadowed by the escalating attacks, with the U.S. military on Thursday conducting strikes deeper into Iran and firing on a ship that the U.S. accused of trying to break its naval blockade of Iranian ports. Iran has retaliated by launching missiles and drones at U.S. allies in the region and warned that its attacks could grow to target "all the infrastructure in the region."

The U.S. and Iran are in a delicate and potentially pivotal moment that "leaves open the possibility of moving up the escalation ladder," said Naysan Rafati, senior Iran analyst at the Washington-based International Crisis Group.

The push is on for renewing negotiations

Andrabi, the spokesman for Pakistan's foreign ministry, acknowledged that mediation between Iran and the U.S. had become increasingly difficult. But he said peace efforts remained alive.

"It can be put on the backburner, but it stays," Andrabi said, adding that "whenever the parties exhaust the logic of escalation, the formula for peace is there."

The regional officials involved in mediation attempts said efforts to salvage the deal to end the war were continuing this week. They acknowledged that the 60-day negotiating process spelled out in the interim deal has halted. But they said mediators have been working to persuade both sides to return to the negotiating table.

Officials say the key point of dispute is management of the Strait of Hormuz, the crucial energy shipping route that is Tehran's greatest source of leverage. The language in the interim deal is vague. Iran claims it has the authority to arrange shipping transit through the strait, while the U.S. says the waterway is meant to be open to free passage and has tried to arrange an alternate shipping route along Oman's coast.

In his interview with Rogan, Vance acknowledged that diplomacy might ultimately be the only way forward.

"I'm very frustrated by the Americans and frankly by people in other countries who are like, 'You cannot negotiate with the Iranians,'" the vice president said. "Well, then what is your proposal to get people to stop shooting at ships in the Strait of Hormuz?"

Trump increases the threats and says Iran 'better behave'

The fighting resumed over Iran's unwillingness to allow oil tankers and other commercial vessels to navigate freely through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital Persian Gulf shipping route through which 20% of the world's oil normally flows. Iran effectively choked off the usual stream of commerce by attacking commercial vessels that ignored its rules, disrupting world energy markets and driving up prices that could pose problems for Republicans in November's midterm elections.

Asked by reporters in recent days if he is still open to negotiations, Trump has repeated his previous threats that Iran returning to the table is the only thing that can avoid U.S. attacks on civilian infrastructure like bridges and power plants. But the Republican president said he would not put a timeline on it.

"I don't like giving deadlines, but they pretty much know, they know the story," Trump said in Pennsylvania on Wednesday. "They better behave."

Moments before, Iran's parliament speaker and lead negotiator said the country is not declaring last month's interim deal void. But Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf said Iran's commitment depends on continued implementation by the United States. If Washington fails to honor its obligations, Iran would have no reason to remain bound by it, he argued.

The initial June 17 agreement called for a permanent end to hostilities and a reopening of the strait and started a 60-day negotiating clock to reach a final deal on the future of Iran's nuclear program and other issues.

Qalibaf also suggested that Iran is not seeking to keep the Strait of Hormuz closed indefinitely. He said Tehran's objective is to preserve what he called "Iranian arrangements" governing navigation through the waterway, while allowing the maximum safe passage of commercial shipping under those rules.

US is trying a naval blockade and more strikes to reopen the Strait of Hormuz — again

To stop Iran's attacks on ships, Trump has stepped up military attacks and reinstituted an earlier Navy blockade of Iranian ports to inflict economic pain.

But it would be unrealistic to expect the U.S. to eliminate Iran's ability to launch missiles and drones into the strait anytime soon, said Bradley Bowman, a former Army helicopter pilot and now a scholar at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a hawkish Washington think tank.

"Unfortunately, Iran only needs to hit a ship every now and then to create serious problems and dilemmas for insurers and ship captains and reduce the flow of traffic in the strait," he said. "That reduced flow exerts significant economic and political pressure on Washington, especially as midterm elections approach. Iran understands the leverage it now has — and so does Trump."

At the same time, Bowman and other experts are not convinced that more strikes and economic pressure will get Iran to negotiate.

"We're doing things that have not affected Iranian behavior in the past," said Mark Cancian, a retired Marine colonel and a senior defense adviser with the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "So why would it affect Iranian behavior now?"

Ukrainians protest Zelenskyy's ouster of his popular defense minister

By SAMYA KULLAB and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — President Volodymyr Zelenskyy shook up his wartime government, drawing thousands into the streets Thursday across Ukraine to protest the ouster of his youthful defense minister — seen as an innovator of the country's successful drone technology but who clashed with the traditional military establishment.

The personnel overhaul, which included replacing his prime minister, could become a test of Zelenskyy's political authority as Ukraine's fight against Russia's full-scale invasion approaches 4½ years. Zelenskyy has remained in office under martial law because wartime elections are prohibited but has periodically reshuffled his government.

The moves threw Ukraine's military leadership into an unwelcome crisis at a time when its actions against Russia are starting to bear fruit and as Moscow has unleashed unrelenting aerial attacks. Two people were killed and five others were wounded, including a child, when Russian missiles hit the capital of Kyiv overnight, Ukraine's Emergency Service said.

In making the changes, Zelenskyy cited friction between outgoing Defense Minister Mykhailo Fedorov and Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the commander of Ukraine's armed forces.

"I'm just showing that if the sides can't resolve an issue, I will have to resolve it," Zelenskyy said at a news conference.

The outgoing defense chief was seen as a modernizer

Fedorov, 35, is considered to be a vigorous modernizer whose technological expertise is credited in part with significantly improving Ukraine's military performance in recent months against Russia's bigger army. He is leaving the government after only six months in the post.

Fedorov appeared at a news conference in a dark T-shirt and jeans, and accused Syrskyi of blocking reforms needed because "the war has changed completely" due to new technology like drones.

During his time in office, he secured restrictions on Russian forces' access to the Starlink satellite communications system, allowing Ukraine to better leverage its midrange strike capabilities giving Kyiv significant battlefield advantages.

Fedorov said he was willing to work with Syrskyi, "but we encountered a situation in which all the initiatives we proposed began to be blocked."

"Under this arrangement (with Syrskyi as commander), I personally do not know how the war can be won," he said.

On social media, Fedorov highlighted what he called his major achievements: redirecting funds earmarked for salaries into midrange strike capabilities, fiber-optic drones, reconnaissance systems and other technologies. He pointed to expanded drone procurement, Patriot missile defense contracts, successful

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ballistic missile tests and sweeping changes to military procurement.

But he acknowledged he was unable to complete the Defense Ministry's organizational transformation "according to NATO standards and common sense," and move all procurement to competitive tenders, and build a culture of accountability.

Syrskiy didn't appear in public but in a Facebook post thanked Fedorov and said he hoped he would continue to serve Ukraine. "I wish him to continue to remain in the Ukrainian team," Syrskiy said without elaborating.

Zelenskyy said he had asked Maj. Gen. Yevhen Khmara to perform the defense minister's duties in the meantime, according to a post on the Telegram messaging app. Since January, Khmara has been acting head of the state's security service, known as the SBU. He had previously led the SBU's elite Alpha special forces unit.

Zelenskyy described a difficult relationship between the Defense Ministry and the military at multiple levels, not simply a matter of personalities, and he said both sides share responsibility for the consequences.

"Together we win, and together we're responsible for the things that cause confusion and public reaction," he said, standing beside British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who was making his final foreign visit before leaving office next week.

Mostly young protesters support Fedorov

Syrskiy, 60, initially organized the defense of Kyiv in February 2022, and seven months later masterminded a successful counteroffensive in the Kharkiv region. Born in 1965, he attended the Moscow Higher Military Command School before serving in the Soviet Artillery Corps before the USSR's collapse in 1991.

The Ukrainian military has rallied under Fedorov, slowing Moscow's front-line advance to a virtual standstill and striking refineries and other energy sites inside Russian territory, causing widespread fuel shortages, Western officials and analysts say. Zelenskyy's decision to fire him despite that record has dismayed many people.

Before becoming defense minister in January, Fedorov headed Ukraine's digital transformation policies. He won popularity by spearheading the rapid development and deployment of drone technology and introducing several successful e-government platforms.

As minister, he moved to combat corruption, an issue that carries particular weight with Ukrainians who have repeatedly protested graft. Fighting corruption meant working against the interests of groups that had long profited from programs within the ministry, he said in interviews. He also sought to overhaul weapons procurement to make it more transparent.

He had promised sweeping military reforms, saying it had faced about 200,000 desertions and draft-dodging by some 2 million people.

The mostly young protesters who took to the streets of Kyiv and other cities to support Fedorov made crude remarks about the current military commander, chanting, "Syrskiy, go away!" and "A European army for a European country!"

Kyiv resident Bohdan Huryak said he was "deeply outraged" by Fedorov's exit.

"I'm not deeply invested in the internal political debates, but this is a person who shows results on the battlefield, we see results, we feel the fighting spirit and confidence in victory rising," Huryak told The Associated Press. "And then, six months later, he is removed from office? Come on."

Russian military correspondents and pro-Kremlin bloggers relished the controversy. Pro-Kremlin political analyst Sergei Markov described Fedorov's comments as a "rebellion" against Zelenskyy.

The deputy commander of Ukraine's air force, Col. Pavlo Yelizarov, quit over Fedorov's dismissal, saying on social media it will weaken Ukraine's air defenses and lead to more deaths from Russian attacks.

"I believe that the dismissal of Mykhailo Fedorov is a great evil for the country's defense capability," he wrote in his resignation letter on Facebook.

State energy company chief is new prime minister

Parliament overwhelmingly approved Serhii Koretskyi, the head of state energy company Naftogaz, as the country's new prime minister.

In nominating Koretskyi, Zelenskyy cited his record in the energy sector and argued he was best pre-

pared to guide Ukraine through another winter, when Russian attacks on the power grid intensify.

Unlike other senior government officials, the 48-year-old engineer did not rise through political parties, parliament or the civil service. He spent more than two decades managing fuel and food businesses before being picked to run some of Ukraine's most troubled state-owned energy companies and gained a reputation as an effective crisis manager who could make them profitable.

Zelenskyy has faced protests before over his decisions. Large demonstrations broke out in July 2025 when he fast-tracked a law that would have curbed the independence of the country's anti-corruption watchdogs.

The outcry threatened his leadership for the first time since Russia's invasion, and he swiftly reversed course and submitted legislation to restore the agencies' independence.

Trump administration races the clock to rebuild US tariff wall knocked down by Supreme Court

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Treasury last year swelled with revenue from President Donald Trump's double-digit taxes on imports from almost every country on earth.

But the money dried up after the Supreme Court struck down the biggest and boldest of Trump's tariffs in February.

The question now is: Can the president's trade team make good on its promise to replace the lost revenue? A deadline is approaching rapidly.

After the Supreme Court setback, the president turned first to Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 to impose 10% tariffs globally. But Section 122 only authorizes tariffs for 150 days. Trump's expire on July 24. Congress would have to extend those tariffs — something lawmakers are unlikely to do as the Nov. 3 midterm elections approach amid voter discontent over the high cost of living.

But the administration has more durable options: Section 301 of the same 1974 trade law permits the president to impose tariffs and other sanctions against countries found to engage in "unjustifiable," "unreasonable" or "discriminatory" trade practices. Trump used Section 301 to impose big tariffs on China in his first term and is rolling them out again — as recently as late Wednesday when he announced 25% tariffs on some Brazilian imports, charging the world's 11th-biggest economy with a host of unfair trade practices.

Trade attorneys and analysts are confident the tariff-happy Trump administration will manage to beat the clock and swap out Section 122 tariffs with bigger Section 301 tariffs by the July 24 deadline. "They're going to raise the tariff wall again," said trade lawyer Ryan Majerus, a partner at King & Spalding and a trade official in Trump's first administration and in President Joe Biden's.

Trump last year tested — and exceeded — the limits of his authority to impose import taxes, a power the U.S. Constitution gives Congress. He invoked the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) to slap big tariffs on most of the world's countries.

He justified the levies, which marked a stunning reversal of decades of U.S. policy in favor of lower tariffs and freer trade, by labeling America's longstanding trade deficits a national emergency.

The Supreme Court didn't buy it, ruling in February that the president couldn't use the emergency powers law to impose tariffs at all. The legal defeat meant the administration had to send refunds to importers that had paid the levies.

As a result, tariffs have at least temporarily gone from a windfall to a drain on the Treasury.

Revenue from import taxes peaked at more than \$31.4 billion last October. Then, after the Supreme Court ruling, it started dwindling — to \$22 billion in both March and April. As refund checks went out faster than revenue from the Section 122 and other tariffs came in, the number turned negative: A small (\$42 million) shortfall in May was followed by a whopping \$25.6 billion loss in June.

Trump and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent have vowed to use other legal authorities to recoup the lost income.

Enter Section 301, which gives the president power to impose — and adjust — tariffs in response to other

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countries' trade practices. But the administration must first check procedural boxes – collecting comments and holding hearings. There are no limits on Section 301 tariffs. They expire after four years but can be renewed.

So the president has flexibility in how he uses the Section 301 tariffs. Trump can still change them — after clearing procedural hurdles — but he can't impose or move them up or down on a whim as he often did with the IEEPA tariffs. Uncertainty over Trump's tariff policy has vexed businesses, leaving them hesitant to make investments and decisions because they don't know what the trade rules are going to be.

A switch to rule-bound 301 tariffs would mean "there's less uncertainty but not no uncertainty," said Sarah Bianchi, a former U.S. trade official who is now chief strategist of international political affairs at the investment research firm Evercore ISI.

The Trump administration has turned to two big Section 301 investigations in its campaign to replace lost tariff revenue. One accuses 60 countries, accounting for 99% of U.S. imports, of failing to do enough to crack down on imports created by forced labor. The other is investigating whether 16 U.S. trading partners — including China, the European Union and Japan — are overproducing goods, driving down worldwide prices and putting American manufacturers at a disadvantage.

The administration has already decided what it wants to do about the forced labor issue. Invoking Section 301 last month, U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer proposed tariffs — 10% on 16 countries and 12.5% on 44 — that are the same or slightly higher than the 10% Section 122 levies they would replace. But Greer's office is still receiving public comments on the proposed tariffs and has not imposed them yet.

Nathaniel Halvorson, a partner at the Baker McKenzie law firm and a former U.S. trade official, expects Greer's office will manage to get the forced-labor levies in place in time so that there won't be much, if any, "daylight" between them and the expiring Section 122 tariffs. "Really, they're operating about as fast as legally possible," he said.

The administration has not yet completed the other Section 301 investigation into alleged overproduction by 16 countries. Trade attorney Majerus expects the administration to propose more big tariffs in that case, likely in a month or two. He suspects they will be timed to take effect only after the midterm elections "for obvious reasons."

Trump, who has proudly called himself "Tariff Man," has made it clear that he is seeking to bring back the big, worldwide import taxes he'd imposed in 2025. So the new 301 investigations look like a pretext to do that and might be vulnerable in court, Bianchi said.

"Section 301s have been pretty legally durable," she said. "But no one has tried to use it to basically put in place universal tariffs. I think there will be legal challenges."

What remains of the Iran deal as fighting rages

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

The conflict between Iran and the United States has intensified in recent days and an interim deal to end the fighting has collapsed less than a month after it was signed.

The Memorandum of Understanding was supposed to halt all military operations and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway for global oil and gas. It also set the stage for further negotiations intended to lead to a permanent peace deal and an agreement on Iran's nuclear program within 60 days.

Here's a look at some of the main clauses of the agreement and the situation on the ground.

The fighting has resumed

THE DEAL: The United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran and their allies in the current war by signing this MOU declare the immediate and permanent termination of military operations on all fronts, including in Lebanon, and undertake from now on not to initiate any war or any military operation against each other and to refrain from the threat or use of force against each other and ensuring the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon.

THE CURRENT SITUATION: The U.S. has launched days of airstrikes on Iran in response to its attacks on commercial ships in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran has fired back at Arab countries hosting American troops. A

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ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah reached shortly after the Iran agreement has largely held despite renewed hostilities elsewhere in the region.

The Strait of Hormuz is largely closed

THE DEAL: Upon the signing of this MOU, the Islamic Republic of Iran will make arrangements using its best efforts for the safe passage of commercial vessels with no charge for 60 days only from the Persian Gulf to the Sea of Oman and vice versa. The traffic of commercial vessels will immediately start and, considering the needs for removing the technical and military obstacles and demining by the Islamic Republic of Iran, will be instated within 30 days. The Islamic Republic of Iran will conduct dialogue with the Sultanate of Oman to define the future administration and maritime services in the Strait of Hormuz in discussion with other Persian Gulf littoral states in line with the applicable international law and the sovereign rights of coastal states of the Strait of Hormuz.

THE CURRENT SITUATION: This clause seems to have been the undoing of the deal. Iran says it gives it the right to manage traffic through the strait and potentially charge tolls after 60 days. The U.S. and others dispute that, saying the strait should be open to all without fees, as it was before the war. The U.S. has set up an alternative route along Oman's coast and outside of Iran's control. Iran's attacks on ships using that route triggered the renewed hostilities. Traffic through the strait rose after the deal was signed but remained far short of prewar levels and has plummeted in recent days as fighting has escalated.

The U.S. has reimposed its blockade

THE DEAL: Immediately upon the signing of this MOU, the United States of America will begin the removal of its naval blockade and any disturbances or impediments against the Islamic Republic of Iran and will fully end the naval blockade within 30 days. During this period, the traffic of vessels will be in proportion to the numbers of prewar traffic being restored by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The United States of America further undertakes to remove its forces from the proximity of the Islamic Republic of Iran within 30 days after the final deal.

THE CURRENT SITUATION: The U.S. this week restored its blockade on Iranian ports, citing Iran's attacks on commercial ships in the Strait of Hormuz. On Thursday, U.S. forces opened fire on a ship they said was trying to break the blockade.

Sanctions on Iranian oil exports have been restored

THE DEAL: The United States of America undertakes that immediately upon the signing of this MOU and until the termination of sanctions the U.S. Department of Treasury will issue waivers for the export of Iranian crude oil, petroleum products and derivatives and all associated services including banking transactions, insurances, transportation, etc.

THE CURRENT SITUATION: The U.S. issued the waivers but then revoked them after Iran's attacks on shipping.

There's been no public sign of progress toward a final deal

THE DEAL: The United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran commit to negotiating and achieving the final deal in maximum 60 days extendable with mutual consent ... After signing this MOU and subject to the beginning of the implementation of paragraphs 1, 4, 5, 10 and 11 of this MOU, and the continuing implementation of these measures, the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran will start negotiations regarding the final deal exclusively on the other paragraphs.

THE CURRENT SITUATION: Negotiations were apparently paused during last week's funeral for Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed in the opening U.S. and Israeli strikes. It's unclear if they have resumed, or if any progress has been made. The 60-day time frame suggests a mid-August deadline.

The nuclear dispute still seems as intractable as ever

THE DEAL: The Islamic Republic of Iran reaffirms that it shall not procure or develop nuclear weapons. United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran have agreed to resolve the disposition of stockpile enriched material pursuant to a mechanism that will be mutually agreed upon in accordance with the schedule mentioned in Paragraph 7 with the minimum methodology to be downblending on site under the supervision of the IAEA. The two parties also agreed to discuss the issue of enrichment and other

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mutually agreed matters related to the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear needs, based on a satisfactory framework being agreed upon in the final deal. The final deal will confirm the provisions of this paragraph.

THE CURRENT SITUATION: It's unclear if any progress has been made toward the highly ambitious goal of resolving the nuclear issue in 60 days. Iran has not publicly made any concessions while reiterating its longstanding position that its program is peaceful. It has refused to allow International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors to visit bombed nuclear sites where its highly enriched uranium is believed to have been buried.

Other clauses also appear to be in limbo

The interim deal called for a \$300 billion reconstruction fund for Iran as part of the final agreement, but it's still unclear where that money would come from. The U.S. pledged to lift all sanctions as part of the final accord, but U.S. officials have always said that is linked to progress on nuclear and other issues.

Trump officials want to make testosterone drugs easier to prescribe. Is that a good idea?

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Officials under President Donald Trump want to make it easier for men to get a prescription for testosterone, the latest shift in a decades-long debate over the benefits and risks of replacing the hormone that affects sex drive, mood and other health factors.

The move, backed by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and other top officials, aligns with the advice of many online influencers and podcasters, including men's health gurus who tout the hormone as a way to boost muscle and energy. On Tuesday, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said the military would begin screening for low testosterone and offering the hormone as a way to help troops operate at their "absolute best."

The notion of testosterone as an all-purpose elixir for strength and vitality is not supported by the science. But medical experts say a decade of new research has bolstered the case for testosterone's benefits for sexual health while allaying concerns about its impact on the heart.

"Many providers have been trained for years that these were real issues, and they were scared to get a testosterone reading from a patient or offer them testosterone therapy," said Dr. Justin Dubin, a urologist at Baptist Health Miami Cancer Institute.

Last year, the Food and Drug Administration removed a bold safety warning about possible heart risks with testosterone pills, gels, injections and patches, based on recent data that showed no increase in those problems.

Last month, the agency proposed rewriting prescribing instructions to clear the way for using testosterone against age-related symptoms, such as low libido and erectile dysfunction. Currently the label emphasizes that the hormone is only approved for abnormally low testosterone levels caused by serious medical conditions or injury.

But experts who prescribe the drug say those patients are a small segment of people seeking help.

"The majority of people we see in our office are regular men complaining of these common symptoms because they're dramatically affecting their quality of life," said Dr. Helen Bernie, a urologist and director of sexual health at Indiana University.

Testosterone use has evolved over decades

Testosterone was first approved in the 1950s to treat hypogonadism, a condition defined by low testosterone levels caused by medical problems affecting the testes or other organs.

Testosterone declines naturally with age and can affect sexual function, mood, bone density and other measures. The question of how to diagnose and treat men with those issues has long been debated by researchers.

"These symptoms overlap with symptoms of human aging in men, so there's a high risk of misdiagnosis and that's led to the controversy" said Dr. Shalender Bhasin, of Harvard Medical School, who has co-authored several recent testosterone studies and guidelines.

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Bhasin says increased willingness to prescribe testosterone reflects growing acceptance of the seriousness of men's sexual health problems, beginning with the introduction of Viagra for erectile dysfunction in the 1990s.

Bhasin helped write the Endocrine Society's current guidelines for testosterone, which recommend discussing testosterone with men who have documented symptoms and two blood test results confirming low hormone levels. One recent study by Michigan researchers found that just 12% of men getting a prescription met that criteria.

Prescriptions previously soared, despite little evidence

The potential for overprescribing testosterone is real and helped lead to current restrictions.

In the early 2010s, drugmakers spent millions on TV ads for gels, patches and other products promising relief from "low T," including a laundry list of symptoms like fatigue, muscle loss, brain fog and weight gain.

By 2013, the drugs were generating more than \$2 billion in sales annually, despite lacking FDA approval for most of the issues described. Doctors remain free to prescribe drugs off-label, or for unapproved uses, and many men today continue taking testosterone because they believe it improves energy, mood and appearance.

In 2015, the FDA hit drugmakers with a double whammy: They had to clarify that their drugs weren't approved for routine problems and also add a boxed warning about possible heart risks.

FDA scrutiny led to new research

The FDA now says updated data warrants relaxing the restrictions.

An FDA-mandated study published in 2023 followed 5,000 men with a history of heart disease, with half receiving daily testosterone gel and the other half getting a sham drug. After two years there was no difference in heart attack, stroke and related problems between the two groups.

A series of studies by the National Institutes of Health also clarified the benefits of the hormone. Results from nearly 800 older men showed testosterone therapy improved erectile dysfunction, libido and other sexual measures and had a small effect on mood. There was little or no improvement in other measures like fatigue, memory or overall well-being.

The recent testosterone studies are the largest ever conducted, but Bhasin — who helped lead both efforts — says more research is needed on longer-term effects.

"I think FDA's label changes are very welcome and they are bringing us a big step forward," said Bhasin, who also co-authored the Endocrine Society's guidelines. "But I think there's a lot more to be done to better define the safety and efficacy."

In recent comments submitted to the FDA, the Endocrine Society recommended studies of 15 to 20 years to assess conditions that evolve slowly, including prostate cancer, which remains a concern when prescribing testosterone.

Some men should not get testosterone

Experts agree that men who are hoping to have children in the near future shouldn't take the hormone. Getting testosterone from a pill or gel shuts off the body's natural process for making the hormone.

"It can stop the signal from your brain to your testicles to make testosterone, and so you stop making sperm," Dubin said. "That can compromise fertility."

Most guidelines also recommend careful consideration for men who have had prostate cancer or are at risk of the disease, given lingering questions about whether hormone therapy hastens tumor growth. But guidelines may soon change.

The FDA has proposed new language that would only suggest that men whose prostate cancer has spread to other parts of the body should avoid testosterone.

Be wary of online promotions

Dietary supplements promoted online to boost testosterone should be avoided because they aren't FDA approved and probably don't work.

FDA-approved testosterone drugs come in a variety of forms. Gels and pills generally need to be used daily. Injections, patches and implantable pellets can last for weeks or several months.

Many of these medications are available through telehealth services, though accessing them that way

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can have risks.

A 2022 paper by Dubin found that only 1 in 7 online prescribing companies asked basic screening questions, including whether men planned to have children. And most of the companies did not have a testing threshold for whether patients actually had low testosterone.

How to protect yourself from the bad air caused by wildfires

By CALEIGH WELLS Associated Press

When wildfires burn, smoke can travel long distances and degrade air quality far away, posing risks to those breathing it.

Fires burning in one state can make the air worse several states away, and wildfires in Canada can send smoke into U.S. cities.

Here's what to know about taking precautions against poor air quality due to wildfires.

What counts as bad air?

The Environmental Protection Agency's Air Quality Index converts all pollutant levels into a single number. The lower the number, the better.

Anything below 50 is classified as "healthy." Fifty to 100 is "moderate," while 100 to 150 is unhealthy for "sensitive groups," and anything above 150 is bad for everyone.

Sensitive groups include people with asthma, lung disease or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, said Dr. Sanjay Sethi, chief of the division of pulmonary, critical care and sleep medicine at the University at Buffalo medical school.

"If you have heart or lung problems, then you've got to be definitely more careful," Sethi said. "I would either avoid going outside or wear an N95 or at least a dust mask."

Is my air unhealthy?

Sometimes the air is bad enough to see or smell the smoke. Even if you don't see the pollution, it can be unhealthy to breathe.

The EPA maintains a website with up-to-date, regional air quality information. PurpleAir, a company that sells air quality sensors and publishes real-time air quality data, has a citizen scientist air quality monitoring network with a more granular map of street-by-street air quality readings.

The best way to get indoor air quality readings is to buy a monitor, said Joseph Allen, director of Harvard University's Healthy Buildings Program.

"You can find these low-cost, indoor air quality monitors just about everywhere online now. They don't cost all that much anymore," he said.

What if I have to go outside?

For most people, going outside for just a short time won't have a negative long-term impact, said Sethi.

Wearing an N95 mask, which became common during the coronavirus pandemic, will help filter out the pollution.

"N95 is going to get rid of 90-95% of the particles," said Jennifer Stowell, a research scientist at Boston University's Center for Climate and Health. "If you have access to a mask that has a respirator-type attachment to it, then that's the very best."

If you must be outside and you experience symptoms, experts say you should head indoors or elsewhere with better air quality. Even if you are healthy, it's good to take precautions.

"If you start wheezing, which is like this whistling sound of the chest, or if you're feeling short of breath, that's definitely more concerning," Sethi said.

How do I make my air cleaner?

Close the windows and turn on the air conditioner, if you have one, setting it to circulate the indoor air. Use blankets to cover cracks that allow outside air into your home, such as under doors.

Finally, swapping the air conditioner's filter for a MERV 13 filter can help, but ensure it's installed correctly.

"If you happen to have access to an air purifier, even if it's just a room air purifier, try to keep it running and in the room that you're doing most of your activities in," said Stowell.

After 6 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 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, a Republican, 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, a Democrat, 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.

"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' reinvestigating 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

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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 machine 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."

3 islands help control access to the Strait of Hormuz. They're in the crosshairs of the Iran war

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The expanding U.S. military campaign against Iran has put three small islands that sit at the confluence of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz in the crosshairs once again.

The islands of Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb — which were seized in 1971 by Iran from what would become the United Arab Emirates — have become a garrison for Iran, helping it exert significant control over the strait, through which a fifth of all oil and natural gas passes in peacetime.

U.S. strikes on two of the islands in recent days have renewed speculation about the fate of these small, rocky isles, whose ownership remains disputed.

Three islands sit along the route to the Strait of Hormuz

The land mass of all three islands totals just about 10 square miles (25 square kilometers). But they carry oversized strategic importance given they sit along the deep-water route taken by ships passing between the strait and the Gulf.

The largest, Abu Musa, has a village on it but primarily serves as a base for Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which has stationed fast boats and missiles — both of which have been used to harass ships in the strait — on the island. It also hosts air defense systems. The same goes for Greater Tunb Island, while the much-smaller Lesser Tunb only has a military presence.

Because of their strategic importance, regional powers have long fought for control of the islands.

Iran, then under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, took the islands by force on Nov. 30, 1971, two days before the formation of the United Arab Emirates. The shah, as America's top security ally in the region,

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received little pushback at the time.

After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran used the islands as a base to target shipping during the “Tanker war” of the 1980s, when the U.S. Navy escorted oil tankers through the region under Iranian fire. Iran used the islands to both monitor the strait and launch vessels to lay mines or openly attack vessels in that conflict.

U.S. estimates suggest Iran attacked over 160 ships in that confrontation. So far in the current war, there have been over 50 attacks targeting vessels and oil rigs, according to the Joint Maritime Information Center, a coalition overseen by the U.S. Navy. That includes some incidents of the U.S. firing on ships it accuses of trying to break its blockade on Iran.

The islands have become US military targets

In recent days as part of the escalation in fighting, the U.S. military launched strikes on both Abu Musa and Greater Tunb islands. Some analysts have speculated that American forces might invade.

“Together they act as a layered denial system to the most critical energy chokepoint in the world,” Isabel Oakeshott, a columnist for The Telegraph who now lives in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, wrote in the newspaper. She equated Abu Musa to “a fixed aircraft carrier” for Iran.

Taking the islands likely would be possible for the U.S., which has both paratroopers and Marines in the region. However, they likely would be exposed to Iranian attack while there.

“Without prepared, hardened fortifications to provide cover — even with air support from nearby naval assets — force protection would be an enormous challenge,” warned Brandon Carr, an analyst with the Washington-based Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, which calls for restraint in American military operations abroad.

“The Marines would come under fire from Iranian ballistic missiles and drones, severely limiting their ability to project power into the strait.”

The dispute over the islands hangs over the conflict

In recent years, the United Arab Emirates successfully lobbied both China and Russia to include language in joint statements about resolving the ownership of the islands through either negotiations or an international court decision.

That infuriated Tehran — but the world largely ignored the dispute.

“What the world called a bilateral territorial dispute was, from the beginning, a strategic claim on a global chokepoint,” wrote Noora Mohamed Al Murry, an Emirati legal scholar, in April.

“Managed ambiguity, in a waterway this consequential, is not a neutral position. It is a choice with a price, and the world is now holding the invoice.”

Oakeshott, the columnist, predicted that the UAE, which hosts U.S. forces and has repeatedly come under Iranian fire in the war, would likely push to get the islands once the conflict ends.

The U.S. campaign may force the issue to a head, some 55 years after the late shah warned the strait could become a “nuisance” for the world.

“It does not take a big boat to carry a bazooka and a few shells,” the shah told The Guardian newspaper in 1971. “But the trouble that it could cause is tremendous.”

She knew he wasn't real. She was in love with him anyway.

Takeaways about romance scams

By JULIET LINDERMAN Associated Press

One rainy afternoon in August, Jean Booth scurried up the stairs of a nondescript Thai restaurant, shook out her blue, shoulder-length hair and took out her phone. She bit her lip; no messages.

Her boyfriend, Donnie, was due to arrive at the airport in a matter of hours, but Jean hadn't heard from him all day. Over the next half-hour, Jean checked her phone a few more times, but Donnie didn't text or call. Part of her knew he wouldn't — they had never met in person or even spoken on the phone.

Jean wouldn't hear from Donnie until hours later, when he'd send a WhatsApp message telling her he couldn't get a plane ticket, that he was stuck, that he was scared and in danger. When he'd tell her he

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was sorry, and ask her, again, for money. Jean would then pull into a sprawling parking lot in suburban Virginia, and cry.

Here are some takeaways from The Associated Press' story about romance scam victims like Jean Booth:

— Romance scams are on the rise across the United States. Last year, more than 49,000 Americans reported losing a collective \$1.3 billion to romance scams, according to available FTC data shared with the AP. That's an increase of at least 14% and likely more from the previous year.

— The growth in romance scams comes in part from acute social isolation ushered in by the COVID-19 epidemic and lockdowns. In a first-of-its-kind study in 2025, the World Health Organization found that years after the world opened up again, people continue to suffer from loneliness. Estimates for people globally who report loneliness range from 1 in 6 to 1 in 2.

— Scientists have found that humans evolved to rely on each other, and our brains are hardwired to seek out relationships and community for survival. Love is a necessity like food, water and shelter.

"Social connection is a fundamental biological need," psychologist Julianne Holt-Lunstad said. "If it's lacking, we may seek it out in unhealthy ways."

— Like Booth, some romance scam victims are aware at some level that they are being manipulated. Ally Armeson, the executive director of FightCybercrime.org, has worked with 880 victims, many of whom were caught in romance scams. She likens their conundrum to a desert prison: They see the bars trapping them, but the unbearable desolation outside the prison seems worse.

— The guilt, shame and social stigma surrounding these scams compound the loneliness that propels so many victims into them in the first place. Many victims Armeson has worked with have considered taking their own lives.

"They've been living this life where somebody loved them, they believed in them, they promised a beautiful future," Armeson said. "Then, all of a sudden, that life collapses. ... The person who gave them purpose is a ghost they can't even mourn."

She knew he wasn't real. She was in love with him anyway. One woman's story of a romance scam

By JULIET LINDERMAN Associated Press

One rainy afternoon in August, Jean Booth scurried up the stairs of a nondescript Thai restaurant tucked into a strip mall off the highway, shook out her blue, shoulder-length hair and took out her phone. She bit her lip; no messages.

Her boyfriend, Donnie, was due to arrive at the airport in a matter of hours, but Jean hadn't heard from him all day. This little hole-in-the-wall was a pit stop on the way to their new life together. She'd been forced to move into her dad's house in Ohio since her life fell apart in the spring, in no small part because of Donnie. She told herself that if Donnie didn't call or message by the time this lunch was over, she'd write him off forever.

She twirled her fork around the steaming noodles in front of her and wondered if Donnie had ever tasted pad thai, if he liked spicy food, if they would ever sit together in a restaurant like this.

Over the next half-hour, Jean checked her phone a few more times. But Donnie didn't text or call that afternoon. Part of her knew he wouldn't. They'd never met in person, never even spoken on the phone. Still, Jean wanted so badly to believe he'd really show up this time.

Jean wouldn't hear from Donnie until hours later, when he'd send a WhatsApp message telling her he couldn't get a plane ticket, that he was stuck, that he was scared and in danger. When he'd tell her he was sorry, and ask her, again, for money. Jean would then pull into a sprawling parking lot in suburban Virginia, and cry.

She was angry at Donnie, but angrier at herself.

She knew somewhere in the back of her mind that Donnie didn't exist. She also knew that before she hit the road again, in spite of all logic and months of warnings from everyone in her life, she'd send the money anyway.

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As a kid growing up in a religious household, Jean found the strict doctrines of Christianity unconvincing. But Jean has always been a believer: in fate, magic and, above all, that people are honest and, more often than not, mean well.

Jean's faith in the goodness of others had been tested again and again throughout her life, and with each betrayal she found herself a little more guarded. Still, she clung to it.

That faith steadied her during a volatile childhood, and again after her 24-year relationship collapsed. It also made her susceptible to a romance scam, a crime meticulously designed to exploit a victim's trust.

Romance scams are on the rise across the United States. Last year, more than 49,000 Americans reported losing a collective \$1.3 billion to romance scams, according to available FTC data shared with The Associated Press.

That's an increase of at least 14% and likely more from the previous year. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 lockdowns that fractured communities and frayed the social fabric of society, there are more lonely people than ever.

Still, like Jean, victims of romance scams often figure out they're being lied to long before they cut off contact. Sometimes they're manipulated into ignoring or suppressing their suspicions. Sometimes hope overrules logic.

Ally Armeson, the executive director of FightCybercrime.org, has worked with 880 victims, many of whom were caught in romance scams. She likens their conundrum to a desert prison: They see the bars trapping them, but the unbearable desolation outside the prison seems worse.

"They've been living this life where somebody loved them, they believed in them, they promised a beautiful future," Armeson said. "Then, all of a sudden, that life collapses. They're alone, their money has been stolen. The person who gave them purpose is a ghost they can't even mourn."

Some victims take years to shake free of scams. Some never do. And the guilt, shame and social stigma surrounding these crimes compounds the loneliness that propels so many victims into scams in the first place. Many victims Armeson has worked with have considered taking their own lives.

Sitting in the parking lot that hot August evening, Jean thought about taking hers.

"I want to cry, I want to vomit," Jean said. "I'm at war with myself, and I don't know which side is going to win."

Donnie had come into Jean's life eight months before, in January 2025.

She was 43, freshly divorced and looking to start over. She'd just moved from Nevada to Maryland and landed a job as a grants administrator for the government. But the Trump administration slashed the federal workforce, and Jean was laid off.

So when Donnie, who was kind and handsome but not intimidatingly so, sent her a message on Match, she figured she had time and nothing to lose.

"Good morning, beautiful," he wrote.

It had been so long since someone called Jean beautiful. For years she'd struggled with her weight and appearance. In an instant, she remembered how good it felt.

He called himself Daniel Rodriguez Fanelli, Donnie for short. He was a military man, younger than Jean, with blue eyes and a close-cropped haircut, a paratrooper who dropped out of helicopters into war zones across the Middle East and would soon return to the U.S. He was brave, and tender: He had a 4-year-old daughter named Trixie, a little girl with soft, blond hair who looked like his late wife, who'd died in a car accident two years before.

Over the next few weeks, their texts become frequent, then familiar, then flirtatious. Jean started organizing her daily routines around their conversations, and dreaming of their future together — a big house, a blended family, a new beginning.

"I think about you every day," Jean wrote, 16 days after their conversation began. "It feels both too soon and like we've always been here."

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Three weeks after their first conversation, Jean leaned back in a leather chair and balled up her fist to bear the pain of a new tattoo being inked into the fleshiest part of her upper arm: a small heart buoyed by a parachute, for Donnie. She closed her eyes and imagined their first meeting. They would honor fallen troops together, walking through Arlington National Cemetery.

"I sometimes wonder, how can this be real?" Jean asked Donnie 22 days into their relationship. "Am I going to wake up one day and find this was all a dream?"

She knew scammers prowled all corners of the internet. But Donnie was present, interested in her crochet and sewing projects, her rescue cats Orion and Saphyra, her career, her painful upbringing.

And it felt good to believe again in the possibility of a happy ending like the ones in the romance novels Jean read and wrote. She'd self-published five books by then and was working on a sixth, inspired by Donnie. Some nights, when he was stressed or scared, Jean would tell him stories.

Still, she wanted to know for certain she wasn't making a terrible mistake.

She asked a friend who worked in information security to run a background check, but Donnie had almost no digital footprint. Jean was relieved. After all, he'd told her he was in special operations and had to be careful not to reveal anything personal online.

"I have a really, really hard time letting people in and trusting them because of trauma," Jean told Donnie. "But you've made it easy."

In the middle of February, Donnie started to seem distant. He told her something was eating at him but was reluctant to say what it was. After Jean pressed, Donnie said the nanny who'd been watching his toddler while he was overseas was threatening to abandon the child unless he sent money.

Jean offered to take care of Trixie instead, but Donnie said no; he didn't want Jean to meet his daughter this way. Instead, he asked Jean for money.

"This means everything to me, more than you can imagine," he said. "I love you so damned much and I'm so blessed to have you."

Jean walked down to the pier near her house, stood by the water and wept. Her best friend, Anne, whom she spoke to each morning, had warned her to be careful, but Jean hadn't listened. Now Jean wondered how she'd been so foolish.

"Every single thing I was warned about you, you said and did. It was classic, perfectly executed and part of me knew the whole time," Jean texted Donnie when she got home that night. "Yet that sliver of hope remained."

"Do you have any idea how hard it is to be told how stupid you are for loving someone you met on the internet from every single person in your life?" Jean asked.

Jean cried for two days. All the while, Donnie berated her for doubting him and demanded an apology. Jean relented. Trust was an integral part of love, she thought, and she owed it to him to believe he was telling her the truth.

"I'm sorry," Jean said, "I have major trust issues that I've been working through."

She sent Donnie \$7,800.

Love is a necessity like food, water and shelter. Scientists have found that humans evolved to rely on each other, and our brains are hardwired to seek out relationships and community, not only for joy and comfort, but for survival.

The COVID-19 epidemic and lockdowns that followed ushered in an acute period of social isolation. In a first-of-its-kind study in 2025, the World Health Organization found that years after the world opened up again, people continue to suffer from loneliness. Estimates for people globally who report loneliness range from 1 in 6 to 1 in 2.

"Social connection is a fundamental biological need," psychologist Julianne Holt-Lunstad said. "If it's lacking, we may seek it out in unhealthy ways."

Scammers know how to exploit that vulnerability.

Jean sometimes would not hear from Donnie for days and ask if he was safe. He lashed out: She was

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smothering him, she didn't trust him, she needed to calm down.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'll be way more mellow when you come home."

Jean hadn't been sleeping well, and she was beginning to feel the stress of unemployment. She had a small nest egg, but it wouldn't last forever. She told herself that once Donnie came home, everything would be OK.

In March he said he was due back in the U.S. the following week, and Jean was counting down the hours. She asked him again and again when he'd arrive, but he evaded her questions. Her insistence on ironing out details proved to him, again, that she didn't trust him, he said. Jean apologized.

Jean's sisters and friends encouraged her to stop talking to Donnie. He's a scammer, and Jean should know better. Was she stupid? Was she blind?

She knew they could be right. But what if they were wrong? What if this was the love of her life?

Donnie told her these were the same people who had supported her unhappy marriage. Jean started avoiding them.

"I choose you," she told him.

On the afternoon of March 23, Donnie told Jean he'd be home April 1. Jean burst into tears.

Six hours later, Donnie asked for \$3,500, for Trixie's school fees and uniforms. Jean immediately said yes.

"If you're serious about me being part of your family, then this is just what partners do," she said.

Donnie asked Jean if she'd move in with him, to a big house in the Maryland suburbs with a yard and a pool. But there was maintenance work that needed to be done. Could Jean help offset the cost?

Jean offered instead to clean the house herself, and asked for his address. Donnie said no.

"I'm starting to feel like money is the main thing you want me for," Jean said.

"How can you love a man and not believe him?" Donnie shot back.

"Please don't be upset with me," Jean replied. "You deserve someone less broken."

Jean sent \$7,600 for the contractors. She told herself she'd be living in the house one day.

But April 1 came and went, and Donnie didn't show. Four days later he surfaced: He'd been locked up after punching his officer. The transport and replacements he'd needed to be sent home never came, and he hadn't slept in days, he said. He was sick and scared, and needed medicine and food.

Could Jean send \$3,000 for medicine and food? She did.

As the month dragged on, Jean started to get anxious. Donnie promised a FaceTime call one Sunday but abruptly canceled, claiming he'd run out of his allotment of bandwidth.

By then, she'd sent him \$27,000.

One day, when Jean was feeling particularly low, she pulled up his Instagram profile. She identified one person Donnie followed who followed him back, and sent her a message. Do you know Donnie Fanelli? Is he real?

To Jean's surprise, Cindy replied almost instantly. They'd exchanged messages for a few months.

"He's a bot," Cindy said. "Some of the things he said, you hear from scammers."

"And his photos have been used A LOT," Cindy added.

Jean started to panic. Nothing alarming had come up when Jean had run reverse-image searches on Donnie's photos months before. But she sat down at her desk and paid a fee to sign up for two deluxe services. In an instant, a pair of photos appeared on her screen: Donnie, in slacks and a black dress shirt posing next to a thin, blond woman in a wedding photo booth. The photo had been posted on social media by the bride.

Jean clicked on the woman's Facebook page, and her stomach dropped. There were dozens of the same photos Donnie had sent her: Smiling with Goofy at Disneyland, selfies in military fatigues. The AP contacted the couple in the photos for comment but received no reply.

Jean confronted Donnie, and he said it was all a misunderstanding. Someone was using his photos. "This is creepy and crazy," he said. Besides, didn't she think it was suspicious, Donnie asked Jean, that all of a sudden, after all this time, these photos appear online?

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Jean rationalized. It seemed like an impossible coincidence, but maybe she'd jumped to conclusions too quickly.

By then her life depended on him telling the truth. She hadn't looked for a place to live, because Donnie had asked her to move into his house. It was April 23, and come May 1 Jean would be homeless. She'd bet not only her heart, but her stability on this man.

A day later Donnie asked for almost \$9,000, to complete the paperwork he needed to come home, and Jean fell apart. She told him she needed proof: A photo, right then and there, with a timestamp so she'd know it was real.

"You're spiraling," he told her. "You're so doubtful. Always looking for what's not there." He promised that in two weeks, when he came home, she'd know she'd been foolish. "I'm sorry your mind is so unsettled."

"If I blindly trust you and you don't show," Jean said, "you will have shattered my heart."

She sent the \$9,000.

Two days later, on April 26, Jean got into her car and started to drive.

Donnie had refused to give her his address. But once, when a digital money transfer wouldn't go through, he'd given her a mailing address to wire cash to a supposed neighbor. It was in Frederick, Maryland, less than an hour from Jean's house.

She pulled into the parking lot of an apartment complex, walked up to the door and rang the buzzer.

"Hello?" a woman's voice answered over the intercom.

"Hi. My name is Jean, and I want to talk to you about Donnie Fanelli."

The door clicked open.

Elizabeth was around Jean's age, maybe a little younger. She told Jean that Donnie was the love of her life.

Jean felt rage bubble up inside her. Jean and Elizabeth sat on the couch and sent Donnie a selfie, Jean holding up her middle finger.

"There's a special place in hell for you," she told him.

When Jean showed up, Elizabeth had assumed the worst: That her boyfriend of almost a year who'd been deployed overseas had been killed in the line of duty.

Elizabeth had drained her savings, taken out two personal loans and opened multiple lines of credit to support Donnie, who'd promised he'd be home soon. He'd never once mentioned Jean.

As she listened to Jean, Elizabeth's shock gave way to panic. For weeks Donnie had been sending her money, and instructing her to deposit it into the nanny's account. One of those deposits had arrived earlier that day: \$11,500, from Jean.

Elizabeth, who asked to be identified only by her first name because she hasn't told friends and colleagues what happened, told The Associated Press that she doesn't remember much about that afternoon except that it crushed her spirit. That day she knew she would never see the \$14,000 Donnie had promised to pay back.

In the following days, the two women texted each other updates. Donnie had told both women the other was crazy and making it all up. They compared details: He'd told Jean his birthday was Aug. 10, and Elizabeth it was Jan. 10. Otherwise his story was remarkably consistent.

"I'm super mad and hurt," Elizabeth said. "I haven't blocked him yet."

"I obviously haven't blocked him either," Jean said. "And I'm getting sucked in and want to (expletive) help him."

Donnie told Jean that when he met her, he had fallen in love and cut it off with Elizabeth. Jean bristled. If that was true, why was Donnie's number saved as "my love" in Elizabeth's phone?

He begged, he told her he might die overseas and it would be Jean's fault. But she clung to her resolve. Then she stopped hearing back from Elizabeth.

She didn't know that Elizabeth had gotten a call days after the two women met. A man on the line told her that she'd missed a court date and there was a warrant for her arrest. He told her to stay on the phone as she drove to Walmart and bought \$700 in gift cards. When Elizabeth went to check out, the

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cashier told her to hang up immediately: It was another scam.

She changed her phone number. It was the end of her contact with Donnie, and with Jean.

Jean assumed Elizabeth had blocked her. And she started to reconsider: Was it possible that Elizabeth wasn't a victim after all?

Her anger was again giving way to hope that maybe there was an explanation.

In early May, Jean enrolled in a 10-week support group for romance scam victims. The faces on her computer screen were of men and women, young and old. They told stories that sounded similar to Jean's own experience with Donnie. Some wept.

Still, Jean wondered if she'd made a mistake coming to this meeting, if she belonged there. Afterward she texted Donnie. She always said goodnight.

She didn't tell him about the support group. She didn't tell him that, in a moment of doubt and fear, she'd reported him to her local police department as a fraud. Instead, she told him she loved him, and she meant it.

Donnie told Jean he'd be home by June but never showed up. He said he'd been waylaid in Syria, stuck in a hotel, terrified. Then, he was in Turkey and lost his passport. He needed money.

She sent \$5,000.

In the end, Jean didn't cut off the relationship. It was Donnie who began to pull away.

Jean sent him more money, money she'd needed to pay rent. She moved her belongings into storage. She had nothing left.

"I'd give you my life," Jean said, "but that's not worth anything financially."

She thought about suicide. She went to one last game night with her friends in Maryland. She'd be going to Ohio to live with her parents. They had a tense relationship, but Jean had no other choice.

"I gave you my rent, the last of my money, I'm homeless. That means no more friends, no more game nights," she told him. Jean wondered how everything had spiraled so out of control.

I'm a stupid girl, Jean thought. I'm a stupid girl with a bleeding heart.

This \$5,000 Jean sent, while sitting in that Virginia parking lot in August, was the last. Because then Donnie would all but disappear, resurfacing intermittently to offer excuses for why he hadn't come home.

When the AP sent a series of text messages to a number linked to Donnie, the person who answered refused to comment and told a reporter to "piss off." AP also contacted the woman Jean said was Donnie's nanny, who refused to be interviewed. She denied having played any part in the scam and said she too had at one point been in a romantic relationship with Donnie, calling him "dangerous."

Over the course of 237 days and 10,449 messages, Jean had given Donnie more than \$90,000.

Life after Donnie was difficult.

To Jean's surprise, local investigators told her they'd look into her case, but that's all she knew.

Some days she missed him. Other days she was angry and fantasized about confronting him. Sometimes she thought of him as Donnie, other times as "it" or "the scam."

When other men messaged her, asking to talk, she told them off. I know what you're doing, she'd say. I know you're a scammer.

One of these guys folded immediately. He admitted that, yes, he was a Nigerian posing as an Englishman. He was wracked with guilt about doing this work, but money was tight and it was all he could think of to make ends meet. His real name, he told her, was Clinton, Clin for short.

He was 27, with a broad smile and sparkly brown eyes. Clin sent her photos of his life in Lagos, and Jean responded with updates from hers in Ohio. She told Clin about Donnie, and about her books. He told her that one day he hoped to open his own stall in one of the markets, selling shoes. Soon they were exchanging messages daily, then video calls. He told Jean he'd saved her photo as his screen saver.

Eventually he started asking if she'd consider visiting him. She demurred. He was too young, she said.

One night in September, Jean told two of her oldest friends about Clin. They warned her that this sounded

like another scam. Jean insisted it was different: Clin was honest, she said, and promised he'd never ask her for money.

"Sometimes it's just nice to have someone say you're beautiful," she told them.

On Oct. 7, Clin asked Jean for a favor. He needed money to buy the shoes he planned to sell at his stall.

"I really want to save up and I have a plan of meeting you soon, babe," he wrote.

Jean sighed, and told him she'd think about it.

Three days later, she sent \$400.

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 a 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.

Today in History: July 17, Disneyland's opening day

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, July 17, the 198th day of 2026. There are 167 days left in the year.

Today in History:

On July 17, 1955, Disneyland opened in Anaheim, California, after its \$17 million, yearlong construction; the park drew a million visitors in its first 10 weeks.

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Also on this date:

In 1862, during the Civil War, Congress approved the Second Confiscation Act, which declared that all enslaved people taking refuge behind Union lines were to be set free.

In 1902, Willis Carrier produced a set of designs for what would become the world's first modern air-conditioning system.

In 1918, Russia's Czar Nicholas II and his family were executed by the Bolsheviks.

In 1936, the Spanish Civil War began as right-wing army generals launched a coup attempt against the Second Spanish Republic.

In 1944, during World War II, 320 men, two-thirds of them African Americans, were killed when a pair of ammunition ships exploded at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine in California.

In 1945, following Nazi Germany's surrender, President Harry S. Truman, Soviet leader Josef Stalin and British Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill began meeting at Potsdam in the final Allied summit of World War II.

In 1975, an Apollo spaceship docked with a Soyuz spacecraft in orbit in the first superpower link-up of its kind.

In 1981, 114 people were killed when a pair of suspended walkways above the lobby of the Kansas City Hyatt Regency Hotel collapsed during a tea dance.

In 1996, TWA Flight 800, a Europe-bound Boeing 747, exploded and crashed off Long Island, New York, shortly after departing John F. Kennedy International Airport, killing all 230 people on board.

In 2014, all 298 passengers and crew aboard Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 were killed when the Boeing 777 was shot down over rebel-held eastern Ukraine; both Ukraine's government and pro-Russian separatists denied responsibility.

In 2020, civil rights icon John Lewis, whose bloody beating by Alabama state troopers in 1965 helped galvanize opposition to racial segregation, and who went on to a long and celebrated career in Congress, died at age 80.

In 2022, a report said nearly 400 law enforcement officials rushed to a mass shooting that left 21 people dead at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, but "egregiously poor decision-making" resulted in a chaotic scene that lasted more than an hour before the gunman was finally confronted and killed.

Today's Birthdays: Former sportscaster Verne Lundquist is 86. Queen Camilla of the United Kingdom is 79. Rock musician Terry "Geezer" Butler is 77. Actor Lucie Arnaz is 75. Actor David Hasselhoff is 74. Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel is 72. Film director Wong Kar-wai is 68. Television producer Mark Burnett is 66. Singer Regina Belle is 63. Country music artist Craig Morgan is 62. Rock musician Lou Barlow is 60. Actor Bitty Schram (TV: "Monk") is 58. Actor Jason Clarke is 57. Movie director F. Gary Gray is 57. Country singer Luke Bryan is 50. Film director/screenwriter Justine Triet is 48. R&B singer Jeremih (jehr-uh-MY') is 39. Actor Billie Lourd is 34. NHL center Connor Bedard is 21.