

Groton Daily Independent

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Wednesday, July 22

Senior Legion Region at Milbank
JVT Practice, 6 p.m., Arena.
St. John's Lutheran: Vacation Bible School, 5:30 p.m.

Thursday, July 23

Senior Legion Region at Milbank
Story Time at Wage Memorial Library, 10 a.m.
Tiger Skills Workouts, GHS Arena, 7:30 a.m.

Friday, July 24

State B Legion 14U at Vermillion
10U Baseball State at Hartford/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.

Pan Am Found

The wreckage of Pan Am's Clipper Endeavor has been found off Puerto Rico, 74 years after the flight crashed into the Atlantic Ocean.

The Douglas DC-4, roughly the size of a Boeing 737, took off from San Juan on April 11, 1952, bound for New York, but shortly after departure, the plane suffered engine failure and ditched at sea. Fifty-two of the 69 people aboard died, while 17 survived the crash—two of whom are still living today. The accident prompted sweeping aviation safety changes, including the now-standard preflight safety briefing, after many passengers refused the pilot's orders to evacuate and remained strapped into their seats.

An underwater search team located the plane roughly 2,000 feet below the surface, identifying it by the still-visible Pan Am logo and the aircraft's name painted on the largely intact wreckage.

War Chest Cost

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Gen. Dan Caine testified before a key Senate committee yesterday, advocating for the Trump administration's request of \$1.5T, including \$67.1B in immediate funding to help cover the costs of the Iran war. Hegseth estimated the war has cost \$37.5B to date.

The request covers weapons, classified programs, fuel, operations, cybersecurity, and drones, among other costs. A shortfall has already reportedly forced the Pentagon to limit training and maintenance efforts; parts of the Navy and Air Force budgets are expected to run out of funds by August. The House plans to vote later this week to authorize \$73B in defense spending before breaking for a weeklong recess; Democratic opposition may block the bill's advance.

The testimony comes as President Donald Trump said the US will soon strike Iran's Pickaxe Mountain, where he suggested Iran may have moved its centrifuges.

Big Boy Locomotive

The world's largest operating steam locomotive, Big Boy 4014, arrived in Kansas City yesterday as part of a monthslong coast-to-coast tour honoring the United States' 250th anniversary.

Big Boy 4014 was one of 25 large locomotives built for Union Pacific in the 1940s. The 1.2-million-pound machine hauled heavy freight through mountain passes during World War II. Retired in 1961 as steam engines were replaced by cheaper diesel-electric trains, Big Boy 4014 spent over five decades in a museum before Union Pacific reacquired it and converted it from coal to fuel oil. Though still too inefficient for regular service—using around 250 gallons of water and 15 gallons of fuel per mile—this summer's tour has drawn sentimental crowds.

The locomotive began its journey at the groundbreaking site of the transcontinental railroad in Sacramento, traveled east of the Mississippi, and stopped in Philadelphia for July Fourth. It is now heading back west.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Ella Langley's "Choosin' Texas" ties Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love You" and Mariah Carey's "We Belong Together" for most weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 among nonholiday songs by women.

Prosecutors present bodycam footage, crime scene photos, and police testimony to Los Angeles judge weighing whether there is probable cause to bring singer D4vd, 21, to trial for the murder of a 14-year-old girl.

Kaylee Hottle, deaf actress who played Jia in the "Godzilla vs. Kong" movies, dies in a one-vehicle crash at age 18.

Science & Technology

Restoring levels of a hormone produced by the thymus gland could help curb age-related inflammation and boost the effectiveness of immunotherapies used to treat cancer and other diseases.

Personalized gene therapy helps teenager with rare, severe form of epilepsy walk independently for the first time with 90% reduction in seizure frequency; another patient, five years younger, sees 26% drop in seizure frequency.

Milky Way's orientation likely flipped by more than 90 degrees about 10 billion to 11 billion years ago after a major collision with another galaxy, possibly explaining why some stars rotate in the outer Milky Way so slowly.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.9%, Dow +0.7%, Nasdaq +1.3%).

CVS Pharmacy to begin filling pet prescriptions at roughly 9,000 locations nationwide.

Novo Nordisk sues Eli Lilly, alleging ads comparing their weight-loss and diabetes drugs are misleading.

Billionaire investor Carl Icahn's Icahn Enterprises agrees to sell auto-service chain Pep Boys to Mavis Tire for roughly \$700M in cash.

Politics & World Affairs

France becomes first EU country to block social media access to kids under age 15, law is on track to go into effect Sept. 1.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy fires his commander in chief, Oleksandr Syrskyi, amid ongoing protests over the recent firing of Ukraine's defense minister.

Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega says the country will "never again" hold elections, pledging to extend his 20-year rule.

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**SOUTH DAKOTA
NEWS WATCH**

Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

5 things to know ahead of the gubernatorial runoff

By Molly Wetsch, South Dakota News Watch

South Dakota Republican voters once again head back to the polls next week.

The gubernatorial runoff on July 28 is the result of more than a year of campaigning in a pool of what was once four candidates for the Republican nomination. It comes after the primary election on June 2 declared Gov. Larry Rhoden and Toby Doeden the two candidates moving on.

Here's what to know about the runoff:

It's the first one.

The South Dakota law requiring a runoff if no candidate meets a certain threshold in primary voting has been around for more than 40 years. But this is the first election that it's been required since the law was passed in 1985 by former lawmaker Joe Barnett.

Doeden received 31% of the vote on June 2 and Rhoden received 25%. Other candidates, Congressman Dusty Johnson and Speaker of the South Dakota House Jon Hansen, received 23% and 21%, respectively. No candidate received 35% of the vote, which is required to advance to the general election.

The runoff brings a new level of uncertainty to the race, which saw one of the most crowded candidate fields in recent memory, as well as once-presumed favorite Johnson fall short in the primary.

Two very different candidates want the job.

While both candidates are running in the Republican primary, they represent two very different sides of the political spectrum.

Rhoden is the incumbent candidate. He succeeded Gov. Kristi Noem, as her lieutenant governor, after she left office to join the Department of Homeland Security in January 2025. Rhoden is a rancher from Union Center and has spent 25 years in Pierre as a state representative and senator and in the executive branch.

Doeden, by contrast, is a businessman from Aberdeen who calls himself an "outsider" and relies on his lack of political experience as an asset. He has largely decried the "establishment" in Pierre and called for new voices in state government.

The runoff pulls from the largest Republican voter base in state history.

Voter registration for South Dakota Republicans is at an all-time high. Nearly 10,000 more voters are able to cast votes for governor on July 28 than were able to at the beginning of this year.

Doeden told News Watch Friday that he believes some of the growth in Republican voters is part of an effort from non-Republicans to sway the primary.

"It's pretty natural in a state that has as many independents as we do, that you see them switching regularly," Doeden said. "Some of those are organic, that would happen in any cycle. But there's certainly been an uptick, and it would certainly seem to me that the Democrats are trying to steal a Republican election because one of the candidates is far closer to their ideology and political beliefs than I am."

Rhoden's campaign did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

It's (almost) all about property taxes.

Property taxes have been a defining feature of both candidates' campaigns: One with promises to eliminate them and one who hopes that his prior reform efforts will speak for themselves.

Doeden's well-publicized plan to eliminate property taxes has been the subject of scrutiny from some of his opposition. He has said frequently on the campaign trail that he plans to eliminate property taxes entirely, and hinged much of his campaign on the plan.

On July 17, a spokesperson from Doeden's campaign told South Dakota Searchlight that plan "has never applied to any classes of property beyond owner-occupied homes." But Doeden said to News Watch that

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it was still his goal to eliminate all property taxes, though he said he plans to start with owner-occupied property.

"I think we can get rid of all owner-occupied property taxes within three or four years. I genuinely do," Doeden said. "And if we keep and maintain strong conservative leadership in the governor's office and the Legislature, I think another four or eight years, we can get rid of commercial and ranch and ag land property tax and replace it with taxes that are more fair and equitable, like sales tax. Not raising the sales tax, but growing the economy and generating more sales tax revenue."

Rhoden has largely touted his previous work in property taxes as a reflection of how he will operate in the future. Most of the bills Rhoden has brought to the table, as a state representative or as governor, have focused on tax reform. Senate bills 96 and 245 are the bills passed in this year's Legislature that Rhoden said will reduce owner-occupied property taxes by 34%.

"I think for the time being, we're going to see how that plays out, see how many counties take advantage of the half-cent side of it," Rhoden told SDPB's Jackie Hendry in an interview aired last week. "That coupled with the fact that, like we said before, things are starting to get back on track, I think we're in pretty good shape."

It's gone negative.

South Dakotans have likely gotten used to seeing political ads on their screens related to the governor's race. They also may have noticed that in the past few weeks, those ads have tilted toward attacks of the opposing candidate.

Social media ads paid for by Doeden's campaign have called Rhoden "Lyin' Larry" and claim that he has raised taxes 400 times. On his own social media, Doeden has called Rhoden "Larry RhoBiden," in reference to former President Joe Biden.

Rhoden's campaign launched a website last week that casts doubt on Doeden's property tax strategy and calls Doeden "reckless" and "too risky for South Dakota." Other ads have called Doeden out for saying he "might have voted for Barack Obama" in prior elections and for not voting in the 2016 and 2020 primaries.

Doeden told News Watch that the ads his campaign is running are positive and that negative ads against Rhoden are from unaffiliated groups. He maintained that he is running a positive campaign – something he said he believes was the reason for his success in the primary – but that he thinks ads mentioning Rhoden's record are not attack ads.

"If people want to call it attacking that's fine, but it's simply just pointing out the record. Every ad that Toby Doeden has run on this campaign, including since June 3rd, has been 100% positive. I have run the most positive campaign in the history (of the state)," Doeden said. "Now I know there are some people and some organizations that support me that are perhaps attacking Larry. I can't control that."

We won't know much about how it was funded until it's over.

A major point of discussion from the beginning of the race was how candidates were funding their campaigns.

Doeden notably donated \$4 million of his own money to his campaign. Rhoden has reported raising just over \$1 million and spending just under \$1 million, much of which has come from state and federal political action committees.

But because campaign finance disclosure requirements are not tailored to runoff elections, the public won't know much about the past eight weeks until Oct. 19 – the next filing deadline. That makes information about who's funding Rhoden and Doeden's campaigns, and how they're spending that money, somewhat obscure.

Campaign finance disclosures can illuminate which candidates were raising and spending the most money and shed light on what groups may be backing a candidate's campaign.

It doesn't end here.

While the victorious candidate will certainly have much to celebrate after the runoff is completed, the campaign will not end on July 28. The winning candidate will face Democrat Dan Ahlers in November for the general election.

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A Democratic candidate has not been elected to the office of governor in more than 50 years. Gov. Richard Kneip was elected in 1971 and served until 1978.

The winning candidate, though they may anticipate election to office in November, will have to find a way to unite Republicans that have been divided over their choice of candidate for nearly the entirety of the campaign.

Doeden said that he is not concerned about rallying the party behind him if he advances beyond the primary, comparing himself to President Donald Trump, as he has frequently during his campaign.

"Ninety-five percent of the mudslinging has been from the political class towards the outsider. Once the outsider wins, that'll go away and they'll unite. The same thing happened to Donald Trump in 2016," Doeden said.

Rhoden said during the SDPB conversation that politics in South Dakota had undergone "choppy waters."

"We've come a long way just in the last 17 months of getting things back on track, and I think that will continue for the next period of time," Rhoden said. "I've always said we do a lot of things right in South Dakota, and our political process is one of them. Sometimes we'll get a little off track, but the ship always has a way of righting itself, and we're in the process right now of the ship righting itself in South Dakota, and I want to continue that."

A recent Emerson poll from KELO-TV showed Rhoden leading with 62% to Doeden's 32% of 500 likely voters polled. Rhoden said to KELO that the poll was "encouraging," while Doeden slammed it as "absurd" and said he was "embarrassed" that he was discussing it.

What else to know for July 28

Do I have to be a Republican to vote?

Yes. The runoff is part of a closed primary, meaning only Republicans can vote. The deadline to register was June 13.

Did I have to vote in the primary to vote in the runoff?

No. As long as you are a registered Republican, whether or not you voted in prior elections does not matter.

Will my polling place be the same?

Not necessarily. Because the primary election on June 2 included municipal and other local elections for several areas, your polling place may have changed. You can check where to vote on the Secretary of State's website.

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TUESDAY, JULY 28

DACOTA BANK

MEMBER FDIC

Groton City Council discusses park saferoom project, opens bids for surplus bucket truck

By Elizabeth Varin

During a brief meeting Tuesday evening, the Groton City Council addressed items such as the next steps for the city's park saferoom project, opening bids for a surplus bucket truck and the process required to vacate portions of land on the west side of town.

City Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich updated the council on upcoming steps to build a new city park bathroom and tornado shelter.

"Everything has been signed. We're good to go with that," he said. "I had the kick off meeting today."

Though the architect who the city has been working with mentioned a possible project completion date in early 2027, that won't be feasible, Heinrich said. Because FEMA funding will be used, the city will have to go through a request for qualification process for architectural plans, which will take at least a couple of weeks because of publication requirements.

After the architectural bid process is completed, the city will have to have another company do a peer review of the architectural plans, he said.

Because FEMA funding is involved, the city will have to have clear documentation about how bids are chosen, as FEMA requires they accept bidders not only based on cost, but by what is the best value for the city.

The saferoom update was informational only, but other items, like the bids for a surplus vehicle, needed a vote.

The city received two bids for a surplus 2007 Ford F550 bucket truck.

- Pharis Transportation submitted a bid for \$17,500.
- City of Hecla submitted a bid for \$14,001.

The council approved accepting the Pharis Transportation bid.

Following up on action taken a couple of years ago, the council discussed requirements to vacate portions of West Seventh Avenue and North Lincoln Street. The council had previously approved vacating that area, but paperwork had not been filed to do so.

Heinrich told the council what needs to be done to vacate that area, including getting written consent from adjoining property owners and publishing a public notice for two weeks.

After more than an hour of executive session discussion, the council also approved accepting applications for a full-time public works laborer position.



The City of Groton will be conducting adult mosquito control tonight (Wednesday, July 22), starting around 8:30 p.m.

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Service Notice: Alan Nierman

Services for Alan Nierman, 77, of Groton will be 10:00 a.m., Monday, July 27th at St. John's Lutheran Church, Groton. Rev. Jeremy Yeadon will officiate. Burial will follow in Union Cemetery, Groton under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

Visitation will be held at the chapel from 5-7 p.m., with a prayer service at 7:00 p.m. on Sunday. Alan passed away July 20, 2026 at Sanford Medical Center, Aberdeen.



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BROWN COUNTY FAIR

ABERDEEN, SD

AUGUST 10-16, 2026

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The poster features a stylized horse head logo with the text "BROWN COUNTY FAIR" and "GETTIN' ROWDY IN THE STIX". A QR code is located in the bottom right corner, and the website "browncountysdfair.com" is listed at the bottom.

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Hospitals



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Help local kids.

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See you on July 30!



Name Released in Charles Mix County Fatal Crash

What: Single-vehicle fatal crash

Where: US 18 at mile marker 336, 3 miles south of Lake Andes, South Dakota

When: 12:40 p.m., Friday, July 17, 2026

Driver 1: Robert Nicholas Fischer Jr., 56-year-old male from Kennebec, South Dakota, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2000 Freightliner Conventional FLD120 semi-truck

Seat Belt Used: No

Charles Mix County, S.D.- A Kennebec, South Dakota man died Friday in a single-vehicle crash near Lake Andes, South Dakota.

Preliminary crash information indicates Robert Nicholas Fischer Jr., the driver of a 2000 Freightliner Conventional FLD120, was traveling southbound on US 18 when his brakes locked up. The truck swerved into the ditch and rolled. Fischer sustained fatal injuries.

The investigation is ongoing. All information released is preliminary.

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

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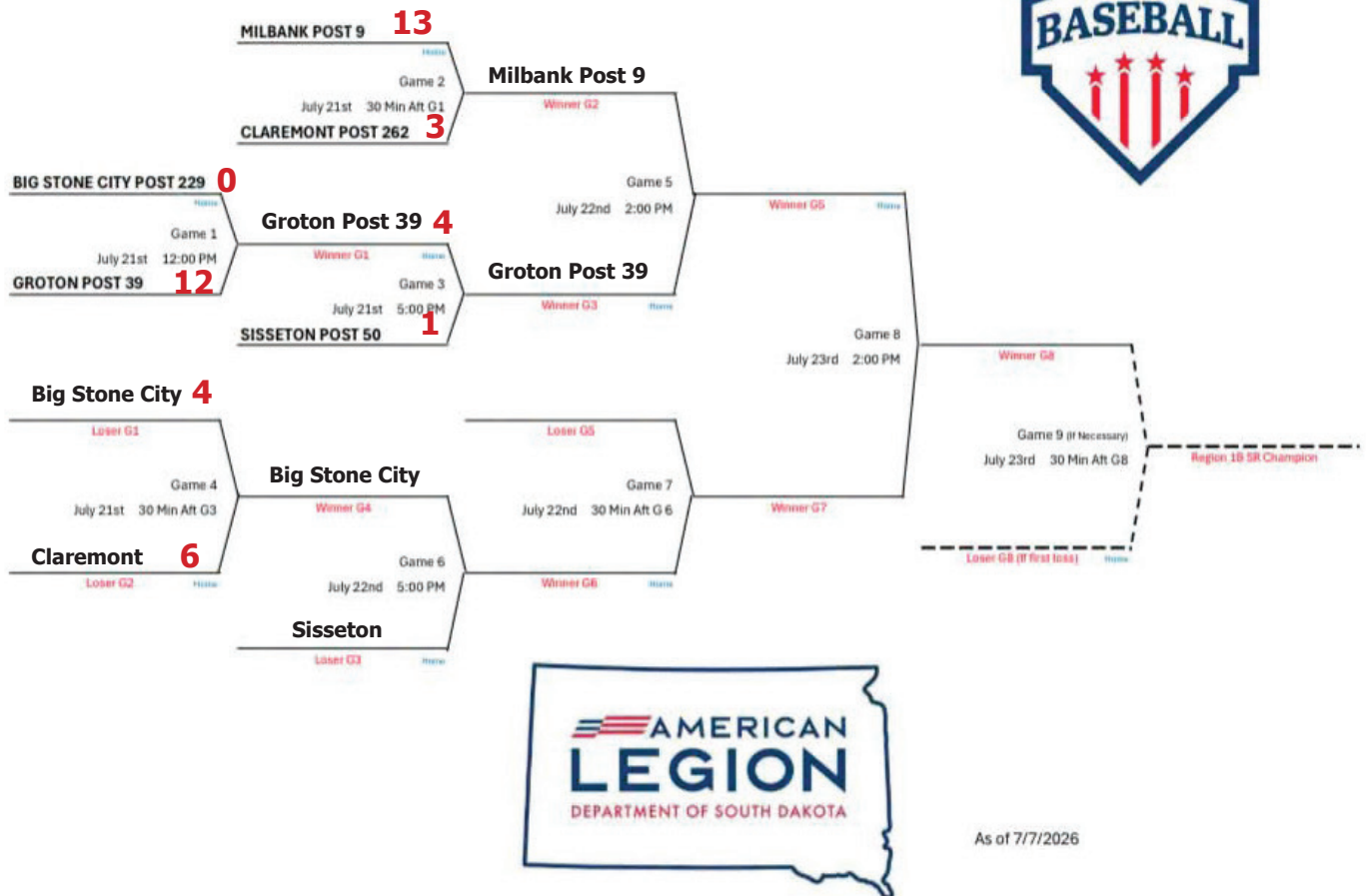
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SOUTH DAKOTA AMERICAN LEGION "B" SENIOR BASEBALL

REGION 1B

MILBANK LEGION POST 9, MILBANK, SD

JULY 21ST - JULY 23RD, 2026



Groton opens Region 1B tournament with pair of wins, advances to winners bracket final

MILBANK — Groton Post 39 is two wins away from a Region 1B American Legion Baseball Tournament championship after opening double-elimination play Tuesday with back-to-back victories in Milbank.

Groton blanked Badgers Post 229 12-0 in its opening game before returning later in the day to defeat Sisseton Post 50, 4-1, earning a spot in the winners bracket final.

In the opener, Groton broke open a scoreless game with four runs in the third inning before erupting for seven more in the fourth to cruise to the 12-0 victory.

Jordan Schwan got the offense started with an RBI triple in the third and later scored on a sacrifice fly. Nick Groeblichhoff followed with a two-run triple to give Post 39 an early cushion.

The fourth inning saw Groton send 12 batters to the plate. An error, an RBI single by Alex Abeln, a bases-loaded walk by Gavin Englund, another sacrifice fly by Schwan, an RBI single from Karsten Fliehs and a two-run double by Tristin McGannon highlighted the seven-run outburst.

Jarrett Erdmann dominated on the mound, allowing just two hits over five shutout innings while striking out eight and walking two.

Groton collected nine hits, with Groeblichhoff and Schwan each recording two. McGannon, T.C. Schuster and Groeblichhoff each drove in two runs, while Englund drew two of the team's seven walks.

Groton then returned to face Sisseton in the winners bracket.

Sisseton took advantage of an early Groton error to score the game's first run in the opening inning, but Post 39 answered in the second when Abeln grounded into a fielder's choice to tie the game.

The score remained even until the fifth inning when Carter Simon delivered the biggest hit of the game, ripping an RBI triple to put Groton ahead 2-1. Gavin Englund followed with a run-scoring fielder's choice to extend the advantage, and Groton later added an insurance run in the inning.

Abeln earned the victory on the mound, allowing just one unearned run on three hits over 6 1/3 innings while striking out five. Braeden Fliehs recorded the final two outs in relief.

Lincoln Krause and Groeblichhoff each had two hits for Post 39, while Abeln, Englund and Simon each drove in a run.

With the two victories, Groton advanced to the winners bracket final and remained unbeaten in the double-elimination tournament.

Elsewhere in Tuesday's opening-round action, host Milbank Post 9 defeated Claremont Honkers Post 262/VFW JH 13-3. Bennett Hunt led the way with four RBIs, including a two-run double during a five-run fifth inning. Milbank erased an early 3-0 deficit and finished with eight stolen bases to advance.

In the elimination bracket, Claremont stayed alive by defeating Badgers Post 229 6-4. Case Reints delivered a two-run double during a four-run third inning to spark the comeback, while Kassen Keough tossed a complete game, allowing four runs—just two earned—on eight hits with six strikeouts. The loss eliminated Badgers Post 229 from tournament play.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

State-ordered study says opioid settlement money should target treatment for incarcerated people

BY JOHN HULT

South Dakota should spend opioid settlement money in the coming years to address the needs of people entering or leaving prisons and jails, according to an assessment prepared for the state Department of Social Services.

The department commissioned the \$325,000 statewide needs assessment to help guide the state's investment of settlement dollars. The inadequacy of the programs and services for addicted people in the justice system was a major takeaway, the department secretary told members of the Legislature's budget committee on Monday at the Capitol in Pierre.

"This is a more intense addiction once you get to that level of opioid use disorder," Secretary Matt Althoff said. "We still see, as is so often the case, the justice involvement. Laws get broken, they become incarcerated or they become prosecuted, and they are also struggling with addiction."

The money comes from the makers and sellers of opioid painkillers linked to spikes in addiction and overdose deaths. South Dakota is expected to receive about \$99 million in settlement funds through 2038. The state's collected \$32.8 million so far, with 70% of the money tagged for statewide dispersal and 30% going directly to localities.

Thus far, the state has awarded all but \$2.7 million of its share through a three-tiered grant system, with awards ranging from \$5,000 on the low end to more than \$50,000 on the high end. The largest single award went to Avera Health, which is using its grant for an addiction-focused psychiatric residential treatment facility in Sioux Falls.

Medication-assisted addiction treatment

In the future, treatment for those released on supervision could involve the use of medications for opioid use disorder, a class of pharmaceuticals that, at therapeutic levels, deaden the craving for the drugs without producing the high or spurring a higher tolerance and a need for higher doses.

The Department of Corrections already offers the medications inside its institutions, but it has concerns about the availability of the drugs and follow-up care on the outside, said Brenna Koedam, who leads the Department of Social Services' Behavioral Health Division.

The two departments have discussed where they might begin with a collaborative effort, Koedam said, which could be with eight outside prison locations for follow-up care to parolees using the medicines.

The Department of Social Services and Unified Judicial System have also begun talks on the drugs' possible use for people on probation, Koedam said. On Tuesday, court system spokeswoman Alisa Bousa said the state courts are interested in "any additional educational and engagement tools that would benefit the probationers."

At the legislative meeting, Koedam told lawmakers that a stigma and "misconceptions" still surround buprenorphine, methadone and naltrexone, the three medications approved for opioid use disorder by the Food and Drug Administration.

The department needs to "continue to get the education out there in regards to how effective these medications can be" when administered as part of an addiction treatment program, said Koedam.

Rep. Terri Jorgenson, R-Piedmont, wanted to know how long people take the drugs, on average.

"This isn't a lifelong thing, is it?" Jorgenson said.

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Koedam told her the answer is complicated and depends on the individual. Some, she said, may use them long-term.

Sen. Taffy Howard, R-Rapid City, said she recognizes that reliance on a non-intoxicating medication is preferable to opioid use, but asked if "we're trading one addiction for another addiction."

For some people, Koedam said, such medicines can be "maintenance" medications, not dissimilar to drugs for blood pressure or depression that people commonly take for a lifetime. Some people, she said, will remain on the anti-addiction medicines "for the course of their lifetime."

Sen. Red Dawn Foster, D-Pine Ridge, urged the department to prioritize "innovative" approaches to addiction for those inside institutions.

"I know a lot of inmates are self-medicating, so this is some type of need," said Foster, referencing the use of illicit substances in prisons and jails.

Next steps for funding

Questions of ongoing funding bubbled up throughout the meeting. Jorgenson said the settlement money is finite and noted the department's mention that the award amounts will grow smaller as 2038 draws near.

Howard, meanwhile, said "I'm seeing a lot of new programs," and said she wasn't convinced that taxpayers won't be expected to keep paying for them.

"When somebody comes and asks for this grant, have you considered saying, 'I need your commitment that you aren't going to ask for ongoing dollars from this,'" Howard said.

The department denied a sizable stack of funding applications because it prioritized programs that wouldn't need ongoing money from the state, Althoff said.

"Why did we say 'no?' Because a lot of it was not sustainable," he said.

The next round of funding awards will prioritize applications in the mid-range of the department's three-tiered grant system, which it calls "organizational" grants of up to \$50,000.

The small awards were designed for projects at the idea stage, Althoff said, while the large ones were more about developing infrastructure. Over the next year, the goal will be to get projects into the operational and sustainable stage.

Near the end of the briefing, Sen. Paul Miskimins, R-Mitchell, praised the department's willingness to take on opioid addiction. Miskimins, a retired dentist who said he tightened his approach to painkiller prescriptions as their addictive nature became clear, said he hopes lawmakers and the general public remember the human cost of the drugs behind the settlement money.

"One of the finest ladies in my practice was arrested for stealing medications out of a medicine chest at a rummage sale because she was addicted and hiding it from everybody in the world," said Miskimins. "She was a Sunday school teacher."

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

Multi-agency operation yields 14 cocaine arrests, including in South Dakota

BY SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF

RAPID CITY — A multi-agency effort to disrupt cocaine trafficking resulted in 14 total arrests of people from Colorado and the South Dakota cities of Pine Ridge, Box Elder and Rapid City, authorities announced Tuesday.

Representatives of federal, tribal, state and local agencies gathered in the U.S. Attorney's Office in Rapid City to speak about the operation.

"Every time I see an amount of drugs seized, the only thing I can think about are the people that were not poisoned by that drug, the families that didn't suffer because those drugs were taken off the street," said Ron Parsons, the U.S. attorney for South Dakota.

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The FBI spearheaded the investigation in coordination with other agencies. The operation seized 5 kilograms of cocaine intended for distribution in South Dakota, authorities said, along with 37 firearms and \$61,000. The operation's first phase happened last month in Colorado, and the latest arrests occurred Tuesday in South Dakota.

Those arrested have all been charged in federal court with conspiracy to distribute a controlled substance, and some face additional charges related to alleged financial crimes and firearms offenses.

The operation was aided by a broader FBI effort known as Operation Steadfast Promise, which launched in April to target violent crime on tribal lands. Some of the people arrested were living on the Pine Ridge Reservation in southwest South Dakota, and the Oglala Sioux Tribe Department of Public Safety was part of the operation.

Parsons declined to divulge details about the origin of the seized drugs, citing the ongoing investigation, but said illegal drugs in western South Dakota typically come from South America or Mexico via Denver.

US Senate committee advances bill supporting study of Missouri River pipeline system expansion **BY SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF**

Another piece of federal legislation seeking funding to study a Missouri River water pipeline project in South Dakota has passed a U.S. Senate committee.

The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources approved the Lewis & Clark Regional Water System Expansion Feasibility Study Act last week, sending it to the full Senate. Majority Leader John Thune sponsors the bill, and Sen. Mike Rounds is a cosponsor. Both are Republicans from South Dakota.

They announced the bill's committee approval in a press release.

"Continued access to clean and reliable water is critical to economic development and quality of life in our state," Rounds said.

The bill would provide \$10 million for the Department of the Interior to study the feasibility of expanding the capacity and reach of the Lewis & Clark Rural Water System. The existing system in southeast South Dakota, northwest Iowa and southwest Minnesota delivers water to 20 member cities and rural water systems.

Last month, bills from Thune and Rounds cleared a Senate committee that would provide \$10 million apiece to support feasibility studies for the Western Dakota Regional Water System and Dakota Mainstem Regional Water System. The Western Dakota Regional Water System aims to build a pipeline from the Missouri River to supply communities across the western portion of the state, whose drinking water needs are currently served by aquifers. The Dakota Mainstem Regional Water System would serve areas in eastern South Dakota, western Minnesota and northern Iowa.

House versions of the three bills from U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, are awaiting action by committees in that chamber.

Republicans in US House approve stopgap spending bill ahead of Oct. 1 deadline **BY JENNIFER SHUTT**

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House approved a stopgap spending bill Tuesday that would keep the government up and running through the fall, sending it to the Senate, where lawmakers expect to rework the measure.

Congress must pass a government funding bill before the new fiscal year starts on Oct. 1 in order to avoid a shutdown just weeks before the November midterm elections.

The 220-205 mostly party-line vote represents House Republicans' opening salvo in negotiations, though without Democratic support it won't be able to advance in the Senate.

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House Appropriations Chairman Tom Cole, R-Okla., said during floor debate that GOP leaders hope passing the stopgap spending bill months before the start of the next fiscal year will avoid another shutdown.

"For anyone questioning this legislation, the facts are simple — it extends the government funding deadline to Dec. 4, denying any party the opportunity to manufacture leverage before elections," Cole said. "It contains no poison pills or partisan riders. It prevents harmful disruptions to our national security and the vital programs our constituents rely on."

Connecticut Democratic Rep. Rosa DeLauro, ranking member on the committee, opposed the stopgap, saying it would "allow Homeland Secretary (Markwayne) Mullin to transfer billions of dollars to the Border Patrol."

Republicans, she said, "refused" to change that aspect of the bill after Democrats "shared language to fix it."

"We cannot in good conscience allow billions of dollars to flow to these agencies without major reforms to keep our constituents safe from further violence," DeLauro said.

Democrats don't want a government shutdown but also don't want "to rush" the process and omit the list of anomalies just sent up by the White House, she said.

Those tweaks to funding levels are commonly added to stopgap spending bills but weren't included in House Republicans' measure because it was written before the White House sent a list of requested anomalies to lawmakers Monday.

"There are over 50 programs listed by the agencies to take some action so that they can be protected during a continuing resolution," DeLauro said, using the technical term for a short-term funding bill.

The changes would support wildfire suppression activities, housing assistance for tens of thousands and programs that help people in rural communities afford their utilities.

"Rushing this bill to the floor haphazardly without carefully considering the various needs that must be met is no way to govern," DeLauro said. "And it is irresponsible."

Senate anticipates changes

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Susan Collins, R-Maine, said earlier in the day that she was working with the committee's top Democrat, Washington Sen. Patty Murray, to draft a continuing resolution of their own.

"It appears that there is good faith on the Democratic side to try to pass the CR and avoid a government shutdown, which is always a disaster," Collins said.

Murray said the House's stopgap spending bill has "problems" that will need to be fixed in order to move through the Senate.

"We just got the anomalies last night and both of us are trying to figure out the best way to get it put together," Murray said.

Appropriations status

Lawmakers must lean on a stopgap spending bill because they will, once again, fail to complete work on the dozen annual government funding bills before the deadline.

The House has passed three of its spending bills. The Senate hasn't passed any, in part, because the committee hasn't released a single bill. The two chambers will need to begin negotiations at some point to settle on a total spending level for the 12 bills and how that roughly \$1.9 trillion will be broken down among thousands of federal agencies and programs.

That means the earliest the full-year government spending bills would become law is during the lame-duck session that is set to last for about five weeks between the election and the start of the new Congress in January.

Lawmakers could also pass a series of stopgap funding bills instead of completing negotiations on the full-year appropriations bills.

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.

Brennan Center report predicts mass voter challenges likely in midterm elections

BY DAVID LIGHTMAN

WASHINGTON — Mass voter challenges are likely to occur in the 2026 midterm elections, the Brennan Center for Justice warned Tuesday, with the potential to “undermine the democratic process.”

President Donald Trump and the Republican Party have been laying the groundwork for questioning the election process in state after state, as Trump has made “election integrity” the centerpiece of his recent domestic policy initiatives, including in a July 16 address to the nation.

The center, at NYU School of Law, found in a report Tuesday that more than 185,000 challenges to voter eligibility were filed by private citizens in 2024, though “the real number is likely higher” since many election officials either were not contacted or sent incomplete responses to an inquiry. The center is regarded as left-leaning.

Mass challenges are a fairly recent development, spurred by improvements in election technology and transparency. Thousands of votes now can be challenged at once.

They’ve rarely been successful, but experts worry they create voter doubts about whether elections are being conducted fairly. Historically such challenges have also often been used to suppress the votes of people of color, a separate brief said.

“Eligible voters facing challenges sometimes don’t vote simply because the process is too confusing. Responding to a challenge requires numerous steps that can trip up voters. They may not understand their options for verifying their identity,” said the report by Brennan Center Counsel Andrew Garber.

Garber found that “mass voter challenges have become a key element in the campaign to use election integrity as a pretext for voter suppression.”

In 2024, he found, election deniers lodged challenges, “in addition to spreading lies about widespread voter fraud, refusing to certify elections, discrediting voting machines, engaging in bad faith poll watching, filing frivolous lawsuits, and threatening election officials with physical harm or criminal penalties.”

This year, Garber warned, such challenges are likely to be an “integral strategy in the playbook to undermine the democratic process.”

Mass challenges, he said, “add basically zero value to elections while creating new costs.”

One big worry, though: “There are instances of eligible voters being removed from the rolls and learning of their removal after the deadline to register and vote in the next election,” the report said. “As is often the case with voter suppression, vulnerable individuals frequently suffer the effects.”

Mullin threatens

The Trump administration is pushing state officials to examine their voter rolls and tighten their election security, thus opening the door for the help of the federal government in conducting mass challenges, the report predicted.

Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin said last week that hundreds of thousands of noncitizens are registered to vote in California, New Jersey, Nevada and Pennsylvania and threatened to prosecute election officials in states that don’t “participate in securing the elections” ahead of the November midterms. He has not specified the source of his data.

Trump has demanded Congress require people to show proof of citizenship when they register to vote and photo IDs at the polls. So far, lawmakers have so far been reluctant to approve the SAVE America Act that in various versions would restrict voting, and it remains stalled in the U.S. Senate.

Trump and his allies have maintained for years the 2020 election was marred by voter fraud. No evidence of any widespread fraud has been found.

Election officials have largely maintained their rolls are accurate and up to date.

“In most states, list maintenance practices tend to keep pace with natural changes in voters’ lives, such as moving,” said a report this month by the nonpartisan Center for Election Innovation & Research.

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Mass challenges

Recent mass challenges have rarely been successful.

The report cited efforts in Georgia, Michigan, Texas, Florida and Iowa in 2022.

"These challenges were widely rejected for lack of evidence or failure to comply with state law," the Brennan Center found.

In 2024, Brennan's research found that private citizens filed at least 185,232 voter challenges in the states studied. Of those, the center found officials accepted at least 5,477. That means they may have removed the voter from the rolls, declared them inactive or taken other steps to make it difficult for them to vote.

Researchers sent requests to Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas and to numerous counties in those states, the report methodology said.

"One takeaway is evident: With only around 3 percent of challenges clearly accepted, challenges contributed little to list maintenance in 2024," Brennan found.

For instance, Georgia got in touch with about 875,000 voters in 2023 who had moved or had not voted for several years. That was more than a hundred times the number of Georgia voters who were successfully challenged the next year.

The center compiled the report by sending public records requests to 42 state and local government entities. It asked for any documents involving voter challenges in 2024 and how officials dealt with those challenges. It also looked at court filings, public reporting and election board meetings.

"Acquiring a complete record of challenges is impossible: They are often made ad hoc, officials may have no obligation to track them, and the records produced are often incomplete," the center noted, adding that some officials refused to provide records or said they got no challenges.

David Lightman has been a reporter or editor for more than 50 years. He's worked for the Hagerstown (Md.) Morning Herald, Riverside (Calif.) Press Enterprise, and then 10 years at the Baltimore Evening Sun, covering local news and, for six years, state government and the legislature. He spent 23 years as the Hartford Courant's Washington Bureau Chief, and 18 years at McClatchy's Washington bureau, where he covered the White House and Congress. He also served as regional editor, supervising the bureau's seven regional reporters. He was president of Washington's Gridiron Club in 2018 and won the David Lynch award for regional reporting in 2007.

Trump proposal will turn federal grants into a system of political favors, Democrats warn

BY AMELIA TWYMAN

WASHINGTON — Democrats in Congress are pushing back against a proposed Trump administration rule introduced by the Office of Management and Budget that would substantially change the way federal grants are reviewed and distributed.

Over the past few weeks, several groups of lawmakers have written public comment letters to Office of Management and Budget Director Russ Vought expressing strong opposition to the new draft rule, which would give political appointees the power to decide what institutions receive grant funding, among other revisions.

A summary of the rule cites the Biden administration as to why it is needed. "Federal awards were often used during those years to promote a 'woke' policy agenda that did not reflect the values of the vast majority of the American public," it says, pointing to diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, policies.

Democrats said the proposal exceeds the office's authority, will make it harder for grant recipients to carry out funding priorities established by Congress and would turn federal grants into a tool for President Donald Trump to "unilaterally advance his partisan agenda and punish political rivals."

The draft rule would allow Trump to "terminate or suspend any grant at any time for any reason and without any notice," they said.

"Ultimately, these changes will make it harder for grant recipients to apply for and manage federal funds – undermining public safety, public health, economic competitiveness, and the government's ability

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to address rising costs," wrote Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York and the entire Senate Democratic Caucus in their July 1 letter to Vought.

Maryland Democrats in Congress and members of the Congressional Community Safety Caucus, led by Reps. Summer Lee of Pennsylvania, LaMonica McIver of New Jersey and Gabe Amo of Rhode Island, also wrote letters urging OMB to rescind its proposed new rule.

Hundreds of billions in funds affected

The more than 100-page draft rule, published in collaboration with 41 other federal grant-making agencies on May 29 and titled "Regulation for Federal Financial Assistance," would change the framework used to evaluate grant applications as well as guidelines for cost sharing.

It would potentially affect hundreds of billions of dollars in federal funding at universities, nonprofit organizations and other U.S. institutions, according to SciLine, an independent nonprofit service for journalists and scientists run out of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Under the proposed rule, federal grants could not be used to "fund, promote, encourage, subsidize, or facilitate" DEI initiatives.

Awards would also in many cases have to "demonstrably advance the President's policy priorities," and agencies would be allowed to cancel funding that is "not effective at achieving program goals or Federal agency priorities" or "no longer in the Federal Government's interest."

"The overarching goal of OMB's proposed revisions is to improve transparency, accountability, and oversight for how Federal taxpayer dollars are used in the context of Federal grantmaking," according to the executive summary of the rule.

OMB officials say they could implement the new draft rule as early as Oct. 1.

Community violence intervention programs

During the public comment period for the draft rule, which ran from May 29 to July 13, congressional Democrats slammed its vague language and the implications it holds for many institutions that rely on federal funds.

Maryland's senators and Democratic representatives in their July 10 letter to Vought denounced the rule for changing a process traditionally based on merit. "The federal grantmaking process includes essential, non-political guardrails that this rule seeks to eviscerate," they wrote.

They also said the proposed rule contains a slew of new undefined standards for grants, including that they must adhere to "gold standard science" and cannot reflect "anti-American values," that recipients may not be able to understand or comply with.

Maryland institutions, often known as hubs for scientific research and innovation, have been hit hard by National Institutes of Health funding cuts and mass federal layoffs since Trump began his second term in 2025. Local governments and schools that receive federal funds have also taken blows, as has the state's overall economy.

In their July 13 letter, members of the Congressional Community Safety Caucus voiced concerns over how the draft rule could specifically affect community violence intervention programs.

Community violence intervention programs, local efforts that have been linked to drops in violent crime rates in cities across the country, rely on federal grants for "state and local government investments, hospital partnerships, philanthropy, and research support," according to the lawmakers' letter.

The new draft rule, they wrote, would jeopardize the operation of these programs by allowing Trump administration officials to "withhold, suspend, or terminate grants, or change terms and conditions mid-implementation, forcing grantees to operate in a tumultuous environment."

The administration has already made cuts to parts of the Office of Justice Programs, further limiting the funds available to community violence intervention programs.

Other responses

Though opposition to the proposed rule is mainly coming from Democratic lawmakers, some bipartisan criticism regarding the rule's broad scope and fast timeline exists.

Sen. Susan Collins, a Maine Republican, on July 6 asked Vought to extend the proposal's public comment

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period at least 90 days and “withdraw portions of the rule that would potentially harm small and rural communities and scientific and biomedical research.”

“While I agree these principles should guide the administration and oversight of Federal funds, the rule would impose new, burdensome requirements on award recipients ... and conflict with Congress’ control over the federal funding process,” she wrote.

OMB did not respond to States Newsroom’s request for comment on lawmaker pushback to the proposed rule. But Vought took to social media last month to express his view of the opposition.

“The freakout by those on the Left subsidized by taxpayer funds over OMB’s update of the regulation governing federal grant making tells you how important it is to keep the bureaucracies from leaking out spending that is woke, wasteful, and contra to the policies of the Trump Administration thru the NGOs,” he wrote.

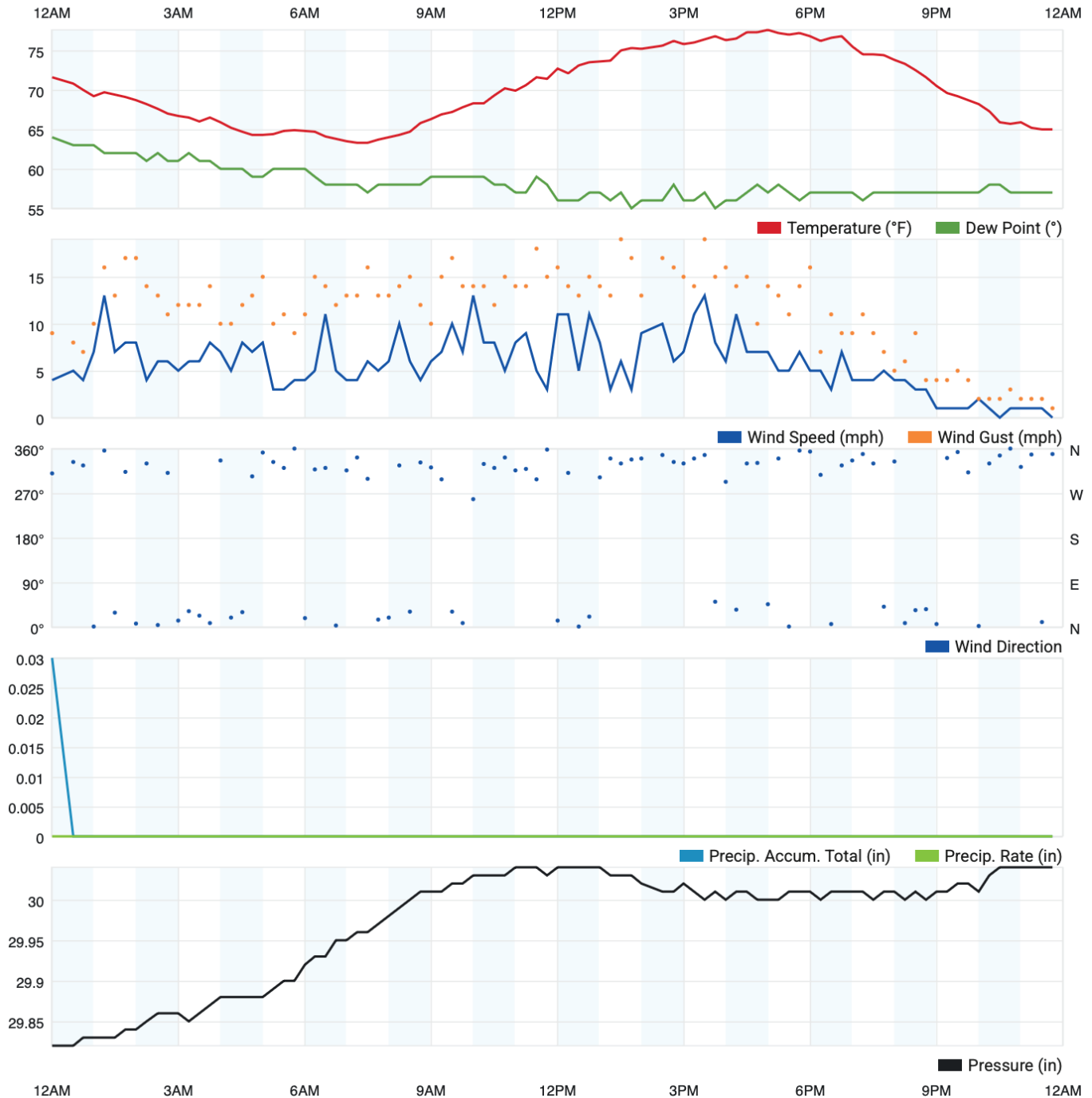
Amelia Twyman is an intern at States Newsroom’s Washington bureau. Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, she now studies journalism and creative writing at the University of Maryland. She works as an assistant news editor at the university’s independent student newspaper, The Diamondback. Amelia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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

July 21, 2026



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Today



High: 82 °F

Sunny

Tonight



Low: 57 °F

Mostly Clear

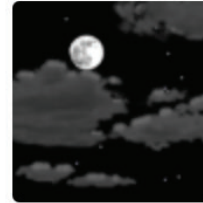
Thursday



High: 85 °F

Partly Sunny

Thursday
Night



Low: 62 °F

Partly Cloudy

Friday



High: 93 °F

Hot

Temperatures Climbing

Southerly winds gusting 15-30 mph

Today
40-50% chance for light rain showers in central SD this morning.
Highs: 78-84°F

Thursday
20-40% chance for rain showers mainly Hwy 14 south
Highs: 80-88°F

Friday
Heat returns. Warmest across north central SD.
Highs: 86-101°F

NOAA

July 22, 2026 2:38 AM

Seasonable temperatures continue today and Thursday with some chances for light rain mainly across central SD. Heat returns on Friday with highs in the lower triple digits expected across north central SD.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 78 °F at 5:36 PM

Low Temp: 63 °F at 7:10 AM

Wind: 19 mph at 3:23 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 111 in 1934

Record Low: 46 in 1980

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 2.36

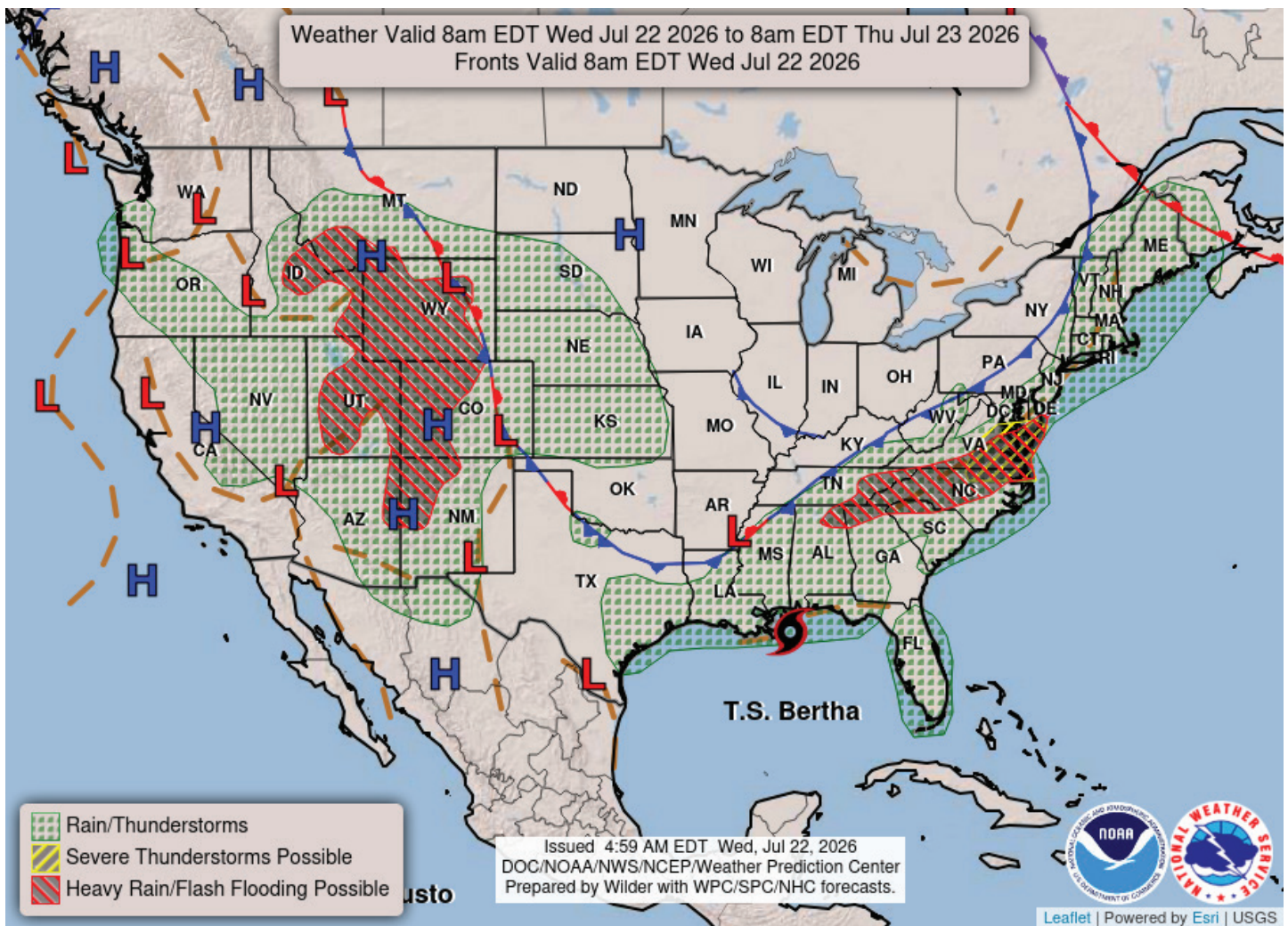
Precip to date in July.: 4.77

Average Precip to date: 13.37

Precip Year to Date: 14.24

Sunset Tonight: 9:12 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:06 am



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Today in Weather History

July 22, 1926: An estimated F2 tornado moved east across the northern part of Hyde County, destroying two barns.

July 22, 1999: An F0 tornado touched down briefly on a farm southeast of Onida. Over half of the roof of a 40 by 45-foot building was torn off and deposited in a tree belt 200 yards to the north. A grain auger was also damaged when it was pushed up against a granary. A semi-trailer was blown over. About 400 acres of ripe wheat was also flattened, and some sunflowers suffered damage as a result of the tornado.

July 22, 2011: Numerous severe thunderstorms brought hail up to the size of golf balls, damaging winds over 70 mph, along with flash flooding to parts of north central and northeast South Dakota. Most of the hail occurred in Grant and Codington counties. Several roads were flooded by nearly 4 inches of rain in Grant County. Five miles west of South Shore in Codington County, over 3 inches of rain brought flash flooding to several roads. The strong winds were observed in Corson, Walworth, and McPherson counties. About 9 miles west of Long Lake, eighty mph winds ripped a grain bin from the fasteners, pushed the north wall of a garage in, snapped several corral poles, moved a semitrailer four feet, and caused some minor damage to the house. Also, many branches were broken off along with several trees uprooted.

1911 — The temperature at Painter, WY, dipped to 10 degrees to equal the record low for July for the continental U.S. (The Weather Channel)

1934 — The temperature reached 109 degrees at Cincinnati, OH, to cap their hottest summer of record. The state record for Ohio was established that day with a reading of 113 degrees near the town of Galipolis. (David Ludlum)

1975 — Six inches of rain fell across Mercer County, NJ, in just ten hours causing the worst flooding in twenty years. Assunpink Creek crested eleven feet above flood stage at Hamilton and Trenton, the highest level of record. Traffic was brought to a standstill, and railway service between New York City and Washington D.C. was cut off for two days. Flooding left 1000 persons homeless, and caused an estimated 25 million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1987 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather from Utah to North Dakota, spawning a dozen tornadoes in North Dakota. Thunderstorms in North Dakota also produced baseball size hail at Clifford which caused four million dollars damage, and high winds which toppled a couple of eighty foot towers cutting off power to the town of Blanchard. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — While cool air invaded the central U.S., unseasonably hot weather continued over the western states. The temperature at Spring Valley, NV, soared from a morning low of 35 degrees to an afternoon high of 95 degrees. Fallon, NV, reported an all-time record high of 108 degrees, and Death Valley, CA, reported their sixth straight day of 120 degree heat. (The Weather Channel) (The National Weather Summary)

1988: Dust devils are not a unique phenomenon, but usually they stay minimal. This was not the case in Dickinson County, Iowa where a powerful dust devil developed on the edge of Lake Okoboji. It picked up whole sections of several docks and swept away all of the loose dirt in the area. Estimated winds exceeded 60 mph.

1989 — Afternoon thunderstorms over Florida produced wind gusts to 92 mph at Jacksonville, damaging thirteen light planes at Herlong Field. Five cities in Texas reported record low temperatures for the date. Corpus Christi, TX, equalled their record low for the date with a reading of 71 degrees, and then tied their record high for the date that afternoon with a reading of 97 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1993: The levee, holding back the flooding Mississippi River at Kaskaskia, Illinois, ruptures, forcing the town's people to flee on barges. The incident at Kaskaskia was the most dramatic event of the flood. At 9:48 a.m., the levee broke, leaving the people of Kaskaskia with no escape route other than two Army Corp of Engineers barges. By 2 p.m., the entire town was underwater.



The Benefits of Wisdom

God's wisdom doesn't just offer knowledge of who He is—it protects and guides us in ways we can't fathom.

Proverbs 3:13-18: 13 How blessed is the man who finds wisdom And the man who gains understanding.
14 For her profit is better than the profit of silver And her gain better than fine gold.
15 She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her.
16 Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor.
17 Her ways are pleasant ways And all her paths are peace.
18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast.

Human insight has limits—it can't compare to the wisdom that comes from God. The truth is, God's "foolishness" is wiser than man's understanding (1 Corinthians 1:25). Walking in His wisdom has great benefits, including ...

Deeper knowledge of God. The Lord is personally involved in every facet of our life. The better we know His character, the more we will understand His viewpoint, recognize where He is working, and be able to respond properly to life's circumstances.

Clear guidance. God sees everything, and His perspective is eternal. He knows exactly what's needed to accomplish His will in our life and what it'll take to resolve problems in a godly way.

Divine protection. When we seek God's wisdom instead of relying on our own understanding, we're protected from decisions that lead us away from His best for our life. His wisdom not only helps us discern what aligns with His purpose but also guards us from paths that would lead to harm.

Knowing God, receiving clear guidance, experiencing divine protection—human wisdom can't provide any of these. They come only from the heavenly Father, and He offers them freely to all who believe.

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:

07.21.26

2 4 24 36 45 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 46 Mins 33 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.21.26

25 37 59 68 70 10

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$743,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 31 Mins 33 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.20.26

23 31 34 37 52 7

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,050,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 46 Mins 33 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.18.26

1 13 27 28 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 1 Mins 33 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.20.26

15 21 39 54 67 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 30 Mins 33 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.20.26

2 9 44 53 59 8

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$567,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 30 Mins 33 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

A Minnesota town now boasts the world's tallest nutcracker

By SARAH RAZA Associated Press

LUVERNE, Minn. (AP) — Crossing the open farmland of southwestern Minnesota, you'll encounter an otherworldly sight: a massive head with a beard, mustache and red-striped top hat looming over the horizon.

Pull into the small town of Luverne and the figure — a nearly 66-foot (20-meter) tall nutcracker, decked out like Uncle Sam — comes into full view.

Luverne, which thanks to a local collector claims to have more of the decorative figurines than people, now boasts the world's tallest nutcracker too. And yes, the star-spangled behemoth has a working jaw.

Outside a quirky rock shop in the town's center, hundreds of people gathered for a weekend ribbon cutting where the nutcracker's name and exact height were revealed to a crowd that was later served red, white and blue cookies and slushies.

"Please welcome our newest Luverne resident, Verne the Patriot," Katie Walgrave announced to cheers.

It stands 65 feet and 7 1/2 inches tall, with the pedestal pushing Verne an additional 9 feet (2.7 meters) over the surrounding prairie, according to Walgrave. That's almost twice the height of a 33-foot (10-meter) tall nutcracker in Neuhausen, Germany, that Guinness World Records currently has ranked as the largest.

Walgrave, who runs the rock shop called Those Blasted Things with her family, said that since the nutcracker was completed in mid-June, customers have quadrupled. Other local businesses have reported more traffic too.

"Our goal is to have something that's different and that you won't see anywhere else. And so that's what we have here," she said.

Given the association between nutcrackers and Tchaikovsky's namesake holiday ballet, the July unveiling seemed a bit out of season. But nutcrackers are a year-round obsession in Luverne, which also hosts a "Nutcracker Fest" every summer.

It all traces back to Betty Mann, 96, and a trip that she made to a Cracker Barrel in January 2001 after her daughter and husband had recently died.

"I said to my daughter-in-law, 'I had a hard Christmas and I've always wanted a wooden nutcracker. I'm buying myself a belated Christmas present,'" she recalled.

She got her first in the Cracker Barrel's gift shop. She kept buying them, and Mann's collection eventually ballooned to more than 2,500 nutcrackers. In 2016, she donated them to the town's historical society, where she was president, hoping to draw more visitors to its museum.

Others also started donating and today, Luverne's 7,554 nutcrackers outnumber its roughly 5,000 residents. No two are the same.

A few years ago, when the city brought in a tourism expert to figure out how to lure more visitors, he concluded "we're crazy if we don't utilize the nutcracker collection," Mayor Patrick Baustian said.

A city committee came up with the idea of building the world's tallest nutcracker, and so Verne was conceived. It was timed perfectly to arrive as the nation celebrates its 250th anniversary.

The nutcracker was several years in the making, with the pieces crafted in Utah and assembled in Luverne. The head and hat had to be lifted on with a crane three weeks ago, completing the structure.

It cost around \$600,000, and was funded by donations and grants, Walgrave said.

John Hawkinson of Lakeville, Minnesota, surprised his wife, Francine, with a trip to Luverne (nearly 200 miles, or 321 kilometers, away) after a house fire last month destroyed her collection of nearly 300 nutcrackers. Many represented times from their life together — a nutcracker resembling a sailor for John's time in the Navy, and matching bride and groom nutcrackers for their marriage.

"Betty started her collection as a way of dealing with grief," John Hawkinson said Saturday. "We came down here out of loss as well. ... I thought that was kind of a full circle moment."

Luverne is about 30 miles (48 kilometers) from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and about 200 miles (322

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kilometers) from Minneapolis. One of its other claims to fame is being a setting for the second season of the TV show " Fargo."

Messy primaries plague both major political parties, causing chaos and confusion in the midterms

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When midterm campaigning began, each major political party had a clear game plan. Republicans would emphasize border security and an economy that was finally shaking off years of high inflation. Democrats would focus attention on a deeply unpopular President Donald Trump to energize their voters.

It hasn't worked out that way. With a little more than three months to go, both parties are grappling with self-inflicted wounds and messy missteps that have complicated their paths to victory.

Trump steered the country into a war against Iran with no end in sight, disrupting the global flow of oil and spiking prices at the pump. He remains fixated on purging his party of dissent and relitigating his election defeat six years ago. He's visiting Georgia on Wednesday to ostensibly promote new investment accounts for children, but what he'll actually talk about is anyone's guess.

On the other side of the aisle, Democrats are in the throes of an internal civil war between moderates and progressives, as democratic socialists successfully oust incumbents in places including New York and Denver. Some of their candidates have imploded in spectacular fashion, jeopardizing races that the party had expected to win.

The drama has turned existential as each party faces a moment of reckoning. Democrats remain shaken by Trump's reelection and are desperately searching for a path back to power. Republicans are beginning to contemplate a post-Trump era even as the president maintains an iron grip on the party.

Frank Luntz, a longtime pollster, said the year has been consumed by "a sense of chaos and confusion." "We really do not know what's going to happen in November," he said.

Candidates have been rocked by scandal

Democrats' latest turmoil has unfolded in Wisconsin, one of the nation's most narrowly divided battleground states.

Lt. Gov. Sara Rodriguez abandoned her bid for governor after a campaign finance scandal just as she seemed to be consolidating support. Now the party establishment is concerned that her departure will elevate Francesca Hong, a democratic socialist who's viewed by party leaders as a potentially weak opponent against U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany, the likely Republican nominee.

After her departure, David Crowley, the Milwaukee County executive, jumped back into the race and received a rare endorsement from Gov. Tony Evers, the Democratic incumbent.

"If we lose, Trump's most loyal lackey in Congress takes control of Wisconsin, and that's turned regular Democratic angst into flop sweats," said longtime Wisconsin liberal activist Scot Ross. Still, he predicted that once the focus moves past the primary fight, "Democratic unity will be so high in Wisconsin we'll all be getting nosebleeds."

Democrats' most consequential derailment might have taken place in Maine, where the party is eager to defeat Republican Sen. Susan Collins as part of a nationwide push to regain control of the chamber.

Graham Platner, an oyster farmer and political outsider, rode a wave of grassroots energy to beat the establishment pick, Gov. Janet Mills, for the Democratic nomination, only to drop out after facing an allegation of sexual assault, which he denies.

Supporters had hoped Platner would be the kind of candidate who could win white working-class voters back to the party, despite controversies including a tattoo widely recognized as a Nazi symbol and a history of inflammatory social media posts. Now Democrats are holding a convention this coming weekend to choose a replacement candidate.

Celinda Lake, a Democratic pollster and consultant, said activists and voters have been willing to overlook potential vulnerabilities while supporting outsiders for office.

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"There is something in the air that has made these candidates incredibly reckless and thinking that they can get away with it," she said, pointing to the president as a potential explanation. "I think Trump has kind of created a high-risk environment."

Marc Short, the former chief of staff to Trump's first-term vice president, Mike Pence, said the dynamic was reminiscent of when the tea party ushered in a wave of untested Republican candidates who famously beat establishment figures in primaries but lost in November, costing Republicans the Senate even as they made gains in the House.

The shoe, he said, is now on the other foot.

"I feel like when there is a lot of energy on one side that you can tend to nominate candidates that create hurdles for you and limit what your gains could be," he said.

Divisions between Democrats are on display in key races

Other races are forcing Democrats to confront some of their deepest divisions and questions about which wing of the party will best position it to win the next presidential election.

In Michigan, progressive favorite Abdul El-Sayed has worried party leaders like Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer who fear he's too far left to win in the battleground state. Democrats will need to hold the Michigan seat opened by retiring Democratic Sen. Gary Peters if they want a shot at winning the majority this year.

The primary also highlights a schism over Israel. El-Sayed, running to become the first Muslim U.S. senator, has described Israel's military campaign in Gaza as a genocide, an accusation rejected by Israel and the White House. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, and its affiliated groups have spent close to \$30 million backing primary rival Haley Stevens, their largest investment ever in a race.

Adam Green, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, said it's clear that voters across the country are rebelling against a political system they see as rigged and are yearning for candidates willing to fight on their behalf.

He said candidates like El-Sayed would serve as proof of concept going into 2028 that "bold, shake-up-the-system economic fighters" are more electable in purple and red states than "stale, status quo corporate-aligned Democrats."

In Washington, Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., downplayed the idea that the ideological divisions would endanger Democrats.

"A healthy party is a party that has arguments," he said. "I think our party should be debating ideas. We should be having hotly contested primaries."

Republicans rocked by retirements and ousted incumbents

Republicans are facing their own challenges as they try to buck historic precedent and maintain congressional control.

Trump reshaped this year's Senate map by sidelining some Republican incumbents and promoting loyalists to replace them. That includes the Senate race in Texas, where he successfully ousted longtime Sen. John Cornyn, whom he saw as insufficiently loyal, and endorsed Ken Paxton, a fiery conservative with a lengthy history of corruption allegations.

Republican leaders had warned his nomination would put the state in play and force the party to spend millions of dollars defending what would have otherwise been a safe seat.

Another challenge has emerged in North Carolina, where Sen. Thom Tillis declined to run for reelection after feuding with Trump last year over healthcare spending. Democrats hope to flip the seat with former Gov. Roy Cooper.

Whit Ayres, a longtime Republican pollster and strategist, said Trump "has exacerbated the problem" of a political culture that has produced more extreme candidates on both sides of the aisle thanks to closed primaries.

Trump can boost candidates — or hold them back

Republicans have historically struggled when Trump is not on the ballot. But he also risks weighing candidates down.

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Just 37% of U.S. adults approve of how he's handling the presidency, according to the most recent AP-NORC poll, which shows deep dissatisfactions over his handling of the economy and other issues.

But instead of staying focused on lowering prices, Trump has continued his bombardment of Iran in a struggle for control over the Strait of Hormuz, a critical waterway for global oil supplies. He also delivered a primetime address to the nation in which he again sowed doubts about the legitimacy of U.S. elections and continued to dispute his 2020 loss to Democrat Joe Biden in an appeal for more restrictive voting laws.

"Trump is our biggest ally," said Lake, the Democratic pollster and consultant. "He's the best things that Democrats have going. And it's the gift that keeps on going."

But Jenny Beth Martin, chair of the grassroots conservative group Tea Party Patriots Action, disagreed.

"President Trump is the single greatest advantage Republicans have in the midterm elections," she said in a statement. "The energy and enthusiasm he generates is incomparable, and we're counting on him to motivate his supporters to go to the polls."

Ukraine overhauls its military top brass for the fight against Russia

By HANNA ARHIROVA and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine pushed on with its fight against Russia's invasion under new military leadership Wednesday, after President Volodymyr Zelenskyy bowed to public pressure and fired his commander-in-chief.

Ukraine has made significant progress in the war this year, and a rift between the country's outgoing army chief and its defense minister threatened to derail its efforts. Both men lost their jobs following Zelenskyy's major government reshuffle last week.

The top-level changes late Tuesday were intended to draw a line under an unwelcome spasm of political turmoil that lasted almost a week and prompted rejoicing in Russia. It was not clear whether Zelenskyy's measures would achieve that goal.

The new army chief, 43-year-old Maj. Gen. Mykhailo Drapatyi, belongs to a new generation of Ukrainian generals who have come up through the ranks during the battle against Russian aggression. He became known for his daring and courage in 2014, the year that Russia seized and illegally annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula — eight years before Moscow's all-out invasion.

Zelenskyy said Drapatyi and other commanders must present an updated defense strategy, including continued reform of the corps system, faster weapon and drone deliveries, stronger air defense against Russian strikes, and a clearer mobilization plan.

Russia says the changes in Kyiv won't alter the front line

There is no sign that the two countries are any closer to a peace settlement, despite U.S.-led diplomatic efforts.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Wednesday that Moscow is sticking to its previous demands. They include Kyiv withdrawing its forces from the four eastern regions that Russia has seized but doesn't fully control, renouncing any aspirations to NATO membership, and sharply cutting the size of its army, among other things.

Peskov told reporters that the Ukrainian political and military changes reflect strains in Kyiv.

"Kyiv's regime is trembling from within. It can be seen with the naked eye," Peskov said.

Neither will the top-level alterations change the front line, he told reporters, claiming that Russian forces are on the offensive.

With the war's roughly 1,250-kilometer (800-mile) front line mostly off-limits to independent observers, Russia and Ukraine have also engaged in a propaganda battle.

Fedorov's future is still uncertain

Zelenskyy met separately Tuesday with outgoing defense minister Mykhailo Fedorov, a 35-year-old tech-savvy entrepreneur credited with swiftly developing Ukraine's drone technology that has given it a battlefield edge.

Fedorov locked horns with outgoing commander-in-chief Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, a 60-year-old veteran

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trained in the Soviet Union before Ukraine's independence.

Street protests in Kyiv and other cities demanded Fedorov's return, viewing him as a key military modernizer, and urged Zelenskyy to fire Syrskyi, regarded as part of the old guard.

Zelenskyy offered Fedorov what he called a respected position in the government that would unify the country's technology sector. It wasn't clear if Fedorov accepted the offer -- or whether the latest moves would satisfy protesters and calm the streets.

Fedorov said after his dismissal last week that he had been offered jobs by some global defense tech companies.

Fedorov supported Drapatyi's appointment, calling it a "new hope in the fight of free people for freedom and justice" and "a voice for change that could not go unheard."

Fedorov had criticized Syrskyi publicly before his dismissal, saying the general was blocking his reform efforts and needed to be replaced for Ukraine not to fail in its resistance against Russia.

Outgoing military chief points to recent battlefield achievements

Syrskyi defended his wartime record in a statement Wednesday.

Among other things, he claimed Ukrainian forces had clawed back 743 square kilometers (287 square miles) of Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory this year and said he was handing his successor an army that was not only defending but also conducting offensive operations.

It was not possible to independently verify his claim.

Fedorov called Syrskyi to thank him for his military triumphs, including defending the Kyiv region at the time of Russia's February 2022 full-scale invasion, the Kharkiv counteroffensive operation later that year and other battles, calling them "already an important part of Ukraine's history." But he added that the country must "move even faster and write new chapters, correcting all previous mistakes."

The political crisis began last Thursday, when Zelenskyy overhauled his wartime government, replacing his prime minister and firing Fedorov after just six months in the post.

The reshuffle immediately drew thousands of protesters into the streets of Kyiv and other cities, framing Fedorov's removal as Zelenskyy siding with an entrenched military old guard over a reformer.

Zelenskyy said Wednesday that he's also appointing Maj. Gen. Ihor Skybiuk as chief of the General Staff as part of the overhaul.

Russia and Ukraine keep up their long-range strikes

The political maneuvers took place against a backdrop of continued deadly strikes by Russia and Ukraine onto each other's soil.

Ukrainian drones overnight struck two more sprawling warehouses of Russia's major online retailer, Wildberries, in Russia's southern regions of Krasnodar and Stavropol, Wildberries founder Tatyana Kim and Russian officials said Wednesday.

The strikes came four days after Ukraine's long-range drones hit massive Wildberries warehouses in the Moscow region and in the Tambov region, killing eight people and wounding dozens, according to officials.

Zelenskyy said, without naming the facilities, that they were used by Russia to supply sanctioned components for the production of drones and navigation equipment.

Russian attacks, meanwhile, have also struck several major Ukrainian logistics hubs and retail facilities over the past week.

Russia attacked Ukraine with four missiles of various types and 216 long-range strike drones overnight from Tuesday to Wednesday, according to the Ukrainian air force.

In the southern Odesa region, a Russian drone killed a woman when it struck a two-story apartment building, regional military administration head Oleh Kiper said.

Congo's Ebola outbreak has killed nearly 1,000 people

BUNIA, Congo (AP) — At least 999 people have died from the Ebola outbreak in Congo, according to official data published overnight into Wednesday, a grim toll in what's already been declared the fastest Ebola outbreak in history.

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The latest update from Congo's Ministry of Health shows that as of Monday, 2,473 cases have been recorded in the latest outbreak, and 999 people have died. At least 737 patients are currently in isolation and hospitals, it said.

The outbreak declared on May 15 is unlike most previous Ebola outbreaks because the Bundibugyo virus responsible for it has no approved vaccines or treatments.

It has also killed more people at a quicker rate than any outbreak on record, including the 2013-2016 outbreak that is considered the worst on record with over 11,000 deaths out of at least 28,000 cases. That outbreak took about eight months to reach 1,000 deaths.

Ebola is rare, but highly contagious and can be contracted via bodily fluids such as vomit, blood or semen. The disease it causes is severe and often fatal.

Officials have also warned that 80% of new cases have emerged through unknown chains of transmission, a sign the outbreak is spreading faster than health officials can track it even as they step up their response in Ituri province, the epicenter of the outbreak, as well as in four other provinces where cases have been recorded.

Attacks on health facilities and response teams have also forced frontline workers and aid groups out of some areas. Some health workers have gone on strike, complaining that they haven't been paid since the outbreak started.

Speaking at the Africa health summit in Ghana on Tuesday, Dr. Jean Kaseya, the Director-General of Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, called for intensified efforts to slow the outbreak.

"If we do not stop this outbreak today, it could become one of the worst Ebola outbreaks the world has ever documented," Kaseya said.

Iran's demands over the Strait of Hormuz would set a dangerous precedent, Rubio warns Asian leaders

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned Asian leaders Wednesday that Iran's demand to control and collect tolls in the Strait of Hormuz would threaten the world's economy and set a precedent that could be repeated elsewhere in the world.

Rubio spoke at the start of an annual meeting in the Philippine capital, Manila, with counterparts from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations who have expressed alarm over the resurgent war in the Middle East that has battered their region. Despite Washington's preoccupation with the war, Rubio said "we're with ASEAN 100%."

"If we create a precedent in the Middle East where a nation state can decide that they are going to control an international waterway, charge a toll and if you don't pay them, blow up your ships, we have created a very dangerous precedent which will repeat itself in other parts of the world, including in this region," he said.

Washington's top diplomat also renewed allegations that Iran has reneged on commitments under a failed peace deal. Rubio said Iran "has been reaching out to the United States, both directly and indirectly, to engage in talks about settling the differences," but gave no indication that the U.S. was considering returning to peace talks with Iran.

Top diplomats from the U.S., China, Russia and several other countries are in Manila this week to take part in at the ASEAN ministerial gathering. Newly minted British Foreign Secretary Ed Miliband was arriving Wednesday, his office said.

Sergey Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, told reporters that Moscow would like to see a quick settlement between the U.S. and Iran.

"There are those eager to incite each party to keep the conflict going, but we aren't one of those," he said.

"We would like to see it stop — it impacts the global economy and Russia is part of the global economy," Lavrov said, adding that Moscow is "interested in stable global energy prices to pursue long-term economic policies."

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Southeast Asia hit hard by energy shock from Iran war

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong underscored her country's concern over the renewed war in the Middle East, warning that "the situation could deteriorate further without much warning."

"We want to see an end to this war. We want to see a ceasefire. We want to see negotiations and we want the strait to be opened," Wong told reporters.

"People are being affected by what is happening and has happened to global energy markets and the effect on people has been direct and personal," she said.

Overreliance on fossil fuel imports from the Middle East has made Southeast Asia particularly vulnerable to the energy shock triggered by the Iran war, according to the International Energy Agency, which called the crisis a "stark wake-up call" for the region's energy security.

Asian markets imported about 80% of the crude oil and almost 90% of the liquefied natural gas, or LNG, transiting through the Strait of Hormuz in 2025, the IEA said.

Rubio and allies reaffirm commitment to counter growing Chinese influence

Rubio also met with counterparts in the four-nation Quad partnership, which is made up of the U.S., Australia, India and Japan. They discussed maritime and transnational security, among other issues, and issued a joint statement after the talks that reaffirmed their commitment to maritime security initiatives that seek to counter China's growing influence in the region.

During the meeting, Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi voiced strong opposition to any attempts to change the status quo by force in the region, including in the disputed South China Sea and East China Sea, where China's increasingly aggressive actions have sparked concern.

Tokyo has a long-running dispute over Japan-controlled islands, which Beijing also claims, in the East China Sea.

Wong echoed his concern, saying "we have real concerns about behavior that is destabilizing and risky."

The Trump administration has repeatedly criticized China's assertive actions in the South China Sea to the disadvantage of smaller claimant countries like the Philippines, Washington's oldest treaty ally in Asia.

The territorial disputes, which also involve Taiwan and ASEAN members Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei, are high on the agenda of the talks.

ASEAN foreign ministers discussed the disputes on Tuesday, welcoming progress in yearslong negotiations between China and their regional bloc on a proposed non-aggression pact that aims to prevent a major conflict in the disputed waters that could draw in the United States.

A new altercation on Monday between Chinese and Filipino forces in a disputed shoal renewed concerns and prompted Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to summon the Chinese ambassador in Manila.

"We reaffirmed the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability and avoid actions that may further complicate the situation," the regional bloc's ministers said in a draft joint statement.

Rubio also met with his Indian counterpart, External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, on the sidelines of the Manila meetings, where they discussed both regional issues and the Iran war, according to a U.S. State Department spokesperson, along with a yet-to-be completed trade agreement to lower U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs on Indian goods.

Rubio met separately with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in a tightly secured convention complex by Manila Bay.

Lavrov said he will meet with Rubio in Manila on Thursday, and will ask him about Trump's claim that a settlement on the Ukraine war is getting close.

Louvre reopens Apollo Gallery after a brazen heist, but no jewels are on display

PARIS (AP) — The Louvre's Apollo gallery on Wednesday reopened to the public for the first time since 88 million euros (\$102 million) worth of crown jewels were stolen in a dramatic daytime heist.

The public can tour the majestic room and view its gilded ceilings and Greek frescoes en route to the

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nearby Mona Lisa, but they won't see any crown jewels or empty display cases. The collections and precious jewels once displayed there have been removed, as the museum said the gallery is returning to its 17th-century original ceremonial purpose.

The stolen jewels remain unrecovered nine months later.

The gallery's former exhibits will be relocated elsewhere in the museum, said Christophe Leribault, the Louvre's director. "It's also an opportunity to rediscover the splendid architecture and decor of this gallery," he said.

Leribault was named to lead the Louvre in February after previous director Laurence des Cars resigned after the October crown jewels heist and a string of failures that battered confidence in the leadership of the world's most-visited museum.

"That sinister day, when iconic pieces were taken, cannot be forgotten, and indeed, I believe, should not be," said French Culture Minister Catherine Pegard. "It was a trauma for the entire world, which, for several days, expressed its shock and sadness in every language. It was a trauma for us, discovering the fragility of a place we thought unshakeable, and which, like so many others, proved vulnerable."

Security at the Paris museum has been boosted with the addition of new surveillance cameras and anti-intrusion systems.

On the day of the heist, thieves took less than eight minutes to force their way through a window into the Apollo Gallery and steal crown jewels valued at 88 million euros (\$102 million), in a weekend operation that stunned visitors and exposed glaring security vulnerabilities.

Security improvement is a priority of the decade-long "Louvre New Renaissance" plan launched last year, with an estimated cost of up to 800 million euros (\$933 million) to modernize infrastructure, ease crowding and give the Mona Lisa a dedicated gallery by 2031.

US and Iran attacks rage as officials question whether diplomacy can stop march toward war resuming

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The United States and Iran exchanged fire across the Middle East on Wednesday, as officials in both nations called into question diplomatic efforts to stop the war as it threatens to again spin out of control.

The U.S. launched an 11th night of airstrikes on the Islamic Republic, hitting targets across the nation as air defense systems opened fire over the capital, Tehran. It wasn't immediately clear what specific targets the Americans went after in these nighttime strikes.

Iran retaliated with missile and drone fire targeting Jordan's port city of Aqaba, once again attacking just on the doorstep of Israel. The U.S. has been using Israel's main Ben-Gurion International Airport to host its refueling aircraft and has put fighter jets at bases in the country, but Iran has been hesitant to strike for fear of bringing the Israeli military back into the conflict.

Meanwhile, shipping remains through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all oil and natural gas traded passed in peacetime. Iran's attacks on shipping in that waterway sparked the recent series of attacks, and the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels of Yemen are now threatening Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea as well.

That pressure pushed benchmark Brent crude above \$94 a barrel in trading, again straining global energy supplies and raising the cost of gasoline in the United States ahead of midterm elections this fall.

Attacks shake Iran and Jordan

Missile alert sirens sounded Wednesday in Jordan's port city of Aqaba on Wednesday. Jordan's military said it intercepted four missiles in the Iranian attack, while two others fell in "uninhabited areas." Plumes of smoke could be seen overhead in Aqaba in videos filmed by people in the nearby Israeli city of Eilat. Jordan said it also intercepted four Iranian drones.

The U.S. military said earlier Wednesday that it had completed an 11th night of strikes on Iran. The state-run IRNA news agency reported that explosions rocked Bushehr, East Azerbaijan, Hamadan, Hormozgan,

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Ilam, Khuzestan and Sistan and Baluchistan provinces. The U.S. said its targets included aircraft hangars and drone storage sites.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard insisted the country's retaliatory attacks would continue.

Before the latest strikes, Iranian Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni visited Pakistan, a key mediator in the conflict, seeking to revive diplomacy. But it was unclear what new arrangement might be reached to end the war, which lately has become a battle for control over the Strait of Hormuz.

Speaking from the Oval Office on Tuesday, Trump gave a dim view on possible talks, saying the U.S. had "no interest in meeting." He signaled that U.S. forces could soon target an area of Iran close to one of its main sites for enriching uranium.

Speaking at a regional summit in the Philippines, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio denounced Iran's actions in the strait.

"If we create a precedent in the Middle East where a nation state can decide that they are going to control an international waterway, charge a toll and if you don't pay them, blow up your ships, we have created a very dangerous precedent which will repeat itself in other parts of the world, including in this region," he said.

The U.S. in response to Iran's attacks restarted a blockade of Iranian ports, turning around vessels engaged in trading Iranian oil.

A Palestinian family split between Israel and Gaza reunites after years of war and loss

By SAM METZ and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

NAZARETH, Israel (AP) — The last time Mais al-Gharam saw her seven siblings was in the Gaza Strip two months before the war. That was before she left the Palestinian territory to go live in Israel and before an Israeli airstrike on the family's home killed her parents and younger brother.

But on this day, she waited hopefully outside Israel's Kerem Shalom crossing, scanning for a glimpse of her surviving brothers and sisters as they made their way through the gates and out of Gaza.

"We never stopped being a family," said Mais, who is 23 and the eldest of eight siblings born to a father from Gaza and a mother who was a Palestinian citizen of Israel. "But every day I wondered whether I'd see them again."

The family finally reunited this month following a yearslong effort by Mais and a team of lawyers to get her brothers and sisters out. They met outside the border crossing and then drove together to the city of Nazareth, where their mother's extended family showered the siblings with hugs and homemade food.

The reunion carried joy, grief and a quiet disbelief: Despite the odds, Mais had secured Israeli passports for her Gaza-born siblings, ages 8 to 22, and arranged for them to come live with her.

But while they had found one another again, they could never reclaim what they lost.

"It's like coming back from the grave," Faraj al-Gharam, their maternal grandfather, said of his grandchildren. In Gaza, he said, "human life has no value."

Hundreds of Palestinian families are split between Israel and Gaza

The family's story begins in 2002 when Murad al-Gharam, a native of Gaza, was working construction in Israel on a temporary job permit. There, he met and married Amal Karim, a Palestinian citizen of Israel who lived in Nazareth. Soon, they had a baby girl and named her Mais.

Decades ago, such marriages were common between Palestinians who lived in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel, before two Palestinian uprisings and Israel's response closed off the occupied territories.

When Murad and Amal met, it was at the height of the Second Intifada. As violence raged, Israel clamped down on work permits for Palestinians, putting Murad's status in Israel in jeopardy.

He and Amal moved to Gaza permanently, settling down with Mais in Nuseirat, a built-up refugee camp in the enclave's central region. Murad began work as a taxi driver, and the couple had seven more children — Zuhour, 22; Jwaher, 21; Sabreen, 20; Ghfran, 17; Fady, 16; Maisara, 11; and Arjwan, 8.

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"We lived here together as a family ... and never lacked anything," Zuhour said.

On Oct. 7, 2023, everything changed.

When Hamas-led militants from Gaza attacked southern Israel, killing about 1,200 people and taking 251 others hostage, the al-Gharams were one of what rights groups estimated to be more than 300 "divided families" with members on both sides of the border.

As Israel launched its retaliatory offensive, and prepared for a full-scale ground invasion, the family had to decide what to do.

Mais had already emigrated back to Nazareth, where she found a job and married. And while the seven children who were born in Gaza had the right to apply for Israeli citizenship through their mother, their father had no such option.

Israeli law generally bars the Palestinian spouses of Israeli citizens from obtaining permanent residency status. If the rest of the family wanted to leave, he would have to stay behind.

"We said, 'Either we all leave together, or we all stay together,'" according to Zuhour.

So they braced for war.

A sister fears for her parents and siblings' survival

About 160 kilometers (100 miles) away, Mais waited anxiously each day for updates, which were infrequent after Israel cut off Gaza's electricity and took out cellphone and internet networks.

The al-Gharam family was displaced at least seven times in the first half of 2024, eventually landing in Rafah in southern Gaza, before Israel invaded there, too.

In the end, they returned to Nuseirat, about 10 kilometers (6 miles) south of Gaza City, and moved back into the home where the children grew up. The area was both a place of refuge and a site of regular airstrikes on schools and apartment buildings that Israel said were being used by Hamas.

At 6 a.m. on July 10, 2024, an airstrike tore into their home, collapsing walls and sending debris crashing through the ceiling. Dazed and wounded, the siblings ran into the street screaming for help.

Jwahrer said she was in such shock that she couldn't even feel that her leg and fingers had been fractured.

They piled into cars and rushed westward to Al Aqsa Hospital in the city of Deir al-Balah, where doctors treated them and pronounced their mother, father and brother Maisara dead.

"Suddenly the burden fell on us," Sabreen said.

Together, they cooked, cleaned and collected firewood to boil water and keep warm. They also made money by opening a bakery in their neighborhood, while relying on charity and funds sent by relatives in Nazareth.

"We were forced — each of us — to take on a role that wasn't ours," Fady said.

The Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment on the strike.

Israeli lawyers pushed the government to reunite family

As her siblings kept the family afloat in Gaza, Mais sprang into action in Israel, determined to save them as conditions there rapidly deteriorated.

She contacted HaMoked, an Israeli rights group, on the day of the strike to start the paperwork and procedures required to reunite with her siblings and bring them to Nazareth. They began drafting letters to the Israeli Interior Ministry and COGAT, the military body that oversees crossings and humanitarian affairs in Gaza.

When she learned from her siblings that their parents and brother were dead, "it was the biggest shock I think I've ever gone through in my life," she said.

At the time, reuniting seemed impossible. Mais needed permits for them to enter Israel, a court order appointing Zuhour, the eldest sibling in Gaza, as legal guardian to the minor children, and six successful applications for Israeli citizenship.

According to HaMoked, the Israeli Interior Ministry initially rejected the request to apply for the divided family procedure to reunite the al-Gharams because their mother was dead.

The family then had to undergo DNA testing to prove the siblings' relationship to Mais, an Israeli citizen. Once the test results were in, the siblings had to make another trip to Kerem Shalom to sign the paperwork for their Israeli passports.

They finally arrived in Israel on July 8, nearly two years to the date of the deadly strike on their home. The half-day journey to Nazareth took the siblings from Gaza's rubble past Israel's irrigated fields and modern cities. When they arrived, they spoke mostly about ordinary hopes such as spending time with relatives, going to school and seeing doctors. They said they had fulfilled their top priority: reuniting. "Family," Jwahr said, "is the most important thing."

Britain's new prime minister must solve the old riddle of how to reinvigorate a slow-growing economy

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — U.K. Prime Minister Andy Burnham's announcements during his first 24 hours on the job underscore the political and financial challenges he faces as he tries to jump-start the country's sluggish economy.

Burnham, from Britain's left-leaning Labour Party, faces restive voters seeking relief from the high cost of living. At the same time, the investors who help finance the government by buying its bonds are demanding that he reduce public sector debt that has ballooned to levels last seen in the 1960s.

In an effort to balance the competing demands, Burnham surprised pundits by naming former Defense Secretary John Healey as his Treasury chief. Healey, who served in the Treasury under former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, is seen as someone who will make sure the government lives up to its pledge to reduce Britain's debt pile.

Then, first thing Tuesday morning, Burnham made a down payment on his commitment to ease the pressure on cash-strapped consumers. The government announced it would scrap the tax on home electricity use for at least six months beginning in October, saving the average household 45 pounds (\$60) a year.

Importantly, the government said the move would be paid for by canceling plans to introduce digital ID, in an effort to reassure investors that Burnham isn't about to go on an unfunded spending spree.

Treasury chief has a big job ahead

"Healey has a daunting task on his hands," said Victoria Scholar, the head of investment at interactive investor.

"The government has ambitious plans to tackle cost-of-living pressures ... but he faces a very difficult set of public finances to carry these expensive plans through."

Now that he's controlling the purse strings, Burnham faces the same issues that have bedeviled every prime minister since the financial crisis of 2008. And their failure to find answers is a big part of the reason that the eight men and women who have taken up residence behind the famous black door at 10 Downing Street in that period have had an average tenure of two years.

Burnham, like his predecessors, faces the challenge of finding a way to reinvigorate an economy that has grown an average of less than 1.5% a year since 2009, compared with an annual average of 3% in the 15 years before the financial crisis.

Burnham received a boost to his cost-of-living reduction agenda Wednesday when inflation fell to its lowest rate in 15 months in June, buoyed by a drop of food and fuel prices. The rate of the Consumer Prices Index was 2.6% in June, down from 2.8% in May, according to the Office for National Statistics. But experts warn the good news may be short-lived because the conflict in the Middle East will continue to put pressure on wholesale energy prices.

As he develops his economic plans, Burnham will be constrained by promises to reduce government debt, which now exceeds 95% of gross domestic product. According to Britain's budget watchdog, debt interest payments rose to 111.2 billion pounds (\$149 billion), or 8.3% of government spending, in the financial year that ended in April, leaving less money to spend on government services ranging from healthcare to education and defense.

New challenges are added to the old ones

But he also faces a new challenge after his predecessor, like most other European governments, pledged

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to increase defense spending to 3.5% of GDP by 2035. That came after pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump, who has criticized his allies for not paying their fair share of Europe's defense.

Meeting that commitment will cost about 36 billion pounds a year, or 500 pounds for each person in the U.K., according to estimates from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, a respected independent researcher.

"We should absolutely acknowledge that these constraints are structural," said Olivia O'Sullivan at Chatham House, a London-based think tank. "They would be tough for any prime minister at this time."

And that's why boosting economic output is so crucial to all of Burnham's plans.

Stimulating economic growth is key to Burnham's plans

Without faster growth, British taxpayers will either have to pay higher taxes or accept cuts in popular programs such as the National Health Service, which offers free medical care to everyone. A booming economy, on the other hand, would boost the revenue generated by existing taxes and tax rates because the value of company profits, worker salaries and other transactions would rise.

Sluggish growth doomed former Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government when angry Labour lawmakers forced him to cancel welfare cuts designed to help balance the budget. More recently he was widely criticized for failing to offer a credible plan for increasing defense spending.

Some Labour supporters have grumbled that the government "shouldn't be in hock to the bond market." But economists say Burnham and Healey must take the financial constraints seriously if they are going to succeed in bolstering the economy and increasing the pot available to fund popular programs.

"It's not some imaginary bogeyman in the bond market," said David Aikman, director of the independent National Institute of Economic and Social Research. "We need people to buy the debt we're issuing."

So far, Burnham has offered little detail on his plans for the British economy.

His big idea is to "reindustrialize" the economy by shifting investment away from London to other parts of the country that were hard hit by the decline in manufacturing. Burnham also says he will increase construction of public housing to address the nation's housing shortage and bolster the construction industry, and support the small and medium-size businesses that account for 60% of private employment.

At the same time, he has pledged to stick to Labour's promises not to raise taxes on working people and to maintain the "triple lock" on state pensions, an expensive policy that guarantees pensions will rise each year by the annual increase in consumer price inflation, average wage growth, or 2.5%, whichever is higher.

Jim O'Neill, a former chief economist for Goldman Sachs and member of the House of Lords who has advised Burnham in the past, told the BBC last month that Britain's new prime minister must "get real."

"We need somebody that's prepared to do something bold and different," he said.

Burnham, he added, "has got the same challenge that everybody else seems to avoid and that's doing something about things like welfare, stop this never-ending spectacular rise in the spending on NHS. ... Do something about the triple lock, etc., etc., and get out of this weird sort of prison of being owned by every little small group that opposes anything anybody wants to do."

Andy Biggs wins Republican nomination to challenge Democrat Katie Hobbs for Arizona governor

By JONATHAN J. COOPER, JACQUES BILLEAUD and WUFEI YU Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — U.S. Rep. Andy Biggs, a fierce ally of President Donald Trump and former head of the House Freedom Caucus, won the Republican nomination for Arizona governor Tuesday.

Democrats were locked in a close primary contest for a battleground U.S. House district, with emergency physician Amish Shah leading party-backed Marlene Galán-Woods for the chance to take on Jay Feely, the former Arizona Cardinals kicker who won the Republican nomination with Trump's endorsement.

A Shah victory would be another defeat for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which has occasionally struggled this year as voters seek out antiestablishment candidates. The race was too early to call early Wednesday morning.

Biggs overwhelmingly defeated fellow U.S. Rep. David Schweikert in the primary and will face Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs in what could be one of the closest governor races in November.

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By choosing Biggs, who supported Trump's failed attempt to block certification of his 2020 election loss, Republican voters risk nominating another conservative warrior who excites the party base but fails to win a general election by turning off independents. Although the party once dominated Arizona, Democrats now hold both U.S. Senate seats and the top three state offices.

Biggs faced travel problems leaving a Republican Governors Association meeting in Colorado, according to senior adviser Drew Sexton, and didn't reach his victory party in Scottsdale until more than three hours after he won the race. By the time he took the stage, the crowd of hundreds had dwindled to dozens and he spoke to a mostly empty room.

"Let's make this the year that we turn Arizona red again," Biggs said.

Schweikert argued during the campaign that Biggs would continue a decade of Republican backsliding. However, he struggled to raise money and did not even return to Arizona for Election Day, remaining in Washington as the House passed a government funding bill.

Biggs rejected Schweikert's claim that he'll be another Republican judged by voters to be too extreme.

"I am a conservative — and a principled conservative — but I work with people that don't necessarily agree with me on every issue," Biggs told a reporter after his victory speech.

Biggs, who had Trump's endorsement and support from the grassroots organization Turning Point Action, said he can unite Republicans going into the general election.

"Everyone I have talked to is really conservative around here," said Ray Roberts, a 33-year-old Republican who works as a processing engineer and knocked on doors for Biggs. "We all have mostly conservative values. I think Arizona is a red state. I think Andy will be the winner in November."

State Rep. Alexander Kolodin won the Republican nomination to challenge Democratic Secretary of State Adrian Fontes, defeating Gina Swoboda, the former Arizona Republican Party chair. Kolodin, a lawyer, was sanctioned by the state bar over his involvement with two 2020 election cases that courts found baseless, including one alleging the vote was marred by fraud and demanding Biden's victory in the state be overturned.

State Senate President Warren Petersen won the Republican nomination for attorney general and will face Democratic incumbent Kris Mayes, who won four years ago by just 280 votes out of more than 2.5 million.

Biggs and Schweikert responded differently to Trump's GOP takeover

Biggs built a national profile as chair of the House Freedom Caucus from 2019 to 2022 and as a staunch defender of Trump. He assisted the president's attempt to block the certification of his loss in the 2020 election, voting against accepting Electoral College votes from Arizona and other battleground states after the Jan. 6, 2021, riot.

He has always represented safe Republican seats and is a veteran of factional brawls within his party. Before going to Congress, he nearly lost his post as state Senate president during a confrontation with then-Gov. Jan Brewer, also a Republican, over her push to expand Medicaid.

"I want the border secured. I want the police and more money spent in the right places like education," said Kate Rouleau, a 67-year-old Republican who voted for Biggs because he "has the same quality as President Trump."

Democrats focused their attacks on Biggs, whom they plan to portray as an extremist focused on helping Trump and not Arizonans.

In a statement Tuesday night, Hobbs said that "the more Arizonans learn about Biggs, the more they'll realize he's one big problem they can't afford."

The race is likely to be another close contest four years after Hobbs narrowly beat Republican firebrand Kari Lake by less than 1 percentage point. Republicans have since expanded their advantage in the state, growing GOP registration by 6% while Democratic registration fell by 4%.

Repeating her victory will require Hobbs to again win a majority of independents and some disaffected Republicans. For his part, Biggs has attacked her as a weak leader who presided over rising costs.

"We can't let the state go to somebody who's actually recklessly incompetent, and that is our current governor," he said.

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Primaries set the field for a top House battleground

Both parties had hotly contested primaries to replace Schweikert in the highly competitive 1st Congressional District, which both parties are targeting in the fight to control the House.

Feely won the Republican primary over Joseph Chaplik, a former state legislator popular with many grassroots activists, and businessperson John Trobough. Feely had Trump's endorsement but has been dogged by criticism for living outside the district.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee threw its support behind Galán-Woods, a controversial decision to get involved in a contested primary that rankled some party activists. Her late husband, Grant Woods, was the Republican attorney general in the 1990s and later became a vocal Trump critic.

Galán-Woods' chief opponent, Shah, is a former state legislator who was the nominee in 2024 but lost narrowly to Schweikert.

"We have a long tradition in Arizona of being independent-minded and working for the benefit of people," Shah said at his election night party in Phoenix. "I wasn't exactly my party's pick. And I was willing to stand up to that establishment. And that's what the voters of this district want."

If Shah's lead holds, he would be the third Democrat to beat a DCCC-backed rival this year following Randy Villegas in California and Matt Dunlap in Maine. Unlike the candidates in those races, Shah and Galán-Woods are largely aligned ideologically.

Linda Bandler, a 65-year-old independent who volunteered on the Galán-Woods campaign, said the party will be in good shape regardless of who wins the primary.

"There still is some sanity," said Bandler, who like Galán-Woods is a former Republican. "I do think that the Democrats will take over the House and the Senate."

DCCC support generally brings an influx of money and staffing, both from the party itself and from the donors and interest groups that take its cues. But this election season, substantial parts of the Democratic base are rejecting candidates that party bosses see as their best shot at winning in Congress.

"The Democratic Party needs to grow up and wake up," said Maria Liong, a 24-year-old medical student who volunteered for Shah's campaign. "They need to realize that they want candidates who listen to their people."

Republicans hold a voter registration advantage in the affluent district, which includes northeast Phoenix, Scottsdale, Fountain Hills and Paradise Valley.

But it started to trend toward the center after Trump's 2016 victory. Redistricting accelerated the trend, fueling Democratic hopes that the seat could be flipped.

In Tucson, retired Marine drill instructor JoAnna Mendoza ran unopposed for the Democratic nomination to challenge second-term Republican Rep. Juan Ciscomani, who also had no primary opponent. The seat is perennially competitive in general elections and is a top pickup target for Democrats in November.

Meanwhile, Pinal County Sheriff Mark Lamb won the Republican primary for the conservative district that Biggs is vacating. The race turned salacious as Lamb, who was endorsed by Trump, came under scrutiny for alleged sexual misconduct and abuse of power.

The county attorney cleared him of criminal wrongdoing, and Trump reiterated his endorsement this month. Lamb dismissed the allegations as "slander and lies."

Beaches closed and sandbags filled as Tropical Storm Bertha approaches the Gulf Coast

By JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

Communities on the U.S. Gulf Coast distributed sandbags and closed beaches as Tropical Storm Bertha threatened to bring flooding and strong winds Wednesday from the Florida Panhandle to Louisiana.

Bertha was forecast to make landfall Wednesday night in the coastal and lightly populated part of Louisiana southeast of New Orleans, with wind as the biggest threat, according to Michael Buchanan, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Louisiana.

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Early Wednesday, the storm was centered about 145 miles (235 kilometers) west-southwest of Panama City, Florida, and 75 miles (120 kilometers) east of the mouth of the Mississippi River. It was moving west at 6 mph (9 kph) with maximum sustained winds of 50 mph (85 kph), the Miami-based National Hurricane Center said.

A tropical storm warning was in effect from the line between Bay and Gulf counties in Florida west to Morgan City, Louisiana, as well as for metropolitan New Orleans and Lake Pontchartrain, the hurricane center said.

Storm surges up to 4 feet (1.2 meters) were possible in Louisiana from the Mississippi River mouth to the Alabama-Mississippi state line, with smaller surges in parts of Florida and Alabama, forecasters said.

Rain between 2 to 4 inches (5 to 10 centimeters) could fall from western Florida to the southern Louisiana coastline, with higher amounts in scattered areas that could cause flash flooding in urban areas.

Bertha was expected to weaken as it pushes into Texas, forecasters said.

Sandbag distribution sites set up

Authorities in Mississippi, Louisiana and Florida opened sites to provide sandbags to residents while red flag warnings were posted along some beaches advising swimmers about the dangers of rip tides. Up and down the coast, double red flags signaled that Gulf waters were closed for swimming.

Beaches near Pensacola, Florida, were mostly deserted except for tourists taking photos of the pounding surf.

"For locals, this is just another storm," said Candice Henderson, manager of the Crab Trap, a beachside restaurant that was packed Tuesday on Pensacola's Perdido Key. "When you're on vacation and it's raining, you either shop or you go out to eat."

Bertha is the second tropical storm of Atlantic season

Bertha is the second tropical storm of the Atlantic hurricane season. Tropical Storm Arthur in June brought heavy rainfall to the southeastern U.S.

Bertha could dump heavy rain on coastal areas of Mississippi that are still recovering from flooding brought by Arthur that destroyed and damaged homes.

"Because of that, people are definitely paying attention, or at least you would hope so," said Jeff Clark, a spokesperson for Mississippi's Harrison County, where six sites were open for sandbag distribution.

There had not been a need by Tuesday to open shelters or order evacuations, Clark said.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration expects a below-average Atlantic hurricane season this year, although that doesn't eliminate the chances of a catastrophic storm.

Hurricane Fausto in the Pacific is far from land

In the eastern Pacific Ocean, Hurricane Fausto churned far from land Tuesday. The hurricane was about 805 miles (1,295 kilometers) west-southwest of the southern tip of Baja California moving west-northwest at 9 mph (15 kph) with maximum sustained winds of 80 mph (130 kph).

It was forecast to gradually strengthen and the hurricane center warned that ocean swells generated by Fausto could cause life-threatening surf and rip tide conditions on the Baja California coast.

What to know about Iran's Pickaxe Mountain, home to an underground nuclear site threatened by Trump

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly issued threats to bomb an under-construction Iranian nuclear site buried deep under a mountain as the two nations exchange blows over the Strait of Hormuz.

The site, known as Kuh-e Kolang Gaz La, or "Pickaxe Mountain," lies on the south side of Iran's Natanz nuclear enrichment site, which was bombed by the United States during Operation Midnight Hammer in 2025's 12-day war between Iran and Israel. But Pickaxe Mountain has remained untouched as Iran continues to dig at the site.

It remains unclear just what has been placed at Pickaxe Mountain, as the United Nations' nuclear watch-

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dog has never gained access to the site. But Trump on Tuesday talking with journalists in the Oval Office acknowledged the possibility Iran may have moved centrifuges there, potentially at a depth that would challenge even the most-powerful bombs in America's arsenal.

"We'll be hitting that area ... probably pretty soon. And there's not a thing they can do about it," Trump said.

Here's what to know about Pickaxe Mountain and the status of Iran's nuclear program.

Pickaxe Mountain site was built after earlier attacks on Iran

The new project at Pickaxe Mountain is being constructed next to Natanz, about 225 kilometers (140 miles) south of Tehran, Iran's capital. Natanz, a mix of above- and underground facilities, has been a point of international concern since its existence became known two decades ago. Repeated sabotage attacks on Natanz, including one likely carried out by Israel that destroyed a manufacturing site for centrifuges, led Iranian officials to start work on the Pickaxe Mountain site.

Protected by anti-aircraft batteries, fencing and Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, the facility sprawls across 2.7 square kilometers (1 square mile) in the country's arid Central Plateau. It has multiple entrances visible from satellite images.

In 2023, an Associated Press story on Pickaxe Mountain included analysis from experts at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies that suggested Iran is likely building a facility at a depth of between 80 meters (260 feet) and 100 meters (328 feet). Digging has continued at the site in the time since, with some experts suggesting it could be even deeper underground.

Experts say the size of the construction project indicates Iran will likely be able to use the underground facility to enrich uranium as well as to build centrifuges.

Centrifuges, tube-shaped devices arranged in large cascades of dozens of machines, rapidly spin uranium gas to enrich it. Additional cascades spinning would allow Iran to quickly enrich uranium under the mountain's protection.

Such underground facilities led the U.S. to create the GBU-57 bomb, which can plow through at least 60 meters (200 feet) of earth before detonating, according to the American military. U.S. officials reportedly have discussed using two such bombs in succession to ensure a site is destroyed. It is not clear that such a one-two punch would damage a facility as deep as the one at Pickaxe Mountain.

Trump threatens to bomb Pickaxe Mountain site

Speaking alongside Lebanese President Joseph Aoun on Tuesday, Trump initially sought to downplay Pickaxe Mountain by bringing up Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium. Iran had enriched uranium up to nearly weapons-grade levels of 60% before the 2025 strikes. In the time since, Iran is not known to have restarted enrichment and its stockpile is believed to be at still at the bombed enrichment sites.

"We follow the material, that's where the action is," Trump told journalists.

Trump, however, said Pickaxe Mountain was a potential target for American bombers as back-and-forth attacks between Iran and the U.S. rage on.

"Normally I wouldn't say that," the president added. "If I thought they could do something about it, I would never say that, but we'll be hitting that area pretty soon. And very heavily."

Iran says that areas around its only nuclear power plant at Bushehr have already come under attack during the war, though no damage was done to its Russian-run reactor. Tehran also said the U.S. attacked the cleared area where it plans to build the Darkhovin nuclear plant, though the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency says there was no atomic material there the last time they inspected the site.

The only nuclear power plant in the United Arab Emirates, its four-reactor facility at Barakah, also has been targeted during the war. Iran has since warned that it would take unspecified "required actions" to respond to the Darkhovin attack.

Iran's nuclear program has been a worry for the West for decades

In 2025, the U.S. bombed Iran's nuclear sites at Fordo, Isfahan and Natanz. All three had conducted uranium enrichment.

At the time of the 2025 war and the recent Iran war, both Israel and the U.S. said they aimed to stop Iran from ever be able to build a nuclear weapon. Iran has long insisted its program is peaceful, and it

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isn't believed by the IAEA or the West to have had an active military nuclear program since 2003. Israel long has been believed to be the Middle East's only nuclear-armed state.

However, even before the recent wars Iranian officials have increasingly threatened to pursue an atomic bomb. The late Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, killed Feb. 28 in the opening moments of the war, issued a verbal fatwa, or religious ruling, that nuclear weapons were un-Islamic. However, his son, Iran's new Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei, has not issued any statement regarding his views on the atomic bomb.

To build a usable weapon, Iran would first need to enrich uranium up to 90% purity. It would then need to build an actual bomb, and then likely also need to miniaturize it and mount it on a ballistic missile. That process would take months or years, and would face the risk of discovery by Israeli or U.S. intelligence in the meantime.

US military completes 11th night of strikes on Iran as attacks overshadow diplomacy

By JON GAMBRELL and MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The U.S. military said it completed the 11th night of strikes on Iran early Wednesday as attacks across the Middle East overshadowed diplomatic efforts in Pakistan to salvage an interim ceasefire deal that has collapsed.

U.S. Central Command said targets included aircraft hangars and drone storage sites. The newest barrage came after President Donald Trump telegraphed that strikes would be intensifying.

Before the latest strikes, Iranian Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni visited Pakistan, a key mediator in the conflict, seeking to revamp diplomacy. But it was unclear what new arrangement might be reached to end the war, which lately has become a battle for control over the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway vital to world energy supplies.

Speaking from the Oval Office on Tuesday, Trump gave a dim view on possible talks, saying the U.S. had "no interest in meeting." He signaled that U.S. forces could soon target an area of Iran close to one of its main sites for enriching uranium.

With negotiations and shipping through the Strait of Hormuz largely stalled, both sides have sought to gain leverage by targeting civilian infrastructure in the region relied on by millions of people.

A barrage of U.S. strikes hasn't loosened Iran's grip on the strait, through which about one-fifth of the world's crude oil and natural gas was shipped before the war.

The U.S. continued its airstrikes into Wednesday, with Iranian air defenses activating near the capital, Tehran. Iran's state-run IRNA news agency reported that explosions rocked Bushehr, East Azerbaijan, Hamadan, Hormozgan, Khuzestan and Sistan and Baluchistan provinces.

That came after Iran attacked a tanker in the strait Tuesday, forcing the crew to abandon the ship. Iran also kept up attacks against U.S. allies in the region. Iran also launched attacks against Bahrain, Jordan and Kuwait.

The escalation pushed energy prices higher. The international benchmark for crude oil traded Wednesday above \$92 a barrel and regular gasoline in the U.S. climbed to an average of \$4 a gallon.

With U.S. midterm elections approaching in the fall, polls have pointed to the unpopularity of the war among Americans, who have felt the pain of pricier gas and seen new casualties in a conflict that weeks ago seemed to be winding down.

The number of wounded U.S. personnel in the Iran war has grown to well over 500 troops, a U.S. official told The Associated Press. The total is higher than the Pentagon's official tally on the Defense Casualty Analysis System, which currently shows 482 wounded.

The U.S. official, who was not authorized to discuss the matter with the media and spoke on condition of anonymity, said the system has a significant lag in reporting injuries. The official said that was a function of its design and not intentional.

Iran-backed rebels in Yemen open a new front in the Red Sea

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In the Red Sea, Iran-backed Yemen's Houthi rebels have opened a new front against Saudi Arabia by declaring a naval blockade of the kingdom, threatening the flow of global oil supplies and trade. With the Strait of Hormuz blocked up, Saudi Arabia has been relying on a pipeline to the Red Sea to get millions of barrels of oil out to market.

A news agency in Yemen that is run by the Houthis, SABA, said Tuesday that six ships in the Red Sea were forced to reroute after they received warnings from the rebel group. The Associated Press could not immediately confirm the claim.

Three Houthi officials said the group warned international shipping companies on Monday to avoid transiting through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the gateway to the Red Sea on the opposite side of the Arabian Peninsula from the Strait of Hormuz. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity, saying they weren't authorized to speak to journalists.

Trump says US has 'no interest' in Iran talks

Momeni, Iran's interior minister, met Pakistan's army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir, according to two officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door negotiations. Momeni later met Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

In a statement, Sharif expressed deep concern over the recent U.S.-Iran escalation, and urged all sides to exercise restraint and avoid actions that could further destabilize the region.

Pakistan's political leadership and Munir, who serves as both the chief of army staff and defense forces, played a key role in brokering last month's interim agreement between the U.S. and Iran. Islamabad has been working to persuade both sides to return to the negotiating table.

Trump told reporters that Iranian officials "want to desperately meet. And until they're ready to meet in a meaningful way, we have no interest in meeting." He said the U.S. would soon target the area near Pickaxe Mountain — a fortified underground site near one of Iran's primary nuclear enrichment facilities.

Iran's military leaders said any attack on nuclear or "other sensitive facilities" would be considered a major escalation, according to a statement reported by Iranian state media.

A deep level of mistrust persists on both sides. Iran came under a surprise attack in June 2025 and again in February while it was engaging in nuclear negotiations with the U.S. The interim deal unraveled when Iran resumed attacks on ships in the Strait of Hormuz, which was supposed to be reopened under the agreement.

US strikes come as ships are attacked

The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said a tanker came under attack early Tuesday in the strait off Oman, forcing the crew to abandon the vessel.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard claimed responsibility for the attack, as well as two other attacks on ships Monday in the waterway.

The route close to Oman's shores has been the one the U.S. military has encouraged ships to travel to avoid Iran's control.

To enforce the blockade in the strait, as of Tuesday U.S. forces have redirected eight commercial vessels and disabled one, CENTCOM said on X.

US military identifies 3rd service member believed to have been killed in Iranian attack

By ALLEN G. BREED, DAVE COLLINS and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — The U.S. military has confirmed that a third service member is believed to be dead in Friday's attack on a base in Jordan and identified them as Sgt. Angel S. Rampersad, 28, of New York.

The confirmation brings the death toll to 18 U.S. service members killed since the war began.

On Monday, the Pentagon identified 1st Lt. Tyler James Feehan, 25, of Ewa Beach, Hawaii, and Pvt. Isabella Gonzales, 19, of Carrollton, Texas, as the two other soldiers who were killed in Jordan in Friday's attacks. The soldiers were killed by Iranian ballistic missile and drone attacks in the first troop deaths from direct Iranian fire since the opening days of the war. They were deployed to support a U.S. mission

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against the Islamic State group, a U.S. Central Command statement said.

After the attack, U.S. Central Command announced that two service members were killed and another was missing. The following day, the military command said that troops found unidentified remains and that an examination process to verify the remains was underway.

Now, the Pentagon says that Rampersad is believed to be that missing soldier and her official status is now "Duty Status-Whereabouts Unknown" and she is "believed to be deceased."

Rampersad belonged to the same unit as Gonzales — the 10th Army Air & Missile Defense Command based in Ansbach, Germany.

Also, a U.S. soldier killed in Iraq during a controlled detonation of an Iranian drone was identified as Sgt. Michael Emmanuel Swinton, a 30-year-old father from North Carolina who had served for nearly a decade, according to a military statement Tuesday and his family.

Swinton will receive a Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Combat Action Badge, and will be promoted to staff sergeant. The Army said it was investigating the circumstances of his death Sunday at an air base in Irbil.

He leaves behind a 6-year-old son and a 4-year-old daughter, his mother said.

"I will never recover from this," his wife, Mia Gonzalez-Swinton, posted Monday on Facebook. "We had so many plans for when you got back, I'm sick to my stomach." She said she was notified Sunday that he had been killed.

Two U.S. Army soldiers were also killed in Jordan last week while defending against Iranian ballistic missile and drone attacks. They were the first U.S. troop deaths from direct Iranian fire since the opening days of the war.

His wife and kids were the center of his world, his mother, Christel Swinton Andujar, told The Associated Press.

"His legacy will live on through the countless lives he touched, the laughter he shared, the strength he gave others, and the unconditional love he poured into his family," she said via text message. "He will forever be missed, forever honored, and forever our hero."

Swinton enlisted in the Army in 2017 and was assigned to the 55th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 108th Air Defense Artillery Brigade, out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

He lived in Spring Lake, a popular off-base location for Fort Bragg families, according to public records. The military gave his hometown as Fayetteville, another nearby community.

"Sgt. Swinton was an experienced noncommissioned officer who took great pride in his work and the people around him," said Brig. Gen. John L. Dawber, commanding general of the Army Air and Missile Defense Command. "He answered the call to duty with courage, honor, and selfless dedication."

Renewed fighting between the U.S. and Iran is now in its 10th day, with both sides launching barrages of strikes. Iran has attacked U.S. allies in the region, and American soldiers are stationed across the Middle East.

Iranian authorities say U.S. strikes in just the past three weeks have killed at least 50 people and wounded more than 500 others.

Both sides have targeted civilian infrastructure relied on by millions of people. Workers on ships, as well as foreign workers and others in Gulf nations, Israel and Lebanon have also died in the conflict.

The U.S. State Department said in a new warning to Americans that "Iran and groups supportive of Iran may target other U.S. interests overseas or at locations associated with the United States and Americans throughout the world."

U.S. President Donald Trump has said the war is necessary to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Trump, a Republican, now faces political pressure to bring the war to a close and avoid the kind of prolonged Middle East conflict he had campaigned against. The escalation has pushed oil prices higher in recent weeks.

Trump will attend the dignified transfer of 4 US service members killed in the Middle East

DOVER, Del. (AP) — President Donald Trump on Wednesday plans to attend the dignified transfer of four U.S. service members killed in the Middle East.

Trump will be at Dover Air Force Base when the remains of the troops killed in action are returned to their families, the White House said. The ritual is one of the most somber duties of a commander-in-chief. It will be the third that Trump has attended since he launched the war in Iran in February.

Two U.S. Army soldiers killed in Iranian missile and drone attacks in Jordan will be returned during the dignified transfer, according to an administration official who was not authorized to discuss it publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The remains of a third service member who is believed to be the soldier missing after the Jordan attacks will also be returned, the official said, as well as the remains of a soldier killed in Iraq during a detonation of an Iranian drone.

"I'll be going to Dover for something that I feel is — it's a great honor for me to do it," Trump said in the Oval Office on Tuesday.

The soldiers killed in Jordan were identified by the Defense Department as Tyler James Feehan, 25, of Ewa Beach, Hawaii, and Isabella Gonzales, 19, of Carrollton, Texas. The soldier who disappeared after the Jordan attacks and is now believed to be deceased is Angel S. Rampersad, 28, of Ozone Park, New York, the Defense Department said.

The soldier killed in Iraq was identified as Michael Emmanuel Swinton, 30, who lived in Spring Lake, North Carolina.

"We feel very badly, but you know, those great people, those great patriots were out there fighting so that Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon," Trump told reporters on Sunday. He added that the U.S. was striking Iran "in honor" of the fallen troops.

The U.S. has launched multiple retaliatory strikes against Iran as an interim agreement to end the war falls apart. Trump on Monday said that every time Iran kills an American soldier, "they will pay for that killing many times over!"

Since the war began on Feb. 28, 18 U.S. service members have been killed.

Trump on Tuesday said that while almost all the incoming fire in Jordan was stopped, some made it through.

"They did slip something through in Jordan," he said. "If we had other operators, you know, it would have not happened, unfortunately."

He went on: "We've stopped almost everything, but when you let other people do your job with the United States — we let other people do the job — and sometimes it doesn't work out so well."

Trump did not elaborate on his comments, and it was not immediately clear who Trump was saying was responsible for protecting U.S. forces in Jordan.

Trump has attended two previous dignified transfers since the outset of the war, most recently in March. During his first term, he described the ritual as "the toughest thing I have to do" as president.

During the ritual, transfer cases draped with the American flag and holding the remains of the fallen soldiers are carried from the military aircraft that transported them to an awaiting vehicle to take them to the mortuary facility at the base. There, the service members are prepared for their final resting place.

Feehan, a first lieutenant who was killed Saturday, will be posthumously promoted to the rank of captain and awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Combat Action Badge. He was assigned out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to the 32nd Army Air and Missile Defense Command.

Gonzales, who was killed Friday, was a private with the 10th Army Air and Missile Defense Command in Ansbach, Germany. She graduated last year from Hebron High School in Carrollton, near Dallas, school officials said.

Rampersad, a sergeant who was believed to have been killed in Friday's attacks, was assigned to the 57th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 52nd Air Defense Artillery Brigade, 10th Army Air and Missile Defense

Command in Ansbach, Germany.

Swinton, a sergeant who was killed Sunday, will receive a Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Combat Action Badge, and will be promoted to staff sergeant. He enlisted in the Army in 2017 and was assigned to the 55th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 108th Air Defense Artillery Brigade, out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

As the president touts Trump Accounts, some families are still waiting for baby's \$1,000

By MORIAH BALINGIT AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump says Trump Accounts could hoist children out of poverty and give more Americans the chance to benefit from investments in the stock market. But some parents say they're still waiting for the money to arrive.

Trump on Wednesday plans to speak at a Georgia high school to promote the investment accounts, which offer \$1,000 in seed money to every child born during his second term. The accounts went live July 4, two days before Trump rang the opening bells for both the New York Stock Exchange and NASDAQ from the Oval Office.

The tax-advantaged accounts, created last year through Trump's signature One Big Beautiful Bill, can be opened for any child under the age of 18. The Treasury Department boasts 6.5 million sign-ups for Trump Accounts, with 1.5 million of those eligible for the \$1,000 seed funding for babies born from 2025 through 2028.

Boosters of the program say it's a chance to give more Americans a stake in the stock market. They hope it will stem the rising popularity of democratic socialists, who seek to raise taxes on corporations and the wealthy to ease the cost of things like food and healthcare for low-income and middle-class Americans.

After the Trump Accounts are set up, parents, relatives, friends and employers can contribute to them. Some billionaires have also pledged philanthropic contributions. The money is turned over to private firms that invest it in index funds, a type of mutual fund that tracks the performance of the stock market. The money can't be accessed until the child turns 18, and only then for specific purposes, such as going to school, opening a business or buying a home.

For babies born since Trump took office last year, \$1,000 from the U.S. Treasury is supposed to kick off the accounts. While some parents report receiving the money, others said in interviews and on social media they're still waiting for the accounts to receive \$1,000.

Masaki and Kristina McLellan, new parents from Bergen County, New Jersey, said in an interview they were wary of signing up for the accounts because they worried it was a promotional stunt for the president. But the \$1,000 incentive persuaded the couple, whose daughter Maya was born in late March, to start an account anyway.

Masaki McLellan said he applied for the account July 6. At first, the application was rejected, but the account was activated after he spent an hour on the Trump Account hotline. He was told he'd see the money in the account in 10 days. Now, he says, he's been told it will take up to four weeks.

Kristina McLellan said she was disappointed it was taking so long to fund her daughter's account. But the infant has multiple other investments already compounding for her. Maya's parents have already started a 529 college savings plan and a custodial brokerage account for her. The Trump Account is the third investment account in the little girl's name.

"We definitely want to give her options for her future and make sure she can choose what she wants to do," said McClellan, a studio director for a local news station, who returns from maternity leave next week.

The Treasury Department said the lag between opening an account and receiving the seed funding constitutes "standard processing time, like receiving a tax refund" and that the overwhelming majority of parents are only waiting one to two days. But the department likes to give parents a conservative estimate for how long it might take for the money to be transferred, such as the estimate of up to four weeks given to the McLellans.

"Trump Accounts level the playing field by allowing every parent to invest in their children's future, not

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just wealthy families with trust funds," the department said. "With roughly 1 million sign-ups per month before launch, Trump Accounts have become the most popular and successful government-backed savings product in U.S. history."

Trump's stop in Georgia comes as he and fellow Republicans face pressure in the midterm elections for their handling of the economy. Only 33% of U.S. adults approve of Trump's economic leadership, among the lower ratings of his second term, according to a June survey by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Trump pledged to lower costs, but his tariffs and the war in Iran have instead helped to increase prices.

Trump Accounts are similar to "baby bonds," championed by Democratic-led cities and states meant to shrink the wealth gap between low- and high-income children. But unlike most baby bonds, which generally target kids from disadvantaged backgrounds, Trump Accounts are available to families of all incomes.

The program has faced criticism from those who say it does nothing to help families in a child's first years of life, when children are most likely to experience poverty, homelessness and hunger. And the bill that created the program, the president's signature One Big Beautiful Bill, also slashed funding for programs that are disproportionately used by children, including Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro back to court for pretrial hearing in his US drug trafficking case

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Nicolás Maduro returns to court with his lawyers Wednesday and is expected to continue objecting to the U.S. military action that snatched the Venezuelan president from power and deposited him in New York to face drug trafficking charges.

Maduro, 63, and his wife Cilia Flores, 69, have been held at a Brooklyn jail ever since U.S. forces seized them from their Caracas home in a stunning middle-of-the-night raid and brought them to New York in early January.

Both have pleaded not guilty. They face potential life prison sentences if a jury agrees that they were part of a conspiracy to send cocaine into the U.S.

President Donald Trump's administration has defended the raid as a "surgical law enforcement operation" in a criminal case first brought six years ago. Maduro has called himself a prisoner of war and his capture a kidnapping.

U.S. prosecutors say Maduro carried out a conspiracy to move thousands of tons of cocaine into the U.S. by colluding with Venezuelan law enforcement to help drug kingpins.

"I am not guilty. I am a decent man, the constitutional president of my country," he said in Spanish at his arraignment in January.

Maduro's lawyer, Barry Pollack, has said he expects to contest the legality of Maduro's "military abduction."

The lawyers have said there are complex legal defenses that the court must address before a trial can begin.

Maduro and Flores have not asked to be released on bail. Judge Alvin K. Hellerstein has yet to set a trial date.

Mamdani says NYC can't arrest Netanyahu but the federal government should

NEW YORK (AP) — New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani said late Tuesday that the city would not be able to execute an arrest warrant issued by the world's top war-crimes court for Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, but urged the federal government to do so.

In the video Mamdani described the Israeli prime minister as a "war criminal" and said he is not welcome in New York City.

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"It is clear that we do not have the independent legal authority to enforce this warrant," he said in a video posted on X. "The federal government however does and I call on them to join the ICC and execute this warrant," he added, referring to the International Criminal Court.

Mamdani had told the New York Times earlier this month that he and the city's legal department were discussing arresting Netanyahu if he comes to New York City for the U.N. General Assembly in September.

President Donald Trump on Monday told Netanyahu in a social media post that he "will not be arrested, in any way, shape, or form, while in the United States of America." The post did not directly mention Mamdani.

Mamdani had said throughout his mayoral election campaign last year that he would seek to order the city's police to arrest Netanyahu under the criminal court's warrant over Netanyahu's role in the war in Gaza.

In his video message Tuesday, Mamdani said his administration has reviewed all avenues available and determined the city can't execute the arrest warrant.

"I want to be equally clear, Benjamin Netanyahu is not welcome in New York City, nor is any other war criminal at large," he said.

Danny Danon, the Israeli ambassador to the U.N., responded by telling the mayor "enough."

"You were elected to serve New Yorkers, not Hamas' propaganda," he said in a statement on social media. "Do your job!"

The world's top war-crimes court issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu and others in 2024, accusing them of crimes against humanity in connection with the war in Gaza.

They said there was reason to believe Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant have used "starvation as a method of warfare" by restricting humanitarian aid and have intentionally targeted civilians in Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza — charges Israeli officials deny.

Trump approves nuclear agreement that may allow Saudi Arabia to enrich uranium, two AP sources say

By AAMER MADHANI, MICHELLE L. PRICE and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has approved an agreement with Saudi Arabia that could potentially provide the kingdom with uranium enrichment capability for its civilian nuclear program, according to two people familiar with the matter.

The people, who were not authorized to comment publicly about the yet to be formally announced decision, said the agreement is expected to be announced publicly as early as Wednesday.

The deal is expected to last 30 years and is also expected to involve U.S. firms in developing the program. The deal could allow for the building of a uranium enrichment facility in Saudi Arabia following a joint U.S.-Saudi study.

But the deal, which is expected to be submitted to Congress for review, could face headwinds among lawmakers who fear that helping the Saudis fulfill their long-standing desire to enrich their own uranium would open new rounds of nuclear proliferation and competition.

Saudi Arabia is a member state of the International Atomic Energy Agency, a Vienna-based agency which promotes peaceful nuclear work but also inspects nations to ensure they don't have clandestine atomic weapons programs.

But the agreement is not expected to include the IAEA's Additional Protocol, which would allow for more monitoring, inspections and verification, according to one of the people.

The expected announcement comes in the midst of the war against Iran launched by the U.S. and Israel, in part, to wipe out Tehran's ability to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran has insisted its nuclear enrichment program is peaceful.

The White House and Saudi officials in Riyadh did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the decision, which was first reported by The Wall Street Journal.

Both Trump and former President Joe Biden tried to reach a nuclear deal with the kingdom to share American technology.

But nonproliferation experts warn any spinning centrifuges within Saudi Arabia could open the door to

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a possible weapons program for the kingdom, something its assertive de facto leader, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has suggested he could pursue if Tehran obtains an atomic bomb.

Energy Secretary Chris Wright traveled to Saudi Arabia last year shortly before Trump visited the kingdom and discussed building out the kingdom's commercial nuclear power industry with his Saudi counterpart. The U.S. Department of Energy did not immediately respond to requests for comment late Tuesday.

Already, Saudi Arabia and nuclear-armed Pakistan signed a mutual defense pact after Israel launched an attack on Qatar targeting Hamas officials. Pakistan's defense minister then said his nation's nuclear program "will be made available" to Saudi Arabia if needed, something seen as a warning for Israel, long believed to be the Middle East's only nuclear-armed state.

Enrichment isn't an automatic path to a nuclear weapon — a nation also must master other steps, including the use of synchronized high explosives, for instance. But it does open the door to weaponization, which has fueled the concerns of the West over Iran's program.

The United Arab Emirates, a neighbor to Saudi Arabia, signed what is referred to as a "123 agreement" with the U.S. to build its Barakah nuclear power plant with South Korean assistance. But the UAE did so without seeking enrichment, something nonproliferation experts have held up as the "gold standard" for nations wanting atomic power.

House passes temporary government funding bill months early to avoid election season shutdown

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House moved Tuesday to head-off a potential government shutdown before this fall's critical midterm elections by passing a bill to fund the federal government through Dec. 4.

The deadline for action is more than two months away, but House GOP leaders are not leaving to chance another possible shutdown souring the mood of voters shortly before they go to the polls. House Speaker Mike Johnson dared Democrats to vote against the bill, and if they did, "then they alone are going to own the chaos that ensues if the government shuts down after September 30."

The House passed the measure by a mostly party-line vote of 220-205.

It's highly unusual for Congress to pass a stopgap funding bill months before the end of the fiscal year. Lawmakers normally act just days or even hours before the deadline. But once lawmakers leave town this week, the House is scheduled to be in session for only 16 more days before the funding deadline.

GOP leadership is laying the groundwork to spend most of that time on another priority: a long-shot, party-line bill that spends \$95 billion to boost defense, aid farmers and get portions of President Donald Trump's elections overhaul bill passed into law.

"I think it's kind of smart to go ahead and take the potential chaos of a shutdown off the table because the amount of damage that does to the American citizens," said Rep. Austin Scott, R-Ga. He said he believed a shutdown "probably works to the advantage of Democrats politically," and he blamed the press for such a scenario.

Democrats overwhelmingly opposed the stopgap measure, which would generally fund agencies at current spending levels.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, said the legislation was dropped on Democrats on Friday without any bipartisan negotiations. She said that, among other priorities, Democrats would have pushed for provisions to reverse a proposed federal rule that could allow agency heads to block or terminate grants they claim don't match the president's priorities.

She said that instead of a bipartisan agreement, "we are scrambling to jam through a one-sided stopgap measure two days before everyone leaves for the August recess."

Republicans said work on the dozen annual spending bills would continue in the months ahead, but that funding the government through Dec. 4 could help lawmakers avoid a repeat of the past year when the country experienced the longest federal shutdown in history followed by the longest partial shutdown in history.

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"We've seen that happen twice in this Congress already," said Rep. Tom Cole, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. "I'm not willing to risk a third time if we can avoid that."

Some of the more conservative Republican lawmakers were fine with the bill to extend funding to Dec. 4, known as a continuing resolution.

In this environment, that's "the best way to spend the least amount of money," said Rep. Eric Burlison, R-Mo. "You keep spending levels static for at least a period of time."

It's unclear if the Senate will go along with the bill. Spending bills require support from 60 senators to advance to a final vote, so some Democrats would need to support it. Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., told reporters that Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Susan Collins was working with Democrats on the committee to "find a path forward."

Detective says D4vd ordered chain saws, body bags in hearing to decide if singer should go to trial

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Singer D4vd ordered a body bag, chain saws, an inflatable pool and a shovel online in the days after the death of 14-year-old Celeste Rivas Hernandez, a homicide detective testified Tuesday.

Prosecutors say D4vd, a 21-year-old whose legal name is David Burke, used the items to dismember Rivas Hernandez's body after he had stabbed her to death for threatening to reveal their relationship and ruin a music career that one witness said had brought in more than \$10 million in just a couple of years.

On the first day of a hearing where a judge will decide if there's enough evidence to go to trial, the homicide detective, Joshua Byers, testified that Burke had used the alias Trayvion Davis for the orders, but used his own cards to buy them and had them delivered to his Hollywood home.

Burke's lawyers have said he did not cause Rivas Hernandez's death, and he has pleaded not guilty to murder, continuous sexual abuse of a child under the age of 14 and unlawful mutilation of human remains.

Byers said most of the items that digital records show Burke bought, including two of the three chain saws and the blue pool, had been found in Burke's garage when a warrant was served. Prosecutors previously said a blood stain in the garage matched Rivas Hernandez's DNA.

And Byers testified that the body bag Burke ordered matched one that contained the head and torso of Rivas Hernandez in the trunk of a Tesla registered to Burke at a Hollywood tow yard on Sept. 8, 2025.

Prosecutors show photos of teen's dismembered body

The lead prosecutor, Deputy District Attorney Beth Silverman, showed photos in court of the dismembered and decomposing body of Rivas Hernandez. Under the body bag, authorities found a garbage bag with the girl's arms and legs.

Burke's lawyer, Blair Berk, pressed Byers about whether the body bag was tested to tie it to the defendant. Berk's cross-examination took a microscopic look at how the scene was treated and the body was investigated.

Byers said the medical examiner at the scene told him the bag could not be taken into evidence because the body was so decomposed it could not be removed from it.

Rivas Hernandez's parents were in court along with dozens of reporters and members of the public who got their seats through a lottery drawing. Her mother appeared to look down when the photos of the body were displayed.

Investigators did not immediately identify the body of Rivas Hernandez when it was found. Byers said her father, Jesus Rivas, called police a few days after the body's discovery because he had seen news reports and feared it was his daughter.

The photos showed blue fragments on the body that prosecutors say were from the inflatable pool.

Byers also testified that when he and his partner arrested Burke, they noticed he had 'Celeste' tattooed in red on his finger. A photo of it was shown in court. A tattoo on another finger read "Shhh" and was identical to one on Rivas Hernandez's finger.

Body camera video shows Burke downplaying the relationship

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Also Tuesday, prosecutors showed a body camera video from February 2024 with Burke telling sheriff's deputies who were investigating after the then-13-year-old Rivas Hernandez was reported missing; Burke told them he had only met the girl once in person, and did not know she was a minor.

"She told me she was 18," the singer said in the video from February 2024. "Everybody's telling me she was 13."

Prosecutors allege that D4vd had already been having a sexual relationship with the girl for several months. He was 18 at the time. Burke said he met the girl as a fan online on Discord and Instagram in 2020 or 2021.

LA County Sheriff's Deputy Juan Gonzalez, whose body camera video was shown, testified that Burke had been extremely cooperative, and allowed him and his partner to search the house. They found no sign of Rivas Hernandez, who was reported missing a number of times in the years before her death.

The mood was friendly and jovial among the three, and one of the deputies says "Ohhh, that's pretty cool, good for you," when Burke described his music career.

The hearing resembles a mini trial

The preliminary hearing, which is expected to last about four days, resembles an abbreviated trial. Judge Charlene Olmedo will decide whether the prosecution offered enough evidence to demonstrate probable cause to proceed to trial.

District Attorney Nathan Hochman said outside the hearing that his office has not yet decided whether to pursue the death penalty in the case.

The defendant, who has been held without bail in a jail near the courthouse since his arrest, appeared in court in his Orange jail clothes and glasses. The judge ruled that his hands could be uncuffed, but he must remain shackled to his chair.

A court filing said Burke sent a car to pick up Rivas Hernandez on April 23, 2025, from her hometown of Lake Elsinore, California, some 80 miles (129 km) outside Los Angeles. They exchanged messages until she arrived at his home, after which her phone went dead.

"Knowing he had to silence the victim before she ruined his music career as she had threatened," the document said, "defendant stabbed the victim to death multiple times and stood by while she bled out."

D4vd had budding music career

One of Burke's financial managers, Benjamin Gregor, testified that he had earned between \$10 million and \$11.5 million dollars from 2023 through 2025.

D4vd began making music for YouTube videos he created of the video game Fortnite.

The songs he wrote and recorded on his phone were a blend of indie rock, R&B and lo-fi pop. The music made him a phenomenon on TikTok, Soundcloud and Spotify, where his top songs, including his 2022 breakthrough "Romantic Homicide," have more than a billion plays.

In 2023, he released two EPs and opened for SZA on tour. Last year, he performed at the Coachella music festival and released a full album that he was on tour promoting when the body was discovered.

Wreckage found of Pan Am plane crash that helped lead to today's safety briefings on every flight

By JOSH FUNK AP Transportation Writer

Searchers have found the wreckage from a Pan Am flight that plunged into the ocean off Puerto Rico in 1952, an accident that killed 52 and led to requirements for the passenger safety briefings given on every commercial flight.

The plane, the Clipper Endeavor, made a hard landing after losing engine power shortly after takeoff. The 17 passengers and crew who survived told investigators everyone lived through the landing, but panic set in as many passengers struggled to find life vests and the crew had a hard time pulling out life rafts.

Within minutes, the plane sank. Explorers found the wreckage of the DC-4 last month by using an autonomous sonar drone to locate the fuselage and tail in 2,000 feet of water.

Now before takeoff, flight attendants instruct passengers about exit locations and where life vests are

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located and how to inflate them.

"This one became a catalyst, and it helped drive safety steps forward of better flotation equipment and the preflight briefings," said aviation safety expert John Cox, a pilot and founder of Safety Operating Systems. "So this is one steppingstone along the path to what we today enjoy as aviation safety. It was a rallying cry at the time."

And now the discovery of this wreck could offer new hope for families who lost loved ones in other ocean crashes like Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 that disappeared 12 years ago with 269 people aboard.

Years of research helped locate the wreckage

This crash first caught the attention of Russ Matthews in 2019 when he saw a blurb about a luggage tag from the flight washing ashore in Florida. He said the historical significance of the Clipper Endeavor prompted him to dig deeper.

That led to years of digging through the Pan Am Airlines and Coast Guard archives looking for clues about the location of the plane's watery grave. Reports from the Civil Aeronautics Board, which was the predecessor to the Federal Aviation Administration, also helped.

But the key to finding the wreckage was found in records in Puerto Rico from a hearing that was held on the crash, and a map estimating the location of the crash that was done by Air Force pilots who witnessed the crash because they just happened to be in the area on a training flight.

Bad weather disrupted a previous attempt to locate the wreck in 2024 with a towed sonar array that was also documented by the Discovery Channel's "Expedition Unknown" show. But Matthews said he and the volunteers who work with his Air/Sea Heritage Foundation dreamed of making a second attempt to find it before next year's 75th anniversary of the crash with one of these newer advanced drones that were originally developed for military uses like finding undersea mines.

Undersea drone played a key role in the search

Tony Romeo, who is CEO of the undersea exploration firm Deep Sea Vision, had been talking with Matthews for a while about the possibility of helping try to find this plane if one of his ships was ever in the area, and then in April one just happened to be passing right by Puerto Rico between two other jobs while carrying an advanced underwater drone with the right sensors to be able to find it.

"There we were, and everything kind of came together at the moment: good weather, the right team, and the right equipment and ship. So we took a shot at it," Romeo said.

Deep Sea Vision previously led an unsuccessful six-month search to find Amelia Earhart's plane, but Romeo had a special interest in this case because his father was a mechanic and pilot for Pan Am airlines. In fact, the drone they used in the search already had a Pan Am sticker on the side.

Capturing the moment of discovery

All the research Matthews' group had done, combined with weather data from the time of the crash, was synthesized to create a map of the most likely location and a search area of 10 square nautical miles. The drone actually found the wreckage on its first pass over that area, although the explorers didn't know that until it returned to the surface with its images.

The Discovery Channel's Josh Gates and his crew were again along for this latest search to capture the moment the plane showed up on images from the drone after they were downloaded. The search will be featured in a special episode of the show this fall, but a few highlights released Tuesday show the moment everyone in the control room realized what they had found. Shouts of "Oh God!" and "That's a plane!" erupted when the image loaded on screen.

"To have a front-row seat to an expedition like this as it's unfolding is tremendous, and so I feel really lucky that we were able to be a part of it," Gates said.

Tropical Storm Bertha is expected to bring heavy rain, flooding along the Gulf Coast

By JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

Tropical Storm Bertha strengthened in the Gulf of Mexico on Tuesday but was expected to weaken this week as it chugs closer to the U.S., potentially bringing coastal flooding and heavy rain from the Florida Panhandle to Louisiana.

Those areas along the northern Gulf Coast were under a tropical storm warning through Wednesday and could see rain and flooding into Thursday morning, the Miami-based National Hurricane Center said. New Orleans also was under a tropical storm warning.

The storm was about 120 miles (190 kilometers) southwest of Panama City, Florida, and 105 miles (170 kilometers) southeast of Mobile, Alabama, Tuesday evening. It was moving at 6 mph (9 kph) to the west with maximum sustained winds near 60 mph (95 kph), the hurricane center said. Gradual weakening was forecast Wednesday through Friday.

Bertha was forecast to make landfall Wednesday night somewhere in the coastal and lightly populated part of Louisiana southeast of New Orleans, said Michael Buchanan, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Louisiana.

Wind will be biggest threat there, he said.

Authorities open sites to distribute sandbags

Authorities in Mississippi, Louisiana and Florida opened sites to provide sandbags to residents while red flag warnings were posted along some beaches advising swimmers about the dangers of rip tides.

Up and down the coast, double red flags signaled that Gulf waters were closed for swimming.

Beaches near Pensacola, Florida, were mostly deserted except for tourists venturing out to take photos of the pounding surf.

"For locals, this is just another storm," said Candice Henderson, manager of the Crab Trap, a beachside restaurant that was packed Tuesday on Pensacola's Perdido Key. "When you're on vacation and it's raining, you either shop or you go out to eat."

The storm was expected to weaken as it moves along the coast, said Jamie Rhome of the hurricane center. It's possible that the worst of the storm will stay offshore, he said Tuesday.

Bertha was expected to weaken further as it pushes into Texas, forecasters said.

Forecasts called for as much as 2 to 4 inches (5 to 10 centimeters) of rain from western Florida to the southern Louisiana coastline, with higher amounts in some scattered areas.

That could cause flash flooding in some urban areas.

Authorities also advised that areas in Louisiana from the mouth of the Mississippi River to the Alabama-Mississippi state line could see storm surges of up to 4 feet (1.2 meters). Parts of Florida and Alabama could see smaller surges.

The tropical storm warning extended west to Morgan City, Louisiana.

Bertha is the second tropical storm of the Atlantic hurricane season

Bertha is the second tropical storm of the Atlantic hurricane season. Tropical Storm Arthur last month brought heavy rainfall to the southeastern U.S.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration expects this year to see a below-average Atlantic hurricane season although that doesn't eliminate the chances of a catastrophic storm.

Bertha could dump heavy rain on coastal areas of Mississippi that are still recovering from flooding brought by Arthur that destroyed and damaged homes in June.

"Because of that, people are definitely paying attention, or at least you would hope so," said Jeff Clark, a spokesperson for Mississippi's Harrison County, where six sites were open for sandbag distribution.

So far, there hasn't been a need to open any shelters or order evacuations, Clark said on Tuesday.

Hurricane Fausto churns in the Pacific

In the eastern Pacific Ocean, Hurricane Fausto churned far from Mexico's Baja California peninsula and posed no threat to land, the hurricane center said.

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Fausto gained hurricane status Monday night. It was about 780 miles (1,260 kilometers) southwest of the southern tip of Baja California, had top sustained winds of 75 mph (120 kph) and was moving west-northwest at 12 mph (19 kph).

The storm was expected to strengthen Tuesday and Wednesday. No coastal watches or warnings were in effect, though ocean swells generated by the storm could cause life-threatening surf and rip tide conditions on the Baja California coast, the center said.

OpenAI says its AI technology acted on its own in an 'unprecedented' hack of another company

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

ChatGPT maker OpenAI said Tuesday that its artificial intelligence system hacked into another AI company on its own in what the company called an "unprecedented cyber incident."

"We had a significant security incident during evaluation of our models," OpenAI CEO Sam Altman said in a statement posted on social media.

AI startup Hugging Face said last week that it had detected an intrusion into its data processing systems that it suspected was caused by an AI agent autonomously acting on its own.

"We suspected last week's cyberattack might have come from a frontier lab, given the sophistication of the agent," Hugging Face co-founder and CEO Clément Delangue said in a statement. "Turns out it did!"

The disclosure comes amid heightened concerns about the cybersecurity capabilities of powerful models that led President Donald Trump in June to sign an executive order creating a framework for the federal government to vet the national security risks of the most advanced AI systems for up to a month before their public release.

"AI is accelerating the discovery and exploitation of vulnerabilities," OpenAI said in its statement Tuesday. "The primary lesson from this incident is that model security and safety must keep pace with rapidly advancing capabilities."

Delangue said he spent the past 24 hours working with OpenAI, "and we strongly believe there was no malicious intent on their part. It's quite mind-blowing that all of this happened autonomously!"

Delangue added that it "might be the first incident of its kind."

OpenAI said the intrusion was caused by a combination of its AI models, including its newly released GPT-5.6 Sol and an "even more capable" model that is still being tested internally.

OpenAI said its AI used stolen credentials and discovered a previously unknown vulnerability to access Hugging Face servers.

It went to "extreme lengths to achieve a rather narrow testing goal" and "found ways to gain access to secret information that it could use to cheat the evaluation," the company said.

Hegseth estimates Iran war has cost \$37.5 billion as he defends funding request at fiery hearing

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth faced fiery questions and protests Tuesday over the U.S. war with Iran, which he estimated has cost \$37.5 billion so far, as Republicans prepare a \$95 billion package to fund the military, along with other White House priorities.

Hegseth provided the new estimate, up from earlier assessments, during a combative Senate Appropriations Committee hearing, which came days after the Pentagon announced that three more American service members have died in the conflict, bringing the death toll to 17, and that more than 100 have been injured since early July. Several times protesters interrupted his opening remarks.

Hegseth said the supplemental war funding is an "urgent, necessary" injection of money, and with President Donald Trump's proposed \$1.5 trillion defense budget a generational investment in the military.

"Without these funds, we face critical shortfalls," Hegseth testified.

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But Sen. Patty Murray, the top Democrat on the panel, warned of "another forever war."

"This war is now spiraling out of control again," Murray said.

President Donald Trump has said repeatedly that "a deal is near, and the war will be over soon," she said. "But now, he's asking for \$70 billion more — and for us to just trust him it'll all work out fine."

Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins were also testifying before the panel. The proposed budget package includes \$60 billion and \$12 billion for other national security needs, along with \$10 billion for farm aid and \$10 billion for voting law changes.

Before the hearing, the White House issued a statement urging support of the budget resolution, "without modification — immediately."

War funds make up the bulk of the GOP budget plan

War funding makes up the bulk of the GOP's new budget proposal, one last priority package the Republicans hope to launch before lawmakers recess to campaign for the midterm elections. The package aims to help farmers struggling under Trump's tariffs and to pay for voter law changes, none of it paid for with offsets.

Most Americans continue to disapprove of how Trump is handling Iran, according to an AP-NORC poll. Gas prices have spiked as Iran works to control oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, U.S. munitions are running low from the onslaught of American missile strikes and Trump has shifted away from his own campaign promise not to draw the U.S. into prolonged military conflicts.

Nevertheless, Trump has showed no signs of backing off the war, and the Republicans have largely refused to confront his strategy or use Congress' power of the purse and war powers authority to halt the conflict.

"The commander in chief and the whole Department of War are working very hard to bring this to a resolution," said House Speaker Mike Johnson at his weekly press conference Tuesday.

Hegseth faced questions over the war and his own leadership

Hegseth appeared before the panel facing a torrent of questions about not only the war, but his own leadership of the department.

Sen. Susan Collins, the Republican chair of the committee, opened the hearing saying it's "deeply troubling" that the Pentagon has blocked or denied promotions to various officers, particularly women and minorities.

Democratic Sen. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire questioned why Hegseth is asking for more money when the department has not yet spent about half the \$150 billion Republicans provided the Pentagon in last year's big budget bill.

"Why are you asking the American people to absorb the cost of a war they don't support?" asked Shaheen.

When Hegseth started describing the "historic nature" of Trump's military strategy, she cut him off. Hegseth later explained that the rest of last year's budget package would be spent by September.

When GOP Sen. Mike Rounds wanted to know if this funding request would be enough to "get the job done," the general demurred.

"I can't answer the question on what it will cost, because the enemy has a vote," Caine said.

Tensions flared during hours long hearing

Republican Sen. John Kennedy of Louisiana was among several senators demanding answers over the situation in the Strait of Hormuz, asking if Iran will impose tolls on what historically has been an open waterway vital to the flow of oil.

Caine said, "That's a hypothetical question, and I don't know the answer to that."

But Kennedy retorted: "Guys, we need straight answers."

Tensions exploded toward the end of the more than three-hour hearing.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., told Hegseth flatly that his war claims don't add up.

Has the U.S. obliterated Iran's nuclear capabilities or not? she demanded to know.

"We're staying laser-focused on the objective," Hegseth responded, "and you're trying to make campaign commercials."

Sen. Jon Ossoff, D-Ga., probed Hegseth's past assessments of the war, including the secretary's claims of Iran's surrender.

When Democratic Sen. Gary Peters of Michigan said the administration's war strategy has been a com-

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plete "failure," Hegseth erupted.

"Shame on you and others who call this a quagmire and a failure," Hegseth said.

Peters told the secretary: "You, sir, are the failure."

The senator said it's not the U.S. troops who are failing, but their leaders. "You don't have a strategy," Peters said. "You don't have a long-term plan to actually win this war."

Hegseth said Democrats have "Trump Derangement Syndrome" and won't give him the money he needs.

Peters said it's not about money, "but a question of leadership."

This week, the Senate will consider another war powers resolution, having voted nearly a dozen times to try to halt the conflict.

Republicans work to pass budget over Democratic objections

The GOP budget proposal is expected to flow through the reconciliation process, which enables the majority to approve the plan on its own, over the objections of Democrats in the minority.

It's the same lengthy process Republicans used to approve Trump's big tax cuts bill last summer, as well as Homeland Security money earlier this year.

The proposal is headed toward a House vote this week, which would start the process by instructing various committees to begin drafting the legislation. Johnson can afford only a few defectors from his slim majority, and some conservatives want the funding offset with spending reductions elsewhere.

GOP senators have so far panned the House budget plan, but are waiting to see if Johnson can kickstart the process.

World Cup final between Spain and Argentina watched by roughly 60 million on Fox and Telemundo

By DAVID BRANDT AP Sports Writer

There are a lot of things that could have gone wrong during this summer's World Cup — a complicated logistical undertaking that included three host nations, 16 stadiums, 48 teams, 104 games and endless opportunities for controversy on and off the soccer field.

But in retrospect, a lot of things went right.

The United States, Canada and Mexico spent nearly six weeks hosting soccer's biggest showcase and — at least for the most part — the action stayed on the field.

Fox said Tuesday that the Spain-Argentina final drew 38.937 million viewers — including a peak of 51.685 million — which easily set the record as the most-watched English-language soccer telecast in U.S. history, according to Nielsen Media Research. Spain won the final 1-0 in extra time.

Telemundo's preliminary numbers for its Spanish-language broadcast said the game had a total audience of 22.6 million, putting the total number of viewers in the U.S. at more than 60 million.

Star players like Argentina's Lionel Messi, France's Kylian Mbappé and Norway's Erling Haaland became household names across North America, television ratings remained high in the U.S. even after the Americans were eliminated and despite high ticket prices, most games featured packed stadiums.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino gave effusive praise to the host countries on Sunday.

Attendance was good, so were ratings

Fox broadcast all 104 games in English on its platforms and American viewership remained strong even after the U.S. was eliminated by Belgium in the round of 16.

Spanish broadcasts on Telemundo were also a popular option — even for non-native speakers.

Fox averaged 7.737 million viewers for the 104 broadcasts on Fox, FS1 and Tubi — up from 3.588 million in 2022 and 2.77 million in 2018.

Though Nielsen's viewership numbers give a window into the World Cup final's widespread popularity, it's a challenge to reflect how many people actually watched since some viewed the game in group settings such as watch parties. In 2025, Nielsen expanded its out-of-home measurement system to try and get a more accurate count.

Despite a few early hiccups, stadium attendance was also strong throughout the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

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"We have had a record number of spectators in the stadiums, almost 7 million," Infantino said. "We will have had, I mean the official figures will come out soon, but probably over 6 billion people watching it from home."

The weather cooperated — usually

Fans and players from other countries found out what Americans, Canadians and Mexicans have known for a long time — it can get pretty hot here in the summer. Climate change isn't helping matters.

But Mother Nature could have been a lot meaner than she decided to be.

Even so, there were a handful of games that featured particularly hot and muggy conditions. The best example was a knockout-round game between Paraguay and France on July 4 in Philadelphia when temperatures hovered around 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 Celsius).

The World Cup final on Sunday also dodged a potential problem when smoke from Canadian wildfires that wrapped the Northeast in haze mostly cleared from the New Jersey area just in time thanks to some well-timed thunderstorms.

Size doesn't matter

This year's 48-team World Cup field was the biggest in the tournament's history and many thought it would water down the competition.

That wasn't the case.

Cape Verde held eventual champion Spain to a draw in its opening game, advanced to the round of 32 and gave Argentina a scare before losing 3-2 in extra time in a World Cup classic. Congo also advanced beyond the group stage and pushed England before eventually losing, while Curaçao was still in with a chance of making the knockouts going into its final group match.

After those Cinderella stories, fans eventually got to enjoy semifinal games full of heavyweights. England, Argentina, Spain and France were the top four in the world rankings.

Politics can't be ignored

The World Cup is famously a petri dish for political conflict, and this year's version provided its share of strife.

Iran's participation in the tournament amid the war in the Middle East was a particularly thorny issue and the team had to move its base camp from Arizona to Mexico. The Iranians' participation was overshadowed by travel complaints and visa issues, with the U.S. refusing visas to several members of Iran's delegation.

U.S. President Donald Trump's relationship with Infantino was scrutinized after American striker Folarin Balogun's one-game ban for a red card was suspended ahead of the team's round of 16 game against Belgium.

Travel restrictions for a series of countries prevented some fans from traveling to the U.S., but there were no reports of the aggressive immigration enforcement that some human rights groups had feared could take place around World Cup stadiums.

Infantino brushed aside most of the controversies, instead focusing on the positives. While the FIFA president has a vested interest in painting a rosy picture of this year's World Cup, there's little doubt the tournament was a hit from a soccer perspective.

"I think we have to invent a new vocabulary, new words to define the success of this World Cup," Infantino said.

Ukraine's Zelenskyy fires his military chief after protests and names a replacement

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Tuesday fired Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi as commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces and named his replacement, following days of mass protests in Kyiv, the country's capital, and other cities across the nation demanding his removal.

It was the second major change Zelenskyy has made under street pressure, after protests last summer

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forced him to undo a law weakening Ukraine's anti-corruption watchdogs.

Zelenskyy appointed Mykhailo Drapatyi as the new army chief, according to a statement on social media. "Our shared wish is one — victory over the enemy and conditions at the front and in pressure on Russia that would force Russia toward peace," Zelenskyy said.

The Ukrainian leader said he made the decision after a series of meetings with military commanders. They began shortly after protests broke out demanding the reinstatement of former Defense Minister Mykhailo Fedorov, seen by demonstrators as a driver of military modernization, and the removal of Syrskyi, who they said embodied the army's old, Soviet-style command culture.

Zelenskyy thanked Syrskyi for his achievements in Ukraine's fight against Russia and praised him for the defense of Kyiv and for operations in Kharkiv and Kursk.

"I am grateful to Oleksandr Syrskyi and to every one of our warriors for Ukraine's strong front-line positions," he said. "I am grateful to Mykhailo Drapatyi for holding that same view."

Drapatyi wrote in a Facebook post that serving Ukraine "has always been an honor for me, and during this war for independence, it means absolute responsibility." He thanked Syrskyi for his consistent work strengthening the Ukrainian military.

"I grew up in it," he added, referring to the army. "I will work responsibly, with focus and with respect for the people defending our state today."

Zelenskyy said Drapatyi and other commanders must present an updated defense strategy, including continued reform of the corps system, faster weapons and drone deliveries, stronger air defense against Russian strikes and a clearer mobilization plan.

Former defense minister's future in the government remains unclear

Zelenskyy met separately with Fedorov on Tuesday and offered him what he called a respected position in the government that would unify the country's technology sector. It wasn't clear if Fedorov accepted the offer — or whether the latest moves would satisfy protesters and calm the streets.

Fedorov congratulated Drapatyi, calling the appointment "new hope in the fight of free people for freedom and justice" and "a voice for change that could not go unheard."

Fedorov had criticized Syrskyi publicly before his dismissal, saying the general was blocking his reform efforts and needed to be replaced for Ukraine not to fail in its resistance against Russia. He said Ukrainians' high expectations must now be met with a clear vision for ending the war, decisive action to preserve soldiers' lives, expand robotic warfare at the front, strike asymmetrically and exhaust Russia's economy.

Fedorov called Syrskyi to thank him for defending the Kyiv region, the Kharkiv operation and other battles, calling it "already an important part of Ukraine's history" but adding that the country must "move even faster and write new chapters, correcting all previous mistakes."

The army chief's dismissal was sparked by protests

The crisis began last Thursday, when Zelenskyy overhauled his wartime government, replacing his prime minister and firing Mykhailo Fedorov as defense minister after just six months in the post.

Zelenskyy cited an unworkable rift between Fedorov and Syrskyi, telling reporters that as the two couldn't resolve their dispute, he would "have to resolve it."

Following his dismissal, Fedorov publicly accused Syrskyi of blocking military reforms and fostering a top-down command culture, criticism that echoed complaints from soldiers and veterans over heavy casualties in costly front-line assaults.

The reshuffle immediately drew thousands of protesters into the streets of Kyiv and other cities, framing Fedorov's removal as Zelenskyy siding with an entrenched military old guard over a reformer.

The backlash promptly spread to inside the military: the Air Force's deputy commander resigned in protest, warning the move would weaken Ukraine's air defenses; veterans and soldiers on leave joined the protests in Kyiv and other cities, and numerous public figures among soldiers spoke out publicly against Syrskyi on social media.

Criticism of the military chief had escalated

Syrskyi has long been associated with a Soviet-style, top-down command culture, and many protesters

said they wanted a new generation of generals who would place a higher priority on preserving soldiers' lives.

Within the military, Syrskyi has earned the gruesome nickname of "Butcher," which particularly spread during his command of the defense of Bakhmut, one of the war's longest and costliest battles.

His already precarious public standing eroded further after Ukrainian outlet Babel published an investigation in June detailing allegations of abuse within the Skelia assault regiment, a unit closely associated with Syrskyi that has reportedly suffered higher-than-average battlefield losses. The investigation documented dozens of deaths among recruits.

2 married couples from Honduras were among 5 adults who drowned in an Ohio river

By PATRICK AFTOORA-ORSAGOS and MARLON GONZÁLEZ Associated Press

POWELL, Ohio (AP) — The skies were mostly clear and weeks of sweltering heat had finally broken as 33-year-old Jose Mario Pineda Dias and his 28-year-old wife, Marina Suyapa Regalado, set out with their two children for some leisurely fishing in an Ohio river. A second Honduran couple and an adult friend joined them.

A photo snapped by a passing boater sometime Sunday apparently shows them about thigh deep in the Scioto River, fishing poles in hand, standing around a big log. Calm as the surface appeared, the river was running high and fast, according to U.S. Geological Survey data. All five adults ended up drowning, authorities have said.

After the photo was taken, if it was indeed them, the group might have returned to shore. It is not quite clear. What Delaware County Sheriff Jeffrey Balzer has said is that one of the adults was struggling to swim in the river when several others went into the water to help. All five were swept under, he said.

The two women's bodies were recovered Sunday and the three men's bodies were found Monday.

On Tuesday, Honduran authorities confirmed that four of the five adults were Honduran citizens — Dias and Regalado and another married couple whose names have not yet been released. The fifth adult also has yet to be identified.

Flabia Zamora, director of consular affairs at the Honduran Foreign Ministry, told reporters Tuesday that they were working with U.S. authorities to bring their bodies home.

Zamora said that once U.S. officials have identified all the victims, Honduras will start the repatriation process, which could take at least a month.

She said the couple's children are in the care of the state of Ohio and that arrangements will be made to reunite them with relatives in Honduras.

One of the children, a boy wrapped only in a towel, fled the riverbank in a panic and ascended to the road as the adults were drowning. According to a passing driver who called 911, "He was screaming, 'Mama! Mama!' and he was about to come out onto the road, and he was crying." She said she was afraid he was headed onto a multilane road that snakes along the Scioto's eastern banks.

Brenda Raya, who described herself as a relative, has launched a GoFundMe campaign to cover funeral and transportation costs, as well as childcare costs for the two orphaned children. She said they are 8 and 10.

"The emotional and financial burden is overwhelming, and we want to honor the memory of our loved ones while providing for the children left behind," she wrote.

The drownings occurred along the O'Shaughnessy Reservoir. The reservoir and its 18 miles (29 kilometers) of shoreline are the property of the city of Columbus. According to the city's Recreation and Parks Department, Jet Skis, tubing and swimming are not permitted in any city of Columbus reservoir.

Lt. Heather Byers, of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, said rivers can be deceptively calm on the surface.

"Even though the water doesn't seem to be moving very quickly, you can still get swept away in very slow-moving water," she said. "Also, since you can't always see the bottom, you never know if you're in,

you know, you could be in 2 to 3 feet of water, what you're comfortable standing in, and then the next thing you know you're at 4 or 5 feet."

Besides the currents and the depths, people can catch a foot between the rocks, snag their clothes on a branch or lose their balance on slippery algae.

Senate panel advances Jay Clayton's nomination to lead US intelligence agencies

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate Intelligence Committee has advanced the nomination of Jay Clayton, President Donald Trump's pick to head the nation's intelligence agencies, along party lines.

The 9-8 vote came after some Democrats had praised Clayton and indicated that they might vote for him. But that shifted after a contentious hearing last week in which Clayton repeatedly refused to say that former President Joe Biden won the 2020 election.

Virginia Sen. Mark Warner, the top Democrat on the panel, said at the end of the hearing that he was "bitterly disappointed" in Clayton, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York and a former Securities and Exchange Commission chairman, even though he had worked with him in the past.

The committee's approval sets up a floor vote on Clayton's nomination, potentially early next week. The vote took place behind closed doors, as is customary for the panel, and all Democrats voted against Clayton, according to a person familiar with the vote who requested anonymity to disclose it.

The Democratic pushback on Clayton comes as Trump has made revisiting the 2020 election, which he lost, a primary focus. On Thursday evening, he delivered a speech from the White House in which he again tried to cast doubts on that election and amplified debunked theories about Biden's win.

Clayton told senators that he had no involvement with that speech, but he said repeatedly that the election was "certified" for Biden, declining to say outright that the Democrat won.

Warner said after the vote on Tuesday that he wants to see someone in the job "who is going to be a restraint, not an agitator."

Republicans want to quickly confirm Clayton

Senators in both parties have expressed concerns about the interim director, Bill Pulte, who took over when Tulsi Gabbard resigned last month. Pulte has no known intelligence experience and investigated the president's perceived enemies in his previous post as a federal housing regulator.

Republicans were hoping to confirm Clayton in June so he could replace Gabbard without Pulte serving as interim. But Trump delayed Clayton's nomination before the Senate left for a two-week recess, allowing Pulte to take the job temporarily.

As the nomination heads to the Senate floor, it's unclear whether Democrats will allow Republicans to speed up a vote. Though he is opposing Clayton's nomination, Warner said he didn't want to slow it down.

"We are between a rock and a hard place" with Pulte in the job, he said.

Clayton did not mention Pulte in the hearing last week. But he emphasized his own government and national security experience, attempting to assuage senators in both parties.

"I saw firsthand how a strong national security apparatus depends on decisive judgment, discipline, integrity, and effective communication and cooperation across different branches of the government," Clayton said. "If confirmed as Director of National Intelligence, I will commit to upholding these principles every day."

Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Tom Cotton, R-Ark., who expressed frustration last month when the hearing was delayed, said that Clayton has a reputation for operating with "morality, decency and integrity" in his previous positions.

"Jay Clayton is a highly qualified nominee with a deep experience combating a wide range of national security threats," Cotton said in a statement on Tuesday.

President Donald Trump to travel to Michigan ahead of swing state's primary election

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is set to rally in Michigan next week as early in-person voting begins in the battleground state's primary, where voters will choose nominees for open Senate and governor's races.

The rally is set to take place in Oakland County on Monday, according to a person familiar with the plans who was not authorized to discuss the event publicly.

Early in-person voting begins Saturday ahead of the Aug. 4 primary, when voters will also select nominees for U.S. House and other statewide offices. Republican Mike Rogers is unopposed in the Senate primary, while the GOP gubernatorial contest has intensified between Trump-backed U.S. Rep. John James and businessman Perry Johnson.

The visit will allow the president to take his messaging on the road as Republicans grow concerned about how rising gas prices and an unpopular war in Iran might affect their midterm chances. Republicans are defending slim majorities in the House and Senate.

Trump carried Michigan in 2016 and 2024, and both parties view the battleground state as central to the 2026 midterm elections.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

Democrats are facing the most competitive race in the Aug. 4 primary, with U.S. Rep. Haley Stevens and progressive candidate Abdul El-Sayed battling for the party's Senate nomination. The winner will face Rogers, who lost narrowly in 2024 to now-Sen. Elissa Slotkin.

Republicans have faced a bruising contest for the gubernatorial nomination, however, with Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer term-limited. James has been endorsed by Trump, but Johnson has spent millions attacking James on television and digital advertising.

Johnson's campaign has already advertised a "Trump Tailgate" on Monday.

Oakland County, where Trump is set to appear, was long considered one of Michigan's premier political bellwether counties. Democrats have steadily expanded their margins there even as Trump carried the state in 2016 and again in 2024.

Republicans saw 2026 as a chance to finally gain back power in a state that has been dominated by Democrats — outside of Trump's wins — over the past decade. But surging gas prices, an unpopular war in Iran and tariffs that have hit the state's auto industry hard have all contributed to concerns about a worsening political environment for Michigan Republicans.

In May, a Democrat won a special election by almost 20 points in a state Senate district that Kamala Harris won by less than 1 point in 2024. The previous officeholder, a Democrat, carried the seat by 6 percentage points in 2022.

Trump says US-Lebanon flights can resume, pledges help for that country after meeting its president

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump pledged to help Lebanon "a lot" during a White House meeting on Tuesday with the country's leader, Joseph Aoun, who came to push for long-term calm after months of war between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group.

The U.S. has championed peace in Lebanon but has been increasingly distracted by new escalation of the war in Iran, which has destabilized much of the Middle East. Trump says he now has little interest in talks with Iran's leaders to end the war.

In the meantime, Lebanon and Israel have held rare direct talks mediated by Washington.

"It's been a very badly treated place and country, and we're going to have it properly treated and treated with the respect it deserves," Trump told Aoun during a meeting which wrapped the Lebanese leader's four-

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day visit to Washington. "We're gonna help it a lot," he said of Lebanon, without giving concrete details. Hours later, Trump made the surprise announcement that he'd allow American carriers to resume direct flights to Lebanon for the first time in 40-plus years after the US suspended the route.

"I am hereby directing my Administration to allow all U.S. airline carriers to fly directly to Lebanon so that Americans can easily visit this beautiful land," Trump said on social media after Aoun had left the White House.

It is highly unlikely U.S. carriers will want to fly into Lebanon in the near future, however, as the situation in Iran disrupts larger air traffic and questions Hezbollah's influence in parts of the country remain. Direct flights between the U.S. and Lebanon were suspended in 1985 by the Reagan administration following the hijacking of TWA Flight 847.

Lebanon hopes the Washington talks result in Israeli troops withdrawing from large swaths of southern Lebanon that they currently occupy, and the Lebanese military receiving support to assert full control in areas where Hezbollah militants had held sway.

Trump said of Israel's army withdrawing from Lebanon, "They're in the process of doing that," but didn't elaborate.

Aoun told Trump, "Your vision is peace," calling it Trump's "legacy." He also said Trump was a "great president."

Trump responded by joking, "I do agree with that" and said Aoun was handsome and "knows how to get to me," adding, "Now he can have anything."

A framework agreement is being tested

Lebanon and Israel announced a "framework agreement" on June 26, setting a plan for Israeli forces to withdraw and for the disarmament of Hezbollah, which for decades had a strong presence in southern Lebanon. The deal's implementation was to begin in small "pilot zones."

The U.S. State Department said Monday that operations in three villages of one pilot zone had begun. Two of them — Froun and Srifa — were not under Israeli military control to begin with, and the Lebanese army was already present there, while Israeli forces were at one point in a part of the third village, Zawtar al-Gharbieh.

The Israeli military said it would "adjust its force posture in one of the pilot areas in order to enable the Lebanese Armed Forces to carry out their mission," without specifying the location.

The Lebanese army said it began deploying troops in Zawtar al-Gharbieh.

The June 26 agreement also lays out steps toward an eventual Israel-Lebanon peace agreement. The two countries have never had formal diplomatic ties and have been nominally in a state of war for nearly 80 years after Israel's establishment.

Trump noted Tuesday of Lebanon, "There's a Hezbollah problem" and suggested that he personally could speak with that group if Aoun wanted him to. He also again floated the idea of having Syria intervene to fight Hezbollah — though he didn't fully commit to that.

Such a concept would be highly unpopular in Lebanon and potentially embarrass Aoun.

Confusion over pilot zone implementation

It remained unclear whether Israeli troops actually withdrew from any territory. A Lebanese military official said the Lebanese army was unsure whether Israeli forces had been in Zawtar al-Gharbieh before Tuesday, but that they were in adjacent areas and would open fire on anyone who tried to enter.

An Israeli military official said Israeli forces had not been in Zawtar al-Gharbieh "for quite a time" and "we didn't withdraw from there." Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity in accordance with military regulations.

Still, the pilot zones got off to a rocky start.

The Lebanese military said Israeli troops fired Tuesday near an area where they were deploying. The Israeli military said Lebanese soldiers had entered an area that was not part of the pilot zone and Israeli troops fired warning shots in the air.

The Lebanese army disputed this, saying its soldiers were within the pilot zone when Israeli troops opened fire. It called on Israel to resolve disputes through "established coordination and communication

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channels, instead of resorting to aggression.”

A village mayor is cautious

Abed Ezzeldine, mayor of Zawtar al-Gharbieh, was waiting for word from the Lebanese military on whether it's safe for displaced residents to check on their homes.

He said the civilians would go in, but “only to check it out and see how things are and then we will leave.”

“We can't stay because the infrastructure is completely damaged and houses have been leveled. They (the Israelis) have bulldozed the roads,” he added.

The Lebanese military last week increased its presence in some of the areas expected to be included in the pilot zone, with troops patrolling and setting up checkpoints.

Rubio says US will support the framework agreement

Aoun also met Sunday with Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who said Washington will continue to endorse the Lebanese agreement. Rubio warned that Lebanon will “never be fully at peace” as long as the Hezbollah issue is not resolved.

“How do you replace Hezbollah? You defeat and replace them with a government that is strong enough to be the sole force of arms in the country,” Rubio said.

Skeptics in Lebanon fear that a military confrontation with Hezbollah could lead to a civil war.

Government officials have urged investment in the country's battered infrastructure to empower the weakened state, which Rubio echoed.

Israel plans on a long-term presence

Israeli officials, meanwhile, have said they plan to keep troops long-term in a “security zone” in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah has dismissed the U.S.-brokered direct talks and instead backed Washington's talks with its key ally and patron Iran to end their war, which includes ending the war in Lebanon as a condition.

Lebanon's government came to power on a reformist platform in early 2025, vowing to disarm all non-state groups, including Hezbollah, which it blames for dragging the country into another war with Israel in March, when the militant group fired several rockets toward northern Israel two days after the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran.

Beirut's leadership, however, has condemned Israel's subsequent ground invasion and massive aerial campaign in the country, which has killed over 4,000 people and displaced 1.2 million others.

While grappling with stark political opposition from Hezbollah and allies within the deeply divided country, Lebanon's leadership insists that Israeli withdrawal and international financial support for Lebanon's cash-strapped army are crucial for a sustainable security solution.

French lawmakers approve a sweeping social media ban for children under 15

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — France banned children under 15 from using social media on Tuesday, becoming the first country in the European Union to pass a blanket ban on the platforms as concerns grow worldwide over the harmful effects of digital content on kids.

Both chambers of the Parliament voted in favor of the measure, a flagship initiative of French President Emmanuel Macron's second term. The bill also bans the use of mobile phones in high schools.

Several families in France have sued TikTok over teen suicides they say are linked to harmful content. Children's advocates and parents applauded the vote.

“We've been campaigning for this bill from the start because, frankly, we have no other option, no other way to counter tech giants,” said Gaëlle Berbonde, a 52-year-old who lives in the Paris region. “The only thing we can do is protect our children, just as we protect our children from drinking alcohol.”

Berbonde told The Associated Press that her daughter was in seventh grade when she got her first smartphone. A parental control app helped monitor what she did online, but Berbonde had no idea what TikTok really was. After a few months, the family realized that the daughter was cutting herself and was

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suffering from anorexia and depression. She spent a year and a half in the hospital but is now 16 and well.

Macron wants the ban in place for the new school year

The legislation is one of the final major measures adopted under Macron's presidency before he leaves office next year. Macron wants the law to take effect at the start of the new school year in September. However, a review to determine whether the bill complies with the French Constitution is likely to take place and could delay its implementation.

"France is leading the way in Europe in protecting our children and our teenagers," Macron said. "We will keep on going."

The ban won't cover online encyclopedias, or educational or scientific directories.

Lawmakers from the left-wing party France Unbowed opposed the bill, arguing that its constitutionality is unclear, that it would effectively end online anonymity, and that it would be impossible to enforce.

Ines Legendre, a legal adviser for the online protection group e-Enfance, said the law will not immediately translate into an outright ban.

"We'll also have to address the issue of existing accounts for those under 15. How do we identify them? How do we suspend them? And then there's the question of age verification for all new accounts that will come into effect," she said.

According to France's health watchdog, one in two teenagers spends between two and five hours a day on a smartphone. In a report published in December, it said that some 90% of children between 12 and 17 use smartphones daily to access the internet, with 58% of them using their devices for social networks.

The report highlighted a range of harmful effects stemming from the use of social networks, including reduced self-esteem and increased exposure to content associated with risky behaviors such as self-harm, drug use and suicide.

After the European Commission found that the latest version of the bill overlapped with the EU's Digital Services Act, which sets strict rules aimed at keeping internet users safe online, lawmakers held final negotiations Monday. They reached an agreement on an amended version of the legislation, which was then submitted to both chambers for a final vote.

Other countries implement restrictions

Growing awareness of the dangers social media poses for young, developing brains has shown up in a wave of new restrictions globally.

In 2024, Australia became the first country to kick kids under 16 off social media. The law makes platforms — including TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit, X and Instagram — liable for fines of up to 50 million Australian dollars (\$35 million) if they fail to prevent children younger than 16 from holding accounts.

In Europe, Spain's prime minister Pedro Sánchez announced in February that the country wants to limit social media access for children under 16. Denmark and Greece have unveiled plans for bans for youngsters while the United Kingdom said it would also consider banning young teenagers.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen — the EU's top executive — earlier this month called for limits to be placed on children using social media. A special EU panel looking into the issue recommended forbidding access for those under 13 until tech companies can prove their platforms are safe.

Von der Leyen said that children under 3 should have no exposure to screens at all. She noted infinite scrolling as one of the "addictive" traits that tech companies must address. The European Commission is likely to come up with a proposal for the 27 member countries to consider in the near future.

Mexican man killed after ICE encounter in Florida was on vacation, officials say

By GISELA SALOMON and FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — A Mexican man who was struck and killed by a tractor trailer in Florida after running from federal immigration officers was vacationing in the U.S. and had a tourist visa, according to a Mexico official and a group assisting his wife.

Juan Jairo Coronilla Durán, 28, died July 14 after authorities said he darted across a busy road in St.

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Augustine and into the path of a truck. His death was the third in roughly a week involving encounters with Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents, following fatal shootings in Texas and Maine.

Coronilla Durán traveled from his hometown of San Luis de la Paz, in the central Mexican state of Guanajuato, to Atlanta to visit family and friends, according to Isaret Jeffers, founder of Colectivo Arbol, a farmworkers advocacy group. He had stayed in Georgia for three weeks before traveling to Florida's east coast to enjoy the beaches, Jeffers said Tuesday.

U.S. authorities have not publicly identified the man, but a Mexico official confirmed his name. Jeffers said Yezzika Alamilla, the man's wife, told them he had been visiting the U.S. on a tourist visa.

The Department of Homeland Security did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment Tuesday about whether Coronilla Durán had a valid visa.

Authorities say he ran from immigration officers

Coronilla Durán was one of four people in a vehicle that stopped in a gas station parking lot before 7 a.m. on the day he died. The four fled on foot during an encounter with agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Homeland Security Investigations, with one darting across a busy road into the path of the semi, the Florida Highway Patrol said.

It is unclear what prompted the encounter and what happened to the vehicle's other three occupants.

The Highway Patrol and DHS have not provided additional details, citing the ongoing investigation.

Advocacy group says his wife sought help

Alamilla called Colectivo Arbol, which provides legal advice and assistance to farmworkers in Central Florida, the day after her husband died, Jeffers said. She was seeking help to travel from Mexico and repatriate her husband's remains. The organization bought her a plane ticket and put her up for three days, until Monday, she said. The Mexican consulate has been helping her since.

"His wife said he was there on a tourist visa. She didn't understand what was happening," Jeffers said. "He didn't come to work; he wasn't working. He was here as a tourist."

Alamilla "thinks he was very afraid, and that's why he ran away," Jeffers said.

His remains will be repatriated

According to information provided by the widow, Coronilla Durán "had been in the United States for only a very short time (and) had a tourist visa," said Susana Guerra Vallejo, the undersecretary for assistance to migrants and mobility issues for the Mexican state of Guanajuato.

She said that Alamilla would be able to see the body of her husband at the Florida funeral home.

Coronilla Durán's body will be transported to Mexico on a commercial flight from Orlando, Guerra Vallejo told The Associated Press. He will be buried in his hometown of San Luis de la Paz, a farming community in Guanajuato that is about 160 miles (260 kilometers) northwest of Mexico City, she said.

Coronilla Durán and Alamilla had two children, a 7-month-old girl and a 7-year-old boy, Jeffers said.

Coronilla Durán's death was at least the 10th involving encounters with immigration agents since President Donald Trump launched his mass deportation campaign last year.

The Mexican government said it had asked state attorneys general in the U.S. to review the deaths of migrants in ICE custody or during raids for possible criminal prosecution.

ESPN starts layoffs tied to NFL Network acquisition, memo says

By JOE REEDY AP Sports Writer

ESPN is undergoing a significant round of layoffs for the first time in three years after taking over NFL Network in April.

Chairman Jimmy Pitaro said in a memo to employees Tuesday morning, obtained by The Associated Press, that most moves are the result of ESPN's acquisition of NFL Network and other league digital assets last year.

The deal was announced last August and also included NFL Fantasy and the rights to distribute the RedZone channel to cable and satellite operators. In return, the NFL got a 10% equity stake in ESPN.

It was approved by government regulators in January. NFL Network employees became part of ESPN

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on April 1.

"Over the past several months, we've made significant progress integrating the NFL assets that we acquired into ESPN," Pitaro wrote in the memo. "Throughout this process, we have taken the time to carefully evaluate our collective teams, resources and organizational structure to best position us for the future. As a result, we had to make some difficult decisions about job impacts that we will be communicating today.

"While most of the job impacts are tied to the acquisition, we will also notify colleagues in other parts of the company today that their positions have been impacted. We are committed to treating employees with compassion and respect and to providing support as they navigate this transition."

While most of the layoffs affect production and behind-the-scenes personnel, some on-air talent were affected. Ryan Clark, who joined ESPN in 2015 as an NFL analyst, learned of his layoff while on "NFL Live" on Monday. A person familiar with the situation said Clark was originally going to be told Tuesday morning before reports leaked about the decision.

Clark was told by company executives rather than hear about it elsewhere. He did not finish his appearance on the show.

The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because they were not at liberty to discuss personnel decisions.

Clark took to social media on Tuesday to address the layoffs. He also shared a video of himself working out.

"Sending prayers and love to all those laid off today by ESPN. So many of you have poured your life into that company, & I know how you're feeling right now," Clark wrote on X. "My hope is as this door closes another opens for you all. God bless!"

Other notable names include Karl Ravech, who had been with ESPN since 1993 and had been an integral part of its baseball coverage. Ravech was the voice of "Sunday Night Baseball" from 2022-25 before the package moved to NBC this season. He did call Monday night's game between the Los Angeles Dodgers and Philadelphia Phillies.

Tom Pelissero, who had been with NFL Network since 2017, is also part of the cuts. ESPN had recently signed NFL insiders Ian Rapoport and Adam Schefter to extensions.

The ESPN cutbacks are also part of other reductions that are taking place throughout the Walt Disney Company this week.

US civil rights agency moves to end demographic data collection after 60 years

By ALEXANDRA OLSON and CLAIRE SAVAGE AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — How many women hold executive-level positions at top U.S. companies? What is the racial and ethnic breakdown of those roles? What is the gender and racial breakdown of the lowest-paid roles at those companies?

The Trump administration is making it harder for the public to know, moving to toss aside a 60-year-old requirement for tens of thousands of private sector employers to submit workforce demographic reports each year to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the agency responsible for enforcing anti-discrimination laws in the workplace.

The EEOC's Republican majority voted 2-1 Tuesday to rescind the data collection requirement, submitting the proposal to a 30-day public commentary period before final approval. The proposal is a quiet but profound salvo in President Donald Trump's shake up of civil rights enforcement, ending a practice that has endured through 10 Republican and Democratic administrations.

EEOC Chair Andrea Lucas, an outspoken critic of diversity and inclusion practices who has urged white men to come forward with discrimination complaints, argued that requiring companies to submit the annual demographic reports risks encouraging companies to justify discriminatory practices to diversify their workforce.

"It may promote racial stereotyping at work, and it may encourage employers to engage in discrimina-

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tion," Lucas said during a hearing ahead of the vote.

Former Democratic EEOC commissioners and civil rights organizations have denounced the proposal, saying it will deprive the agency of a critical tool for uncovering discrimination patterns and tracking how women and racial minorities have fared since the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which created the EEOC and prohibited employment discrimination based on race, color, sex, national origin and religion.

The EEOC, which receives more than 88,000 worker complaints each year, has historically used the data to guide its enforcement priorities and inform some of its investigations.

Commissioner Kalpana Kotagal, the sole Democrat left on the EEOC since Trump moved to wrest control of the agency, voted against the proposal.

"Today, the commission discusses whether to turn back time to a period before the civil rights movement, kneecapping its ability to protect workers," Kotagal said.

Here's what to know about the reporting requirement and the proposal to end it:

How the EEOC has collected the data

Since 1966, the EEOC has required companies with at least 100 employees, or federal contractors with at least 50 workers, to submit a form called the EEO-1 each year.

The form, which has evolved over time, identifies 10 job categories from "Executive/Senior Level Officials and Managers" to "Laborers" and "Service Workers." It asks employers to report on the number male and female workers in each job category, as well as the number of workers from different race and ethnicities.

The data typically covers more than 50 million employees and 73,000 employers nationwide.

A view into gender and race in the private sector

The EEOC launched during the Biden administration an interactive tool allowing the public to explore historical demographic metrics across industries and job categories. The most recent data is from 2023. Under the Trump administration, the EEOC last collected EEO-1 data for the year 2024 but has not publicly disclosed it. Collection of the year 2025 would have begun this year.

The data shows white men dominating executive and senior manager roles at private companies, though women and minorities have made inroads, especially in the years following the #MeToo and Black Lives Matters movements.

Women remain underrepresented in the top ranks of companies. While they make up nearly half the workforce at the companies surveyed, women held just 34.5% of executives and senior manager roles in 2023. That was up from 29.2% a decade earlier.

White and Asian women made the fastest gains, and by 2023, were no longer underrepresented in senior roles compared to their numbers in the overall workforce. In contrast, Black and Hispanic women remained sharply underrepresented in executive and senior manager roles despite making modest gains.

Asian men have been proportionally represented in senior roles for years, while Black and Hispanic men remained underrepresented in 2023.

Of those demographic groups, only one was overrepresented in senior roles: white men, who made up a third of the overall workforce at the companies surveyed but held 52.7% of executive and senior management roles.

Why the government wants to end the data collection

Lucas said the annual reporting requirements impose "hundreds of millions of dollars" on costs on employers, a burden she argued was unnecessary absent "any allegation, indication, or evidence of discrimination."

The move was recommended by Project 2025, the conservative Heritage Foundation's blueprint that has guided many of the Trump administration's policies.

A group of former Democratic EEOC commissioners and legal counselors said there is little evidence that companies are routinely using employment data to engage in quotas or race-based hiring.

"This is simply inaccurate and unsupported speculation, at odds with the ways in which this data is actually collected, managed and used," the former officials said in a statement.

Instead, the officials said, tracking such data encourages companies to proactively examine their hiring, promotion, benefits and other policies to ensure they are not unnecessarily erecting barriers. The agency has also issued special reports on demographic employment trends across certain industries or roles.

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Corporate retreat from demographic disclosure

The EEOC is prohibited from publicly releasing an individual company's EEO-1 form, only publishing the information in the aggregate. In recent years, however, a growing number of the country's top companies began publicly releasing their forms in response to pressure from shareholders and Democratic elected officials to show transparency in their diversity efforts.

That trend has started to reverse.

Companies have started to pull back on publicizing both EEO-1 forms and their own diversity reports, which conservative advocates and the Trump administration have seized on to argue that companies are using discriminatory tactics to add women and minorities to their ranks.

In 2025, 24 companies in the S&P 100 — the largest U.S. publicly traded companies — chose not to disclose their EEO-1 data after having done so the year before, according to Andrew Jones, principal researcher at The Conference Board Governance & Sustainability Center. Still, 60 S&P 100 companies did release the data.

Why companies may keep gathering data

Companies are still likely to keep track of their demographic data, whether or not they disclose any of those metrics publicly, and even if they are no longer required to submit annual EEO-1 reports. That's because Title VII requires employers to keep records that could be pertinent to any discrimination investigation, and the EEOC is empowered to request them.

"What we are generally advising is to stay the course," Jennifer Robins, counsel in law firm Saul Ewing's Labor and Employment Group. "Private litigants, employment discrimination lawsuits are not going away, and this data is helpful to defending oneself."

The EEOC has demanded extensive demographic data from companies to bolster Lucas' own marquee cases. Those include an investigation into diversity, equity and inclusion practices of sports giant Nike, which Lucas has alleged discriminate against white employees.

Lucas emphasized Tuesday that the EEOC would continue to demand data in the course of its investigations. Kotagal warned employers that under future leadership, the EEOC could reinstitute the EEO-1 collection.

Smithsonian history museum chief rejects White House criticism of its leaders as radical activists

By STEVEN SLOAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History pushed back Tuesday against a recent White House report that branded the institution's leadership as radical activists who cannot be trusted.

The testimony from Anthea M. Hartig came as President Donald Trump has engaged in a broad national effort to reshape the stories of America told by cultural institutions controlled or influenced by the federal government and, in particular, to purge diversity, equity and inclusion elements from those narratives. Many historians are alarmed by the revisionism.

"As we continue to fact check the report, we unwaveringly attest that it does not fairly or accurately characterize the full body of work at the museum," Hartig told a House Oversight subcommittee. "There is always room for improvement. But I also know the beauty and the inspiration and the expertise that lies in our collections, our exhibits, and our programming."

Coinciding with the 250th anniversary of American independence, the White House Domestic Policy Council released a report on July Fourth arguing that the museum, a centerpiece of the sprawling Smithsonian complex on the National Mall, doesn't tell history "in a way that is inspiring, unifying, and worthy of our great republic."

Republicans on the panel reiterated some of those concerns on Tuesday.

"In the museum's current telling, history is just an ongoing power struggle between oppressors and the oppressed," said Rep. Tim Burchett, R-Tenn. "The report makes clear that the museum's woke exhibits

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and materials reflect a broader vision held by the museum leadership.”

Hartig, the first woman to serve as director of the National Museum of American History, said the institution “does not take sides in America’s political debates.” She described the museum’s presentation of the nation’s story as an evolution intended to add voices, not erase history as detractors sometimes argue.

“When historians talk about reframing a traditional narrative, we don’t mean erasing it,” she said. “We mean adding the evidence, the voices, the objects, that earlier tellings left out, so that more Americans can see themselves reflected in the national story.”

The White House report argued that the museum “has refused to celebrate the Nation and its history.”

“It has not created any exhibit dedicated to presenting a general narrative of American history or telling the story of any of our Founding Fathers, the Second Continental Congress, the Declaration of Independence, the American Revolutionary War, or the achievement of independence and the establishment of the constitutional rule of law,” the report said.

But the museum opened an exhibit in May dubbed “In Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness” that displays 250 objects throughout the building to celebrate America’s 250th anniversary. The artifacts include the desk used by Thomas Jefferson to draft the Declaration of Independence, a Revolutionary War-era gunboat and the Star Spangled Banner.

Some Republicans on the panel on Tuesday acknowledged that the museum displays important material related to the anniversary but argued it was challenging to navigate. Rep. Michael Cloud, R-Texas, said he expected references to the Declaration of Independence to be more prominent during a recent visit.

“I’m not saying it’s not there, but it’s hard to find,” he said.

Hartig faced particular scrutiny from Republicans over an exhibit entitled “Girlhood (It’s Complicated),” which included a diary from a 13-year old exploring issues including gender identity. The museum director said the exhibit, which ran from 2020 through 2023, included a label making clear it was not designed for children.

Hartig’s future as the museum’s director hung over the hearing. Trump last year said he was firing the longtime leader of the National Portrait Gallery, another Smithsonian museum that, like the National Museum of American History, operates independently of the executive branch. The National Portrait Gallery’s director, Kim Sajet, nonetheless stepped down from the museum in the face of the White House pressure.

At one point, Burchett asked Hartig why she should continue in her job. She responded simply that overseeing the museum is “the honor of my career.”

US actions harm global efforts to prevent and treat HIV in dozens of countries, new report says

By LAURA UNGAR AP Medical Writer

The Trump administration’s disruptions to a global AIDS relief program have forced organizations to close clinics, lay off staff and cut services, seriously impeding efforts to prevent and treat the disease in dozens of countries, a new report released Tuesday shows.

The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, known as PEPFAR, is credited with saving at least 26 million lives since its inception in 2003. But last year, it was impaired by the dismantling of the U.S. Agency for International Development and cuts to thousands of global health grants.

“The disruptions were very widespread,” with services for young women, orphans and children impacted, said Elise Lankiewicz, policy associate for the nonprofit amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research, which released the report.

Researchers contacted groups that got PEPFAR funding to deliver HIV services last year. Nearly a quarter — 166 groups from 46 countries — responded to an electronic survey conducted between last November and April, providing information on their funding, staff and services.

The survey didn’t reach all PEPFAR groups and certain types of organizations — like those that were most severely disrupted or still receiving U.S. funding — may have been less likely to respond. That could result in an underestimate or an overestimate of disruptions, depending on which organizations were missed.

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Nevertheless, the findings are a window into the struggles that some groups faced last year.

Some key findings were:

—Most organizations had at least one award terminated or payment delayed last year. Terminations led to the closure of more than 1,700 clinics, drop-in centers and other service delivery sites, and to the loss of more than 16,000 full-time staff members.

—Even though the U.S. government directed services providing HIV treatment, testing, and prevention of mother-to-child transmission to continue, a majority of partners still reported a disruption to those services.

—Cuts were concentrated on services for populations most impacted by HIV. Most organizations previously serving groups such as sex workers, men who have sex with men, transgender people, and people who inject drugs reported permanently ending a service for these groups. Even among organizations that didn't lose funding, some reported stopping a service for one of these key populations to comply with U.S. policy.

—HIV prevention has been sharply reduced, with many organizations stopping condom programs or services offering what's called PrEP, preventive medicines to guard against sexually transmitted HIV. From fiscal years 2024 to 2025, prevention spending fell 51%, according to PEPFAR expenditure data.

—Locally-based partners were much more likely than international organizations to have an award terminated and to close service delivery sites. Funding disruptions also destabilized interconnected HIV service systems.

"Taken together, these results describe widespread degradation of the infrastructure built to deliver HIV services worldwide, with the deepest damage falling on the populations and partners most essential to controlling the epidemic," the report says.

The survey doesn't provide data at the country level, but amfAR officials point out that the majority of responses came from African countries.

When asked about the report, a State Department spokesperson said in an email that the Trump administration has "strengthened PEPFAR through clear, strategic direction."

"As a result, the number of children testing positive and on treatment for HIV has continued to decline," the spokesperson said.

In April, the U.S. State Department released PEPFAR data for one quarter in 2025: July through September. Officials said PEPFAR-supported programs provided standard HIV treatment for 20.6 million people in more than 50 countries, which they said is stable from the same reporting period in 2024. They also said PEPFAR started 103,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women on PrEP, up from 43,000 the previous year.

The data from that quarter "demonstrates the resilience and strength of the program," the spokesperson said.

But researchers from amfAR and the International AIDS Society combined that quarter's data with another data release that included all four quarters and found substantial disruptions across PEPFAR services.

Other research, published in the journal *Nature Health* in June, specifically examined treatment globally using PEPFAR data. It found that nearly two million fewer people living with HIV were receiving PEPFAR-supported antiretroviral treatment in fiscal year 2025 as compared with the previous fiscal year — about a 10% decline.

"That does raise really important questions about program stability," said Ramona Godbole, an author of that study who wasn't involved in the latest report.

AmfAR's report made numerous recommendations to help restore care. It said the U.S. government and PEPFAR leaders should reinstate support for all HIV services, not just treatment. It also called on other national governments to spend more on HIV services and contract with nongovernmental organizations, including those led by people in key vulnerable populations.

But Jennifer Sherwood, amfAR's director of research and public policy, said even if money is put back into the system, it will take time to get the services up and running and regain the trust of communities.

"And unfortunately, with HIV and infectious disease, each day is deadly," she said. "Each day that we don't have those systems in place, you see new infections."

Appeals court rejects Biden's bid to block release of recordings of ghostwriter interviews

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal appeals court has rejected a request by Joe Biden to block the release of audio recordings and transcripts of his interviews with a memoir ghostwriter before he was elected president.

A divided three-judge panel from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit suspended its decision until Aug. 3 to allow more time for Biden to consider another appeal.

The panel's 2-1 ruling late Monday found there is a "substantial" public interest in disclosing the material that Biden wants to keep under wraps. Redactions to the recordings would help protect Biden's privacy, the majority noted.

"We conclude that any remaining incursion on personal privacy from disclosure of the now-redacted materials likely does not outweigh the public interest in disclosure," the ruling says.

Judge Florence Pan, who was nominated by Biden, a Democrat, wrote a dissenting opinion in which she said Biden has shown a "substantial privacy interest" in keeping the material hidden.

"The conversations at issue took place in Biden's home, and the recordings of them were obtained by the government in the course of a criminal investigation that did not lead to an indictment," she wrote.

The appeal also was heard by D.C. Circuit Chief Judge Sri Srinivasan and Judge Gregory Katsas. Srinivasan was nominated by President Barack Obama, a Democrat who chose Biden as his vice president. Katsas was nominated by President Donald Trump, a Republican who as president lost to Biden in 2020 but was elected again to the White House in 2024.

Mark Zwonitzer, who worked with Biden on two memoirs, 2007's "Promises to Keep" and 2017's "Promise Me, Dad," interviewed him at his home in 2016 and 2017. Biden's lawyers say the conversations were candid, personal and intended to remain private.

Biden spokesperson T.J. Ducklo said the former president disagrees with the ruling but "respects the courts and the vital role an independent judiciary plays in a healthy democracy."

"President Biden's conversations for a book a decade ago that discussed his late son are private, and were provided to the Department of Justice on the express condition they stay that way," Ducklo said in a statement. "Reversing course and making them public is just the latest example of this administration weaponizing the (Justice Department) for political retribution."

The recordings were obtained by special counsel Robert Hur, who investigated Biden's handling of classified documents from his time as a senator from Delaware and as Obama's vice president. Republicans in Congress demanded the material after Hur declined to file charges against the then-president.

Biden sued and sought an injunction to prevent the Justice Department under Trump from releasing the recordings to Congress and the conservative Heritage Foundation. The department previously argued that the recordings were exempt from disclosure under public records law.

Biden appealed after U.S. District Judge Dabney Friedrich, who was nominated by Trump, ruled in June that the public interest in the material outweighed whatever privacy rights Biden had.

Pan noted that the majority is effectively ruling in favor of immediately disclosing the material by denying Biden's request for an injunction pending appeal.

"That, of course, will moot this case," she wrote.

Officials sought phone records of NYT journalists and their relatives in an effort to unmask sources

By ERIC TUCKER and JOCELYN NOVECK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's administration sought phone records of several New York Times journalists and even those of some of their relatives, according to a motion unsealed Monday — an unusually aggressive attempt to unmask the confidential sources of reporters who wrote about Trump's Qatari-gifted Air Force One jet.

The push by the Republican president's administration to compel the identity of sources in the form of additional subpoenas comes at a time when the executive branch's relationship with the press is increasingly contentious. The efforts, described in a letter-motion filed by the Times over the weekend, were more expansive than previously known, the newspaper noted, and also covered a time frame that exceeded the news articles in question.

"Two of the subpoenas seek records beginning on January 1, 2026, long before the events that are purportedly the basis for the Department's investigation," lawyers for the Times wrote in the letter. "That timeframe strongly suggests that the Department is using this investigation not to focus on any purported concerns arising from the July 8 and 9 articles, but instead to forage for information about the Journalists' source relationships more broadly."

Government has said reporters aren't the target

The phone records subpoenas are on top of grand jury subpoenas served July 10 on three journalists that sought to compel testimony from the reporters about the identify of their sources. The Times has separately challenged those grand jury subpoenas and U.S. District Judge Arun Subramanian is scheduled to hear arguments Thursday. The judge has also frozen enforcement of the phone records subpoenas pending a ruling on the newspaper's motion to quash those.

Lawyers for the newspaper noted that some of the phone records subpoenas were issued on the same day as the grand jury ones, an additional one was issued on July 14 and another was issued on July 16 — after the Times had already moved to quash the grand jury subpoenas.

In arguing for the phone records subpoenas to be spiked, the Times said the government had acted in "bad faith" and had ignored its own protocols by not giving the journalists advance notice that records were being sought and by demanding the information "without first conducting any serious investigation."

The newspaper's lawyers said the additional subpoenas call "into question the accuracy" of testimony given last week by Jay Clayton, the U.S. attorney in Manhattan, where the grand jury subpoenas were issued. At his confirmation hearing to be the Trump administration's director of national intelligence, Clayton said that "we followed the protocols" and that the government had taken "the least intrusive possible" steps possible.

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

The additional subpoenas included a request for phone records of one reporter's mother and two of the journalists' spouses. The motion noted that the mother in question is a mental health professional with confidential client relationships and that one of the two spouses is the general counsel of a law firm.

"The disclosure of additional subpoenas for confidential newsgathering information of the Journalists is deeply concerning, revealing yet another instance of the alarming pattern of conduct detailed in the Motion to Quash," the news organization's lawyers wrote.

"These actions demonstrate abuse of the grand jury process, continued bad faith attacks on the Journalists, violations of the Department's own internal regulations and disregard for the law in this Circuit intended to protect critical First Amendment interests," the motion stated.

In a response posted Tuesday morning, the Justice Department said that it had complied with its own regulations in issuing the subpoenas and that it had taken investigative steps before seeking them. The department said it was authorized to delay disclosure of the subpoenas but had decided to alert lawyers for the journalists to give them an opportunity to challenge.

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"Any subpoenas served for a phone number not used by one of the movants was a result of information in a law enforcement database indicating that the phone number was associated with the movant," lawyers for the department said, "If the Government determines that these phone numbers were not used by the movants, the Government will not pursue the corresponding subpoena(s)."

It's part of an ongoing legal challenge

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

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

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

Trump's administration has clashed with the press, from newspapers to TV networks to the Voice of America, on multiple fronts since he returned to office last year. The methods include lawsuits, administrative actions and public threats.

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees the press' ability to operate free of governmental restrictions.

The Associated Press is currently battling the Trump administration in court over the White House's decision last year to bar AP journalists from the president's press pool after the news organization refused to rename the Gulf of Mexico to the "Gulf of America" as Trump demanded. AP style is to acknowledge the president's renaming but retain the term "Gulf of Mexico" because parts of it lie outside U.S. jurisdiction.

Rescuers in Afghanistan search for scores missing after floods kill at least 23

By ABDUL QAHAR AFGHAN Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Rescue crews in Afghanistan searched Tuesday for survivors and bodies in the rubble of houses destroyed by devastating flash floods that authorities said have killed at least 23 people and left more than 100 missing.

The Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority said Tuesday that 80 people also were injured when floods struck the eastern province of Nuristan on Monday, causing an undetermined number of buildings to collapse. The provincial capital city of Parun was among the areas affected, authorities said.

Video footage from Parun showed scenes of utter devastation, with piles of mud, rocks and rubble where buildings used to be. Bulldozers helped clear mud and smashed concrete while local residents used shovels to dig away at piles of earth.

"The flood came through here. We saw bodies being swept away in the floodwaters with our own eyes," said Parun resident Zubair Ahmad, who said homes and shops were destroyed. "The flooding caused extensive damage and heavy losses for the local people."

Forecasters predicted more extreme weather, with heavy rain, thunderstorms, strong winds accompanied by sand and flash floods in 10 of the country's 34 provinces, the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation's meteorology department said Monday evening. The ministry warned residents to avoid riverbanks and other areas at risk of flooding.

Afghanistan is highly vulnerable to extreme weather events, with snow and heavy rain that trigger flash floods, often killing dozens, or even hundreds, of people at a time. In 2024, more than 300 people died in springtime flash floods. Earlier this year, at least 110 people were killed by widespread flooding and landslides in several parts of the country.

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Decades of conflict, along with poor infrastructure, a struggling economy, deforestation and the intensifying effects of climate change, have amplified the impact of such disasters, particularly in remote areas where many homes are built of mud and offer limited protection against sudden deluges or heavy snowfall.

Today in History: July 22, First solo around-the-world flight

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, July 22, the 203rd day of 2026. There are 162 days left in the year.

Today in History:

On July 22, 1933, aviator Wiley Post landed at Floyd Bennett Field in New York City, completing the first solo flight around the world in 7 days, 18 hours and 49 minutes.

Also on this date:

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln presented to his Cabinet a preliminary draft of the Emancipation Proclamation.

In 1934, bank robber John Dillinger was shot to death by federal agents outside Chicago's Biograph Theater, where he had just seen the Clark Gable movie "Manhattan Melodrama."

In 1937, the U.S. Senate rejected President Franklin D. Roosevelt's proposal to add more justices to the Supreme Court.

In 1942, the Nazis began transporting Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to the Treblinka concentration camp.

In 1943, American forces led by Gen. George S. Patton captured Palermo, Sicily, during World War II.

In 1975, the House of Representatives joined the Senate in voting to restore the American citizenship of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee.

In 1991, police in Milwaukee arrested Jeffrey Dahmer, who later confessed to killing 17 men and boys. (Dahmer was sentenced to life in prison and was killed by another inmate in 1994).

In 1992, Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar escaped from his luxury prison near Medellin (meh-deh-YEEN'). (He was killed by security forces in December 1993.)

In 2011, Anders Breivik (AHN'-durs BRAY'-vihk), a self-described "militant nationalist," massacred 69 people at a Norwegian island youth retreat after detonating a bomb in nearby Oslo that killed eight others in the nation's worst violence since World War II.

In 2015, a federal grand jury indictment charged Dylann Roof, the young man accused of killing nine Black church members in Charleston, South Carolina, with 33 counts including hate crimes that made him eligible for the death penalty. (Roof would become the first person sentenced to death for a federal hate crime; he is on death row at a federal prison in Indiana.)

In 2022, Steve Bannon, a longtime ally of Donald Trump, was convicted of contempt charges for defying a congressional subpoena from the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. (After challenging his conviction, Bannon served a four-month prison sentence in 2024 and was released.)

Today's Birthdays: Singer George Clinton is 85. Movie writer-director Paul Schrader is 80. Actor Danny Glover is 80. Singer Mireille Mathieu is 80. Actor-comedian-director Albert Brooks is 79. Rock singer Don Henley is 79. Author S.E. Hinton is 78. Film composer Alan Menken is 77. Jazz musician Al Di Meola (mee-OH'-lah) is 72. Actor Willem Dafoe is 71. Actor John Leguizamo is 66. R&B singer Keith Sweat is 65. Folk singer Emily Saliers (Indigo Girls) is 63. Actor-comedian David Spade is 62. Actor Rhys Ifans (rees EYE'-fanz) is 59. Actor/singer Jaime Camil is 53. Singer Rufus Wainwright is 53. Actor Selena Gomez is 34. Actor and boxer Javon Walton is 20. Prince George of Wales, eldest son of Britain's Prince William and Catherine, Princess of Wales, is 13.