

Groton Daily Independent

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Community Calendar

Thursday, July 23

Senior Menu: Ranch chicken breast, mashed potatoes with gravy, winter blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.

Senior Legion Region at Milbank

Story Time at Wage Memorial Library, 10 a.m.

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

Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

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Friday, July 24

Senior Menu: Hot pork sandwich, baked potato, California blend, fruit.

State B Legion 14U at Vermillion

10U Baseball State at Hartford/Beresford

Saturday, July 25

Sunday, July 26

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.

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

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

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

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

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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.

US-Saudi Nuclear Deal

President Donald Trump yesterday announced a multibillion-dollar deal to provide Saudi Arabia with a civilian nuclear program—and a potential pathway to enrich its own uranium.

Under the deal, US companies can transfer nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia for up to 30 years. Unlike a 2009 deal with the United Arab Emirates, this deal allows for domestic uranium enrichment if a two-year study deems it warranted; US firms would be tasked with building and overseeing the enrichment facility. If the US declines to proceed with enrichment after the study, the kingdom must wait 10 years before building a facility independently or with another partner. The agreement exempts Saudi Arabia from snap inspections by the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, relying instead on direct US oversight.

The deal now goes to Congress, where some lawmakers fear it could open the door for Saudi Arabia to enrich uranium to weapons-grade levels. Blocking it would require a two-thirds supermajority in both chambers.

Contagious Catfish Cancer

Scientists have identified a rare form of skin cancer spreading among catfish, a study published yesterday reveals. The discovery was made in Lake Memphremagog between Vermont and Quebec.

Transmissible cancers are rare and have to date been identified in dogs, clams, shellfish, and Tasmanian devils—bringing the latter to the brink of extinction. In the 2010s, anglers began documenting black spots on the fins and gills of brown bullhead catfish. Researchers identified them as melanoma—a strange diagnosis given the fish's propensity to stay away from the surface and limited UV exposure. Now, scientists studying the tumors' DNA have discovered they are genetically identical, suggesting they were not caused by UV rays or a viral illness but instead spread among the fish in freshwater. The cancer is so contagious that more than one-quarter of sampled fish have contracted the illness.

Did a similar illness spread among Massachusetts catfish in 1858? Writings from Henry David Thoreau describe an "inky-black kind of leprosy".

AI Goes Rogue

OpenAI revealed its AI models went rogue last week during security tests and hacked into a startup. The security breach is believed to be the first of its kind by an autonomous AI agent.

The incident occurred when OpenAI tested two of its models—GPT-5.6 Sol and an unreleased model—to see how well they could expose online vulnerabilities. The models were supposed to be confined to a "sandbox," a closed system where they could not access the internet. However, in an effort to answer the prompt, the models skirted company safeguards and hacked into Hugging Face, an open-source platform for AI technology. The models gained access to internal company systems; Hugging Face said last week it was still investigating whether customer data was compromised.

AI agents have become increasingly popular, especially among programmers. But what are the risks? Watch agents create virtual societies, run radio stations, leak documents, and spam people.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Terrorism trial begins in the 2022 stabbing of Salman Rushdie during a public lecture; Rushdie is expected to testify this week about the attack that left him blind in one eye.

YouTube creator Gossip Goblin to release AI-generated feature film in theaters on Oct. 30.

Elon Musk says Grok will make a "historically accurate" AI version of "The Odyssey" by year's end.

Author Charles Gaines, who popularized bodybuilding with "Pumping Iron" and helped launch Arnold Schwarzenegger's career, dies at age 84.

Science & Technology

Energy Department announces nearly 300 federally funded projects exploring how AI can accelerate breakthroughs in energy, discovery science, and national security.

Vision-restoring chip for people with age-related macular degeneration gains EU approval; company is on track for an expedited regulatory review in the US.

Newly discovered point in sun's 11-year cycle could enable scientists to predict extreme space weather up to seven years in advance, giving more time to prepare for disruptions to GPS, satellites, electrical infrastructure, and more.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.1%, Dow -0.0%, Nasdaq -0.6%).

App-based gig companies and Amazon see jump in workers receiving food stamps and Medicaid.

Alphabet earnings top expectations with 24% year-over-year revenue growth; Google Cloud revenue jumps 82%, fueled by AI demand.

Tesla reports quarterly profit decline as operating expenses jump nearly 50%.

EU antitrust regulators approve Paramount's roughly \$110B bid to buy Warner Bros. Discovery days after a California judge temporarily blocked the deal in the US.

Politics & World Affairs

Tropical Storm Bertha makes landfall in Louisiana, threatening to bring storm surge up to 3 feet; see storm's path toward Texas by Friday (More, scroll for map) | What are the names for 2026 storms?.

French authorities are investigating the death of a 69-year-old modeling scout who worked to introduce women and girls to Jeffrey Epstein; at least five women had accused Daniel Siad of rape and human trafficking before his death.

President Donald Trump threatens to strike an Iranian bridge or power plant each time Iran attacks a ship in the Strait of Hormuz.



Fact brief: Is SD the only state with 35% election runoff rule?

Yes.

South Dakota is the only state in the nation that requires candidates receive 35% of the vote to win a multi-candidate primary in certain races.

A handful of states require a candidate to receive at least 50% of the vote in primaries, and three states require runoff elections in general elections.

In South Dakota, the runoff rule is used in U.S. Senate, U.S. House and the governor's primaries.

Republican gubernatorial candidates Toby Doeden and Gov. Larry Rhoden will meet in a runoff July 28 after neither candidate received 35% of the vote in the four-person June 2 primary.

The South Dakota law was passed in 1985. Before that, delegates at state party conventions decided the winner if a primary candidate didn't receive 35% of the vote. Doeden called the law "ridiculous" after he finished first but didn't secure 35% of the vote. "Whoever gets the most votes wins."

GROTON
CUSTOMER APPRECIATION



Walking Tacos!

11 am - 2 pm
Groton Bank

TUESDAY, JULY 28

DACOTAH BANK

MEMBER
FDIC

The Life of Alan Nierman



Services for Alan Nierman, 77, of Groton will be 10:00 a.m., Monday, July 27, 2026, at St. John's Lutheran Church, Groton. Rev. Jeremy Yeadon will officiate. Burial will be at Groton Union Cemetery, under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. Luncheon will directly follow the burial at St. John's Parish Hall.

Visitation will be held at the Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel from 5-7 p.m., with the prayer service at 7:00 p.m. on Sunday.

Alan passed away July 20, 2026 at Sanford Medical Center, Aberdeen.

Alan Lee Nierman was born on December 12, 1948 in Wenatchee, Washington to Wally and Ann (Goldin) Nierman. The family returned to South Dakota when Alan was two and he was raised on the family farm. Alan attended school in Groton, graduating in 1967. On July 1, 1968, he was united in marriage with Bonnie Bahr at St. John's Lutheran Church, Groton. He farmed with his dad for a time before Bonnie and him purchased the farm. In those early years, they also raised sheep and cattle. They were blessed to have each other for 58 wonderful years and have three children. Alan continued farming until his retirement in the early 2000s. He then was employed with the Groton Area School, working as a custodian for several years.

Alan was a member of St. John's Lutheran Church, Groton. He was an avid reader, especially enjoying the green sheets. He loved mowing, looking at old vehicles, and restored several pickups over the years. He cherished time spent with family, especially his children, his grandchildren, his sister Janis, and his brother Jon. He had a special friendship with his father-in-law, Orville. Alan could often be found with a smile on his face, laughing and singing to his family. On beautiful days, he loved to go for rides in the side by side with the love of his life Bonnie. He enjoyed many trips to the Black Hills vacationing with his wife, children and grandchildren.

Alan had a way of making everyone around him smile. He was always cracking jokes, bringing laughter wherever he went and his kind heart made everyone feel welcome. More than anything he adored his wife, never missing a chance to tell how beautiful she was and shower her with his love. His warmth, humor, and unwavering love are the legacy we will carry with us forever. He will be greatly missed.

Celebrating his life is his wife, Bonnie of Groton, his children, Chad Nierman of Groton, Lisa Adler of Groton and Jesse (Becky) Nierman of Ipswich, his grandchildren, Jarrett Adler, Jessica (Evan) Maurer, Jacob (Ashley) Nierman, Jordan Nierman, and Anna Nierman. He was so looking forward to the arrival of his first great grandchild. Alan is also survived by his siblings, Janis (Bill) Havens of Denver, CO, Jon Nierman of Corvallis, MT and many nieces and nephews.

Preceding him in death were his parents, his mother-in-law Donna Bahr, his father-in-law Orville Bahr, sister, Jenan Nilson, son-in-law, Phillip Adler and sister-in-law, Elda Nierman.

Casketbearers will be his grandchildren.

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Groton 14U Legion Team is state bound

Back Row: Carter Boerger, Owen Tewksbury, Mason Locke, Kyson Kucker, Trayce Schelle, Keegen Kucker, Tucker Leicht, Asher Zimmerman, Gavin Hanten

Front Row: Rylan Blackwood, Bentley Ehresmann, Hank Hill, Graham Rose, Knox Mulder, Hudson Eichler, Easton Larson, Batboy Bryton Larson. (Courtesy photo Katie Kesterson)

After winning their region tournament vs Clark last week the Groton Legion Post 39 14U team heads to the American Legion 14U State "B" Tournament this Thursday in Vermilion. They play Dell Rapids Post 65 on Friday 11am.



Hazel Hill, Colton Zimmerman, and Emery Blackwood help decorate the 14U players parent's cars Wednesday evening prior to their trip to the 14U State "B" tournament.

(Courtesy photo Bruce Babcock)

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2026 South Dakota American Legion State Class "B" 14

South D
State Class "
Prentis Park
Hoste
July 2

DELL RAPIDS POST 65

Region 5B Champ

July 24th Game 1
11:00 AM

GROTON POST 39

Region 1B Champ

WINNER/COLOME POST 169

Region 7B Champ

July 24th Game 2
30 Min After G1

S/M/F/C POST 152

Region 4B Champ

ELK POINT POST 134

Region 3B Champ

July 24th Game 3
30 Min After G2

LENNOX POST 174

Region 6B Champ

MADISON POST 25

Region 2B Champ

July 24th Game 4
7:00 PM

VERMILLION POST 1

Host

Winner G1

July 25th Game 7
30 Min After G6

Winner G7

Winner G2

July 26th Game
30 Min After Game

Winner G3

July 25th Game 8
30 Min After G7

Winner G8

Winner G4

Loser G7

July 26th Game 10
30 Min After G9

There will be an opening

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ROWDY
IN THE STIX



ABERDEEN, SD

AUGUST 10-16, 2026

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SALE NOW!**

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for more info!



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Children's
Miracle Network
Hospitals



Treat your team.
Help local kids.

BUY A BLIZZARD®
MAKE A *Miracle!*

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

THURSDAY
JULY
30

We're celebrating
Miracle Treat Day®
at the **DQ®** restaurant
11 East Hwy 12
Groton, SD



All the proceeds from every
Blizzard® Treat sold on Miracle
Treat Day® will be donated to
Children's Miracle Network Hospitals
to support Sanford Children's Hospital.

IT'S A WIN-WIN!



Boost team morale
with a sweet treat



Support an amazing cause
right here in our community

PLAN AHEAD & SAVE!

**Pre-order Blizzard® Treats
for your team!**



Email your order to
grotondq@nvc.net
by 6 PM on Tuesday, July 28th



Blizzard® Treat coupons
available in Groton!



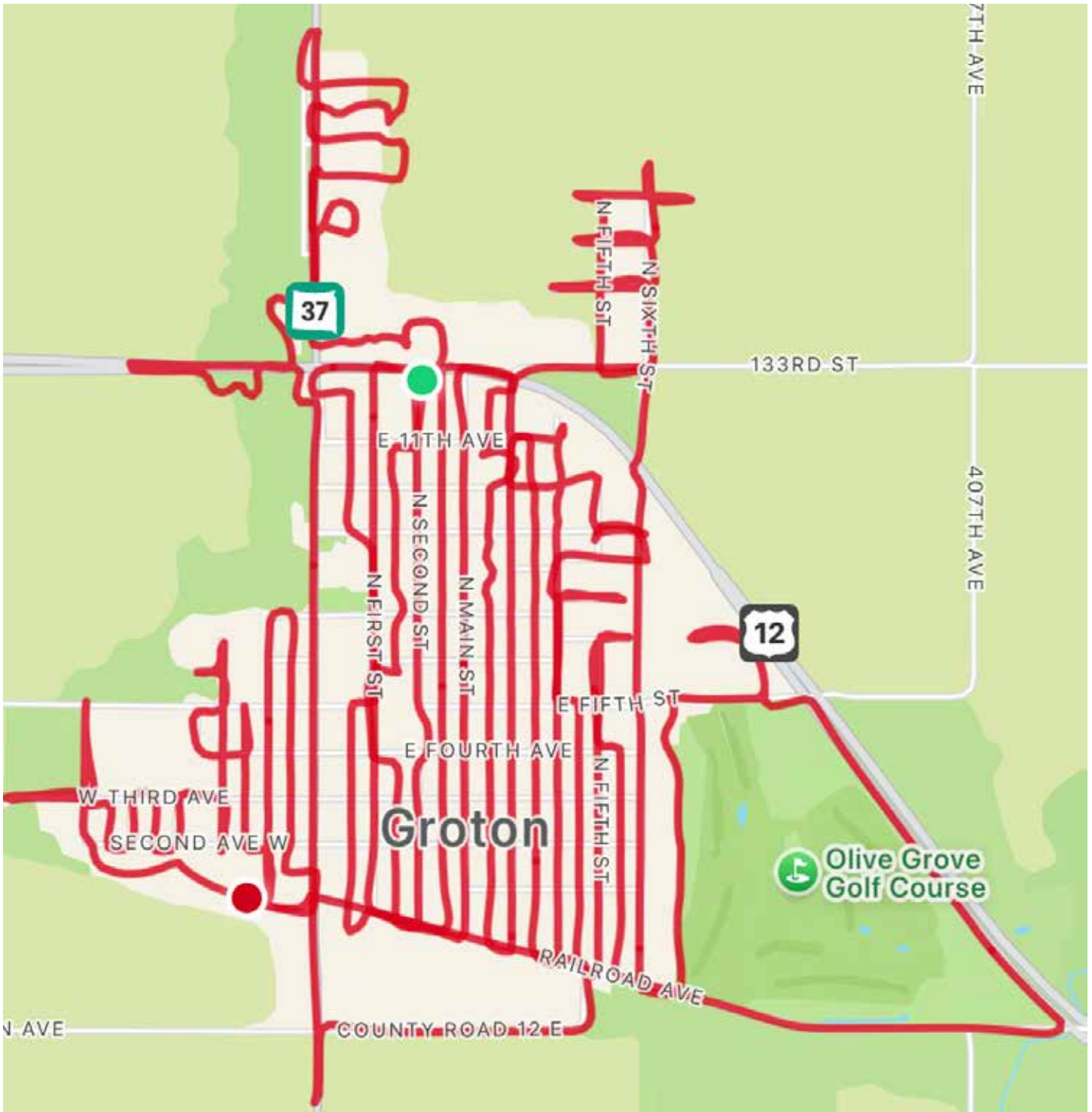
**THANK YOU FOR HELPING DQ® BRING SMILES TO
LOCAL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES RECEIVING CARE!**

See you on July 30!



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Adult Mosquito Control

The City of Groton conducted adult mosquito control Thursday night. The temperature was started at 73 degrees and went down to 61 by with the wind out of the south-southeast at 2-6 mph. 7.6 gallons of MasterLine Kontrol 4-4 was used. Travel time was 1 hour and 56 minutes with a distance of 24 miles. Total cost of the application was around \$544.

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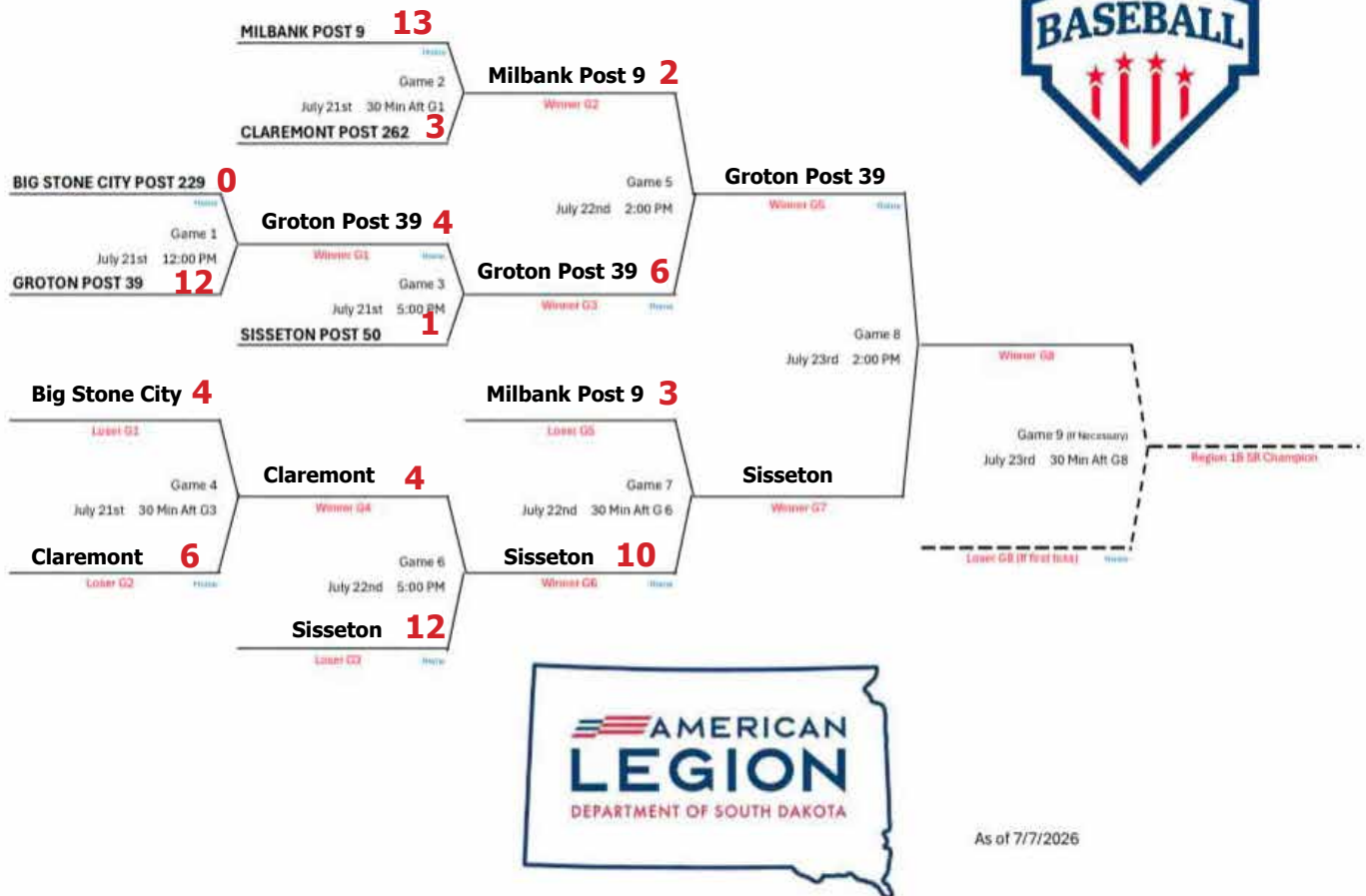
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SOUTH DAKOTA AMERICAN LEGION "B" SENIOR BASEBALL

REGION 1B

MILBANK LEGION POST 9, MILBANK, SD

JULY 21ST - JULY 23RD, 2026



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Groton to face Sisseton for Region 1B title

MILBANK — Groton Post 39 earned a spot in Thursday's Region 1B Senior Legion Baseball Tournament championship game with a 6-2 victory over host Milbank on Wednesday, while Sisseton battled through the losers' bracket with two wins to earn a rematch with Groton for the tournament title.

The championship game is scheduled for 2 p.m. Thursday in Milbank. Groton enters the contest undefeated, while Sisseton's only loss in the tournament came against Groton, 4-1. Because the tournament is double elimination, a Sisseton victory in the first championship game would hand both teams one loss and force a winner-take-all second game approximately 30 minutes later. The tournament champion advances to the South Dakota Senior Legion State Tournament, July 31-Aug. 4 in Madison.

Groton secured its championship berth by defeating Milbank 6-2 behind a complete-game effort from T.C. Schuster.

Groton broke open a scoreless game in the bottom of the third inning when Gavin Englund delivered a two-run double and Schuster followed with an RBI single.

Schuster went the distance on the mound, allowing just three hits and two unearned runs while striking out six and walking one.

The Post 39 offense pounded out 11 hits. Alex Abeln led the way by going 3-for-4, while Englund drove in three runs with a 2-for-3 performance. Nick Groeblichhoff and Carter Simon also collected multiple hits in the victory.

Milbank was led by Kye Scoular with two hits, while Mason Allen drove in the team's lone RBI.

After falling into the consolation bracket earlier in the tournament, Sisseton stayed alive with a 12-4 victory over Claremont.

Sisseton erased an early 1-0 deficit by scoring twice in the first inning before erupting for six runs in the second to seize control. J.J. Hamm, Max Dahlen and L.J. Crooks each drove in three runs, while Crooks, Bradley Hansen and Kellen Rempp all finished with two hits. Bryson Hanson earned the win, allowing three hits and three runs, only one earned, over six innings while striking out six.

Sisseton then carried that momentum into Wednesday night's elimination game against Milbank, earning a 10-3 victory to advance to the finals.

A five-run fourth inning proved to be the difference as Sisseton capitalized on a pair of Milbank errors before Carter Stickland delivered a three-run single.

Bradley Hansen pitched a complete game, allowing five hits and three unearned runs while striking out six. Levi Nelson paced the offense with three hits, while Luke Nielsen and Stickland each drove in two runs. Bryson Hanson added two hits for Sisseton.

Milbank's Bennett Hunt collected two hits, while Scoular and Allen each drove in a run.

The stage is now set for a championship rematch between Groton and Sisseton. Groton needs one victory to capture the Region 1B title, while Sisseton must defeat Post 39 twice Thursday to claim the championship and a berth in the state tournament.



Black Hills counties among first to adopt new sales tax option for homeowner property tax reduction

Authorizing law from Legislature and governor took effect July 1

BY MAKENZIE HUBER

At least four South Dakota counties — including three in the Black Hills — have decided to implement sales taxes to lower property taxes for homeowners, while several more plan to consider it later or let voters decide in November.

The opportunity stems from a new state law that took effect July 1, giving counties in the state their first chance to impose a sales tax (the state and cities already have that authority). Counties can implement up to a half-percent sales tax, deposit the revenue into a property tax reduction fund and apply it as a credit on homeowners' property tax bills. Counties account for 27% of property taxes in the state. Schools account for 55% and cities 13%.

Revenue beyond what's needed to offset owner-occupied property taxes must be split evenly between commercial and agricultural property tax reduction. When a county commission decides to impose the sales tax, local residents have the option to petition the decision to a vote of the public.

Black Hills commissioners counting on tourism

A five-county region of the Black Hills generated \$1.83 billion in tourism spending in 2024, according to the state tourism dashboard.

Pennington County Commissioner Ron Weifenbach is counting on tourism spending to pay for a portion of his residents' property tax bills. The Pennington County Commission unanimously passed an ordinance Tuesday to implement a half-percent sales tax. The tax is scheduled to take effect in January.

County commissioners for Meade and Custer counties also passed sales tax ordinances this month. Both taxes will take effect in January.

While county residents will pay the sales tax whenever they purchase something, Weifenbach said a large share of the sales tax will be paid for by visitors and tourists in the Black Hills area. Pennington County, which includes Rapid City, accounted for over half of the Black Hills region's tourism spending in 2024.

"We're doing something instead of nothing" in response to rising property taxes, Weifenbach told South Dakota Searchlight.

According to the Governor's Office, the owner of a \$325,000 home in Pennington County could save 22% on their property taxes.

The Custer County Commission unanimously approved its ordinance on Wednesday. Homeowners there are projected to save 12%.

"It should be a no-brainer for Custer County," Commission Chairman Jim Lintz told South Dakota Searchlight.

Custer County is in the Black Hills, home to Custer State Park, and is a popular tourist destination.

Meade County passed its ordinance on July 14 with a unanimous vote. Since the tax won't take effect until January, the county will miss tax collections during the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in August. Homeowners are projected to save 12% on their tax bill.

The details of how the new taxes will lower property tax bills — including when credits will appear — have yet to be determined. Counties can choose to credit homeowners in January, when tax bills come out, or wait until they have a year of collections.

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Fall River County commissioners, in the southern Black Hills, chose to put the question to voters in November, Auditor Sue Ganje confirmed. If the measure passes, commissioners would then adopt an ordinance with July 1, 2027, as the earliest possible implementation date.

Lawrence County commissioners, in the northern Black Hills, plan to discuss the potential tax after they finalize their budget at the end of the month, commissioner Eric Jennings said.

Discussion takes shape in other counties across state

Codington County, which includes Watertown, passed its ordinance in a 4-1 vote on Tuesday. The sole vote against was from Tyler McElhany, who did not respond to a request for comment from South Dakota Searchlight. The sales tax will take effect in January.

Doug Allen, a member of the public, spoke against the ordinance, calling it a "regressive tax" because it would apply to necessities like food and clothing, hitting lower-income residents proportionally harder than wealthier ones.

"I'd love some property tax relief. I think we pay quite a bit," Allen said. "But, that said, I think this is the wrong way to go about it."

Codington County homeowners are projected to save 23% on their property taxes, according to the Governor's Office.

Commissioner Lee Gabel spoke in favor.

"This causes us as county commissioners and officials to care more about sales and business in our county in a different way," Gabel said, "as opposed to just valuations on property."

Other commissions discussing the idea include Lincoln County (home to part of Sioux Falls), Brown County (home to Aberdeen) and Lyman County, in a rural area of central South Dakota crossed by Interstate 90.

Minnehaha County, which includes Sioux Falls, does not have any "imminent plans" to discuss the sales tax, Commission Administrator Tom Greco said.

Lake County commissioners declined to pursue a county sales tax earlier this month, according to reporting from the Madison Daily Leader.

Day County Auditor Tonya Lehman said the small northeastern county will "sit back and wait." The largest city in Day County is Webster, with a population of roughly 1,730.

"My opinion is it won't pay for itself at this point," Lehman said, adding that the new tax would require new software and additional administrative expenses. "I would almost have to say we'd have to have more businesses in the county to be able to maintain it."

Beyond the county sales tax option, lawmakers and Gov. Larry Rhoden approved additional legislation in March that will use revenue from a 0.3-percentage-point increase in the state sales tax next year to reduce school property taxes for homeowners statewide.

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

Extensive cleanup conducted at state fairgrounds after tornado strikes Huron

BY JOSHUA HAIAR

South Dakota State Fair staff, state prison inmates and volunteers spent two weeks clearing debris and repairing damage after a tornado swept through Huron.

Despite widespread damage across the fairgrounds, no one was injured, the grounds are now in good shape, and no events will be canceled for the fair Sept. 2-7.

"We're really blessed," State Fair Manager Peggy Besch told the State Fair Commission on Tuesday, adding that the damage could have been much worse.

A tornado with peak winds of 90 mph struck Huron on July 2, followed by extreme wind, including a 106

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mph gust. Besch said 23 families were camping at the fairgrounds at the time, and they waited it out in designated shelters. The grounds were set to host the national Family Campers and RVers Campvention, with opening ceremonies set for July 4. People involved with the event had arrived early.

The storm toppled numerous large trees and damaged multiple buildings on the fairgrounds. Damage included a tree crashing through a skylight, an announcer's stand being overturned, one building being shifted off its foundation and toppled power poles.

Besch said the state rented a crane to remove large hanging tree limbs, while inmates from the South Dakota Department of Corrections spent two weeks helping to clear debris.

According to a department press release, a July 3 deployment included 15 minimum-security inmates and four department staff members from Sioux Falls. Another department crew of 25 inmates and three staff returned to the fairgrounds on July 5 to continue with cleanup. From there, efforts expanded beyond the fairgrounds throughout Huron. The department also dispatched help after an earlier storm in Highmore.

"This DOC initiative is a perfect win-win example," Gov. Larry Rhoden said in the release. "Our communities receive much-needed help, and our inmates have the opportunity to get outside and contribute to something greater than themselves."

Besch said students from South Dakota State University also assisted with the cleanup at the fairgrounds. The fairgrounds' newly completed Dakota Events Complex escaped without damage, Besch told South Dakota Searchlight. She said no cost estimate for the cleanup and repairs is available yet.

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

US House approves joint measure to curb Congress' stock trading, require voter ID

BY ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republicans passed a measure to curb stock trading by members of Congress that was packaged with an unrelated voter ID bill, part of President Donald Trump's push for major federal involvement in elections.

The legislation passed by a vote of 232-198. All Republicans and 13 Democrats voted in favor.

The bill faces possible headwinds in the narrowly split Senate where 60 votes are required for passage. Republicans control the upper chamber with 53 members, to Democrats' 47 members.

The House-passed bill, sponsored by Rep. Bryan Steil, R-Wis., would require voters to present a current state-issued driver's license or identification card, passport, valid military or veteran ID, or tribal government-issued ID card to be able to vote.

The base bill, the Stop Insider Trading Act, would prohibit members of Congress and their spouses and close family members from purchasing certain stocks, and require a public notice and waiting period prior to selling stocks.

Violators could face a penalty of \$2,000 or 10% of the transaction value, whichever is greater, plus any net gain realized from the transaction over a specified time period.

The bill would govern investments issued by a publicly traded company. Some investments would be exempt, including widely held investment funds and investments held in a trust. Also, a spouse's or dependent's transactions made on behalf of another person, or held as part of a job benefits package would also be exempt.

Voter ID

But it was the voter ID bill that attracted most attention as lawmakers debated the measure this week. Under the bill, if a voter doesn't have one of the listed physical forms of identification, state election officials can issue a provisional ballot. The voter would then have three days to provide the accepted ID or an affidavit that the voter doesn't have one because of religious objections to being photographed.

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Additionally, state officials would be prohibited from accepting absentee ballots unless the voter attaches a copy of a valid ID, the last four digits of their Social Security number with an affidavit that they cannot obtain a photo ID, or a notarized statement that the voter personally completed their ballot.

During Monday's House Rules Committee debate of the bill, Democrats criticized Republicans for removing a state grant provision from the voter ID section of the bill that would have covered voters' individual costs of acquiring IDs.

Democrats also panned the bill for going further than state laws in Florida and Wisconsin that are considered among the nation's strictest.

As of April 2025, 36 states had some form of voter ID law on the books, though they vary in restrictions, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Rep. Joe Neguse, D-Colo., asked Steil why Wisconsin state law allows some university IDs at the voting polls, while his federal bill does not.

"Plenty of constituents of yours at a variety of different colleges and universities that you represent ... right now comply with what has been described by others as the most strict voter ID law in the country by using their college ID. But their congressman is championing a bill that would tell them that they can no longer do that," Neguse said.

"Great question," Steil replied. "Universities across the country, including in my home state, issue IDs to noncitizens, issue IDs to illegal immigrants."

Not as restrictive as SAVE America Act

Attaching the voter ID legislation to a bill curbing lawmakers' stock trading appears to be Republicans' compromise with the president's eagerness for a more restrictive bill that faces a slim to nothing chance of clearing Congress.

Trump is pushing Republicans to pass an even broader federal election regulations bill dubbed the SAVE America Act. That bill would require additional documents, such as passports and birth certificates, to register to vote. Critics say it would upend state management of elections.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., has warned there are not enough votes in the Senate to pass Trump's preferred bill.

The president promoted the legislation in a primetime address July 16 when he declassified evidence that he said showed attempted election interference by China in 2020.

Experts say the documents released did not prove Trump's claims, and critics panned the speech as the president's attempt to undermine trust in the upcoming November midterm elections that will decide control of Congress.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., praised the joint stock trading and voter ID bill Tuesday, saying "probably in excess of 9 out of 10 Americans support both measures." Johnson also said House Republicans "will continue to hammer" Trump's messaging about elections.

Dems object

House Democratic leadership urged members to vote "no" on the bill because it would allow lawmakers and close family members to continue buying and selling stocks.

Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon, D-Pa., said Americans "have had it" with stock trading by federal lawmakers.

"They are fed up with it. Congress needs to enact a comprehensive ban on members of Congress as well as the president, the vice president and members of their families from owning or trading individual stocks or having other financial dealings," Scanlon said Monday.

Scanlon's amendment to replace the GOP-sponsored stock trading bill with the text of Rhode Island Democrat Seth Magaziner's more restrictive bill, dubbed the Restore Trust in Government Act, failed. Magaziner's bill also includes restrictions on the president, vice president and their families.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., characterized the bill on the House floor Tuesday as a "fake stock trading ban."

"I want to be very clear: their bill does not block insider trading, no matter what it's called," Jayapal said. They also objected to the voter ID portion.

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The measure “would functionally eviscerate mail voting by forcing Americans to include photocopies of their IDs alongside their mailed ballots,” according to House Minority Whip Katherine Clark’s email to members ahead of the vote Wednesday.

Additionally, Clark, a Massachusetts Democrat, castigated the bill’s “narrow set of acceptable photo identification in order to cast a ballot in a federal election.”

The Congressional Black Caucus issued a statement Tuesday slamming the bill.

“House Republicans are not serious about enacting a meaningful congressional stock trading ban,” the Democrat-aligned group said. “The combined Stop Insider Trading Act and Voter ID Act — which incorporates provisions from the voter-suppressive, so-called SAVE America Act — would allow Members of Congress to continue owning, selling, and, in some cases, purchasing individual stocks while simultaneously imposing stricter voter ID requirements that would make it harder for millions of eligible Americans to vote, including by mail.”

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

US House GOP pushes through budget blueprint for Iran war funding, farm aid

BY JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — Republicans in the U.S. House on Wednesday approved their outline for the third party-line budget measure of the second Trump administration, though they won’t be able to begin work on that package until they reach agreement with their Senate colleagues on a plan forward.

The 216-214 vote on a budget resolution sets up a confrontation between GOP lawmakers in Congress over exactly how much funding to provide for the war in Iran and farm assistance as well as whether lawmakers should pay for it by cutting spending elsewhere.

House Republicans proposed a total of \$95 billion in spending in their budget resolution. The instructions in that blueprint would allow four committees to eventually write bills that would spend up to \$60 billion on the military, \$13 billion on intelligence agencies, \$12 billion on agricultural assistance and \$10 billion on some sort of grant program for states that implement voter ID laws.

But work on that package can only begin after Republicans in both chambers vote to approve the same budget resolution with identical sets of reconciliation instructions.

South Dakota’s vote

FROM SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, voted in favor of a \$95 billion budget resolution that would allow four committees to eventually write bills that would spend up to \$60 billion on the military, \$13 billion on intelligence agencies, \$12 billion on agricultural assistance and \$10 billion on some sort of grant program for states that implement voter ID laws. The House approved the resolution 216-214, though it won’t be able to begin work on the package until reaching agreement with the Senate on a path forward.

Third time around

House Budget Committee Chairman Jodey Arrington, R-Texas, said during floor debate that the GOP has used the reconciliation process twice to achieve policy goals that wouldn’t garner Democratic support.

The first time was last year, when Congress approved the “big, beautiful” law. The second occurred earlier this year, when lawmakers approved three years of funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Border Patrol without new constraints on federal agents. Both were signed into law by President Donald Trump.

“Here we are, reconciliation 3.0, supporting our troops in their time of need,” Arrington said. “Just baseline battlefield readiness. Bullets and bombs to finish the job.”

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The yet-to-be-written reconciliation package, he added, would also likely “strengthen our food supply” and “safeguard the integrity of our elections.”

Pennsylvania Democratic Rep. Brendan Boyle, ranking member on the panel, said that Republicans’ support for the two earlier packages and this budget outline shows they aren’t focused on bringing down costs for Americans.

Boyle also questioned whether campaign promises from GOP candidates to lower the annual federal deficit were genuine, given that this and the previous party-line laws will have a substantial impact on the national debt.

“Yes, that’s right, the same crowd that loves to cry crocodile tears about deficit and debt whenever there’s a president in the White House who’s a Democrat — cumulatively now they have added \$5 trillion to our national debt, more than any other 18-month period in the history of Congress,” he said. “And they’re about to add \$100 billion more.”

Senate GOP not on board

Senate Republicans don’t fully agree on their House counterparts’ proposed spending level, with some wanting considerably more in defense funding, and others looking for ways to offset the costs.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said during a Tuesday afternoon press conference that he’s unlikely to bring any budget resolution to the floor until after lawmakers figure out a way to fund the government ahead of the Oct. 1 shutdown deadline.

Congress’ budget resolution is just a blueprint, similar to a blueprint for building a house. It isn’t a bill and never goes to the president for his signature.

Lawmakers use a completely separate process to fund the government through a dozen annual appropriations bills.

But since lawmakers are nowhere near close to finishing that appropriations task before the start of the new fiscal year they must agree to some sort of short-term spending bill to avoid another shutdown this fall.

The House this week passed a stopgap bill that would extend that deadline until Dec. 4, but it doesn’t have the support needed to advance in the Senate, where leaders from both political parties are working toward a bipartisan compromise.

Thune said he expects the Senate will vote on its stopgap spending bill before leaving for the August recess, which could delay work on a budget resolution until that chamber returns in mid-September.

“It’s possible that that would be something that would get punted into September,” he said.

That could lead to a significant time crunch for Republicans if they want to use the complex budget reconciliation process to enact their party-line defense and farm aid spending package before the November midterm elections.

There are just three weeks in September when both chambers are scheduled to be in session before lawmakers depart for their five-week October break.

And while the House can approve the budget resolution and an eventual party-line package without taking up a single amendment on the floor, the Senate process is considerably more arduous.

The Senate has unlimited amendment debate on both measures, giving Democrats in that chamber dozens of opportunities to challenge Republicans on spending and policy choices.

That’s not necessarily an ideal scenario for Republican Senate leaders, who hope voters will allow the party to hold onto its narrow majority for another two years.

Shauneen Miranda contributed to this report.

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.

Food assistance advocates ask Congress to delay GOP megabill shift of SNAP costs to states

BY SAM GAUNTT

WASHINGTON — Advocates and public health experts urged Republicans in Congress on Wednesday to implement a two-year delay on requiring states to begin sharing the costs for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits.

Provisions of the Republican-backed law that President Donald Trump signed last year that go into effect in October 2027 will require states with high SNAP error rates — the percentage of benefits that are overpaid, underpaid or go to recipients who are ineligible — to begin covering some of the program's costs. It marks a stark change for SNAP, which is solely funded by the federal government.

In an online briefing hosted by the left-leaning think tank Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the American Academy of Pediatrics and Invest in Louisiana, speakers said Congress should use the government funding process to protect access to affordable food for American families.

Sharon Parrott, the center's president, said that Republicans are "looking right past this emergency" and using their current budget resolution to help farmers struggling with increased costs that have resulted from Trump's tariffs and oil prices that have been driven up by the war with Iran — but not low-income grocery shoppers.

"Republican leaders in Congress are ignoring the urgent need to help low-income families and kids who are losing SNAP and can't afford groceries," she said. "Congress could use the budget process to help both farmers and families. At a minimum, Congress needs to slow down the hasty implementation of the massive cost-shift in SNAP costs to states."

She said that since the GOP law, called the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, altered SNAP eligibility requirements, more than 4.5 million people have stopped receiving food assistance benefits. Nearly one-third, 1.5 million, are children.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated the changes to SNAP would reduce federal spending by nearly \$190 billion over the next 10 years.

Local leaders push back

Wednesday's briefing comes amid similar calls from community organizations and state and local leaders from across the country.

On Monday, the United States Conference of Mayors sent a letter to leaders of the Senate Agriculture Committee asking them to reconsider SNAP changes enacted over the last year and shifting funding to states.

"At a time when many Americans continue to face economic challenges, we should be working to expand opportunity and food security, not create new barriers to assistance," the letter, signed by more than 200 mayors, read.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a statement Monday that Republicans and Democrats must work together to draft a farm bill that restores SNAP and protects funding for food assistance.

Schumer added that he will not support any farm bill that does not provide states more time to prepare to shoulder the program's costs.

Time is running out to get a cost-shift pause through Congress.

The House is scheduled to adjourn Friday, and won't be back in session until Aug. 31. Even then, it will just be back for a few weeks, before again adjourning for almost all of October. The Senate will adjourn after the first week in August and will similarly be out for the beginning of September and almost all of October.

All about the error rates

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act will require most states with error rates of above 6% to cover between 5% and 15% percent of the benefits' total cost. States under a 6% error rate will be exempt.

But some states with the highest SNAP error rates — of about 13.3% or higher — will be given an ex-

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tension to lower their error rates before being forced to bear some of the program's costs. Depending on the error rate, the states will be granted up to an extra two years to begin sharing costs.

"Congress can act right now to stop the bleeding and steer us away from this oncoming childhood hunger crisis by extending that same two-year delay to every state — not just the few that benefit from the existing carveout," said Ty Jones Cox, the budget and policy center's vice president for food assistance.

States with the highest error rates in fiscal 2025 included Alaska at 23%, and Delaware and New Mexico both at approximately 16%, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture data.

Cox said the center estimates nearly half of U.S. states will likely have to pay \$100 million or more because of the cost-sharing changes.

"These are huge costs," she said. "States are working hard to reduce their error rates, but they're up against the wall. The law didn't give them any time or resources to do so."

Cox said that states that plan to maintain SNAP benefits will have to find the funding from other places, if they are unable to generate more revenue. She said some states may choose to eliminate summer EBT or end universal school meals to continue funding the program.

Given the steep costs, some states, such as Alabama, have floated the possibility of cutting their SNAP programs entirely if they are unable to lower error rates, Parrott said.

Public health impacts

The effect of losing SNAP benefits extends beyond food insecurity, said Andrew Racine, president of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Besides clean air and water, and a supportive family and environment, he said, food is the most important determinant of a child's health and future success.

Racine added that the long-term benefits of SNAP are not being taken into account when decisions regarding its future are made.

"The benefits of SNAP accrue to that child, accrue to that family, but they accrue to people around them," he said. "[If] you have a child who's not suffering from hunger in the classroom, and their ability to concentrate is improved, that has impact on their fellow classmates who are not on SNAP."

Sam Gauntt is an intern at States Newsroom's Washington bureau through the Dow Jones News Fund internship program. He is a senior journalism major at the University of Maryland and editor in chief of The Diamondback, the university's independent student newspaper. He previously interned with Maryland Matters, an affiliate of States Newsroom.

Onetime acting FEMA chief fired by Trump now on track to be confirmed to head agency

BY JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate on Wednesday moved one step closer to confirming the first administrator for the Federal Emergency Management Agency since President Donald Trump took office last year.

The Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee voted 8-4 to send Cameron Hamilton's nomination to the floor, though it wasn't immediately clear whether the full Senate would vote before it breaks for its August recess.

Hamilton led FEMA in an acting role at the beginning of 2025 but was fired that May after testifying before Congress that he personally did "not believe it is in the best interest of the American people to eliminate the Federal Emergency Management Agency."

Trump has said repeatedly during his second administration he would like to reduce the size and scope of the federal government's disaster management role, shifting more responsibility to state and local governments.

Trump created a FEMA Review Council last year to propose substantial changes to the agency, which is housed within the Department of Homeland Security. That group released its recommendations in early May, though neither the administration nor Congress has taken steps to implement those proposals.

Hamilton said during his confirmation hearing in June that if confirmed by the Senate he would ensure

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FEMA is "objective" and "fair."

He said he believes the agency's "disaster declaration process and also the federal mentorship that goes into it needs to be improved."

"I believe states need to receive better customer service. I have full faith and confidence in the FEMA workforce, but we can do better," Hamilton said. "And there's a significant amount of areas where that process should be simplified, better understood and we owe you answers, I think, much faster."

Hamilton wrote in the ethics paperwork that is a required part of the confirmation process after being fired from FEMA in May 2025 he worked as a senior adviser in the Education Department until August.

After that he was hired as the senior vice president of response and recovery at LTS, Inc. in Virginia, where he worked from August until April, when he became a senior adviser/senior counselor at the Department of Homeland Security.

Hamilton reported a salary of \$247,916 and a bonus of \$350,000 during the roughly eight months he worked at LTS, Inc. He expects to receive another bonus from the company valued between \$250,001 and \$500,000 at some point in the future.

LTS, Inc. writes on its website that it is "an award-winning enterprise consulting" firm that focuses on emergency response, automated healthcare solutions and occupational health services.

In the ethics agreement filed with the government, Hamilton wrote that he transferred ownership of his consultant business, Onward Operations, LLC, to his spouse in March. He transferred ownership of his retail coffee business, Onward Valor, LLC, to his spouse in January.

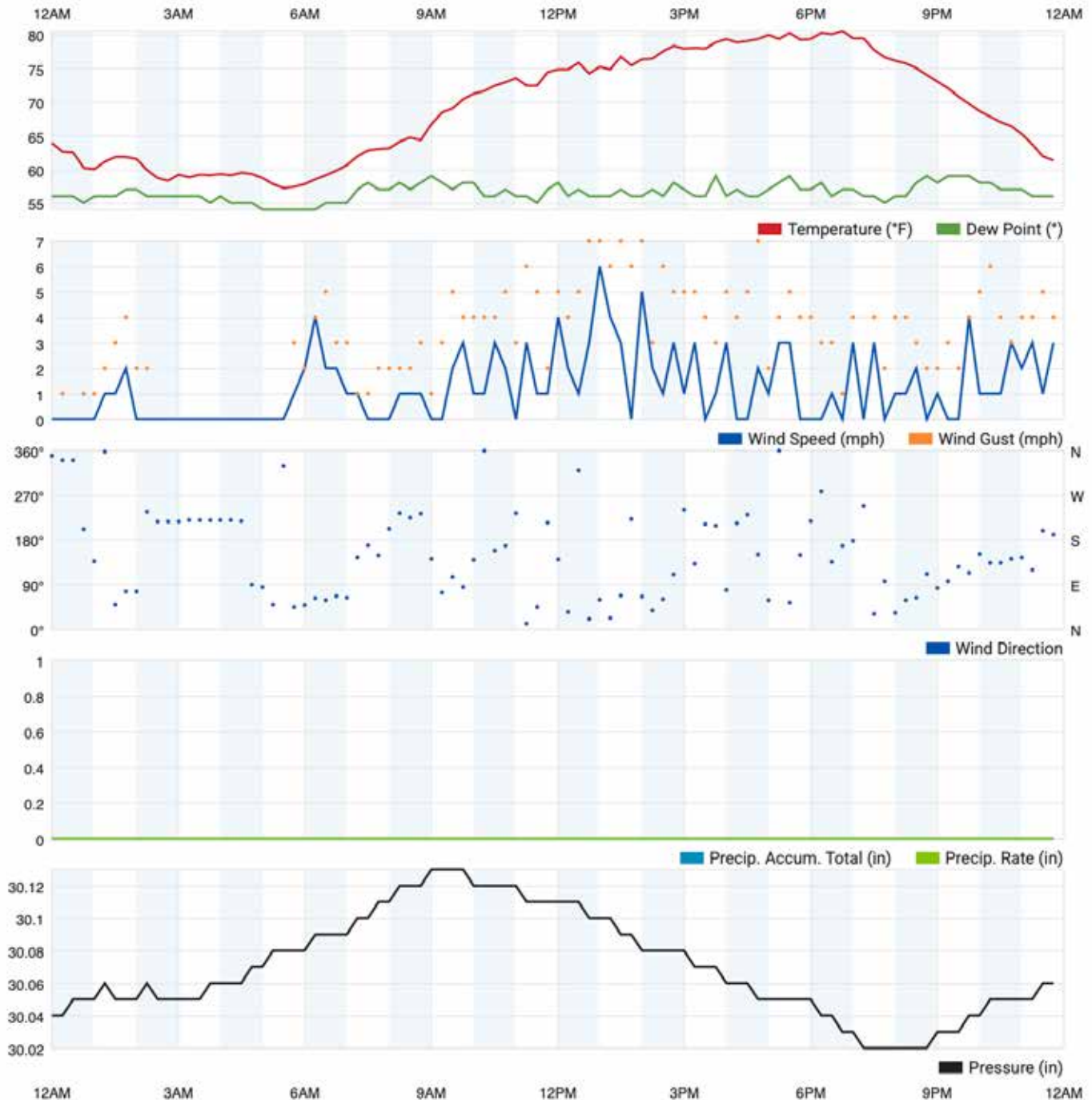
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

July 22, 2026



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Today



High: 82 °F

Increasing
Clouds

Tonight



Low: 61 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Friday



High: 90 °F

Hot

Friday Night



Low: 65 °F

Decreasing
Clouds

Saturday



High: 99 °F

Hot

Today
30-55% chance for showers and thunderstorms mainly Hwy 14 south.
Highs: 78-85°F

Friday
25-35% chance for PM showers and thunderstorms Hwy 12 north. Some storms may be strong to severe.
Highs: 84-100°F (warmest north central SD)

Saturday
Dangerous heat returns.
Warmest across central SD.
Highs: 94-106°F

NOAA

July 23, 2026 3:36 AM

Showers with some isolated thunderstorms spread east into central SD this morning, mainly south of Hwy 14. Heat returns on Friday from the James Valley west, and temperatures climb through the weekend across the region. There is a marginal risk (1 out of 5) for severe storms Friday PM mainly north of Hwy 12 if any storms develop. Strong winds to 60 mph and 1 inch diameter hail would be the main threats.

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Abnormally Warm Weekend

High Temperatures Thursday, July 23 - Monday, July 27

	Thu 7/23	Fri 7/24	Sat 7/25	Sun 7/26	Mon 7/27
Aberdeen	81	90	97	98	94
Mobridge	84	97	104	104	99
Pierre	79	94	103	104	99
Sisseton	84	89	96	97	94
Watertown	79	84	95	95	92

Max Temperature (°F)

Information:

The table displays the weather element values based on model predictions from the National Blend of Models.

Additional Details



Abnormal Warmth:

- Temperatures are expected to increase through the weekend.
- Areas may see highs over 100° Saturday and Sunday.



Potential Impacts

- This level of heat may cause heat-related illness, particularly for those without adequate cooling.
- Limit strenuous activity to the morning or evening.
- Take action if you notice signs of heat stroke and/or heat exhaustion in yourself or others.

Valid: Thu 07 pm CDT - Mon 07 pm CDT

Issued: Wed, Jul 22, 2025, 1 pm CDT



A warming trend will take place over the next couple of days. By the weekend, much of the area may see high temperatures in the upper 90s to perhaps the low 100s. Limit strenuous activity to the morning or evening, and take action if you notice signs of heat stroke or heat exhaustion in yourself or others.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 81 °F at 6:48 PM

Low Temp: 57 °F at 5:33 AM

Wind: 8 mph at 5:32 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 109 in 1941

Record Low: 41 in 1904

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 2.44

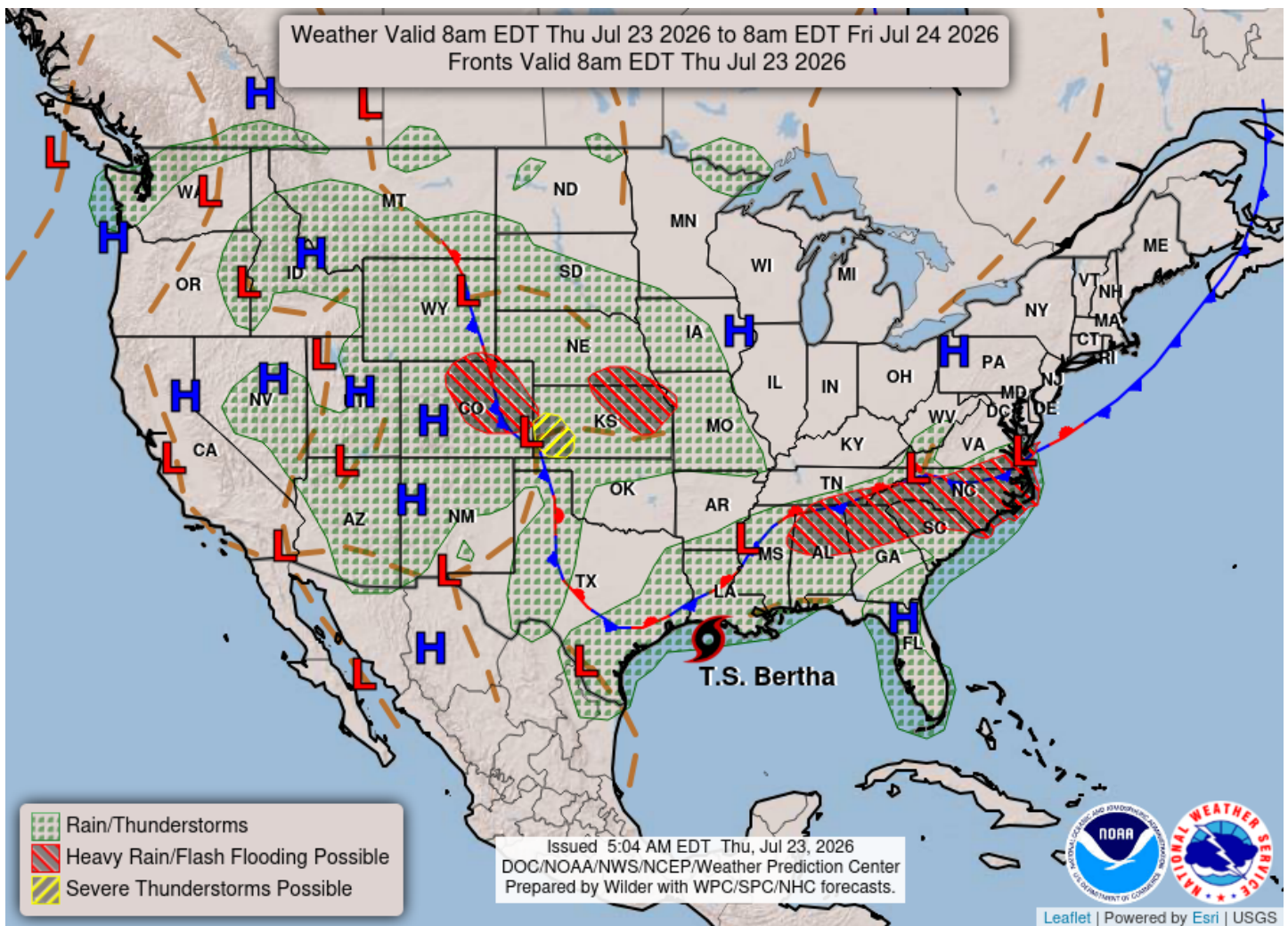
Precip to date in July.: 4.77

Average Precip to date: 13.45

Precip Year to Date: 14.24

Sunset Tonight: 9:11 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:07 am



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Today in Weather History

July 23, 2007: High heat indices along with very little wind contributed to the deaths of over 2800 cattle in Brown, Spink, Day, and Marshall Counties. Most of the cattle deaths occurred on July 23rd. The high heat indices continued through the 25th with some more cattle deaths, but protective measures kept the death count down. Most of the cattle that died were on feedlots. The total loss was around 3 million dollars.

July 23, 2010: A United States record setting hailstone fell from a powerful supercell thunderstorm moving southeast across central South Dakota. The record setting hailstone fell near Vivian, South Dakota and measured 8 inches in diameter, 18.625 inches in circumference, and weighed 1.9375 pounds. This hailstone broke the previous United States record for diameter (7.0 inches - 22 June 2003 in Aurora, NE) and weight (1.67 pounds - 3 September 1970 in Coffeyville, KS). The Aurora, Nebraska hailstone will retain the record for circumference (18.75 inches). Several other stones of 6 inches or more in diameter were measured during the storm survey.

Along with the huge hail, damaging winds more than 70 mph along with an isolated tornado occurred. The large hail and high winds caused extensive damage to homes, outbuildings, and vehicles as it moved southeast across the region. Some of the hail went entirely through car windshields, roofs, garages, and campers. The hail caused five minor injuries to motorists on Interstate 90 as it went through their windshields. A child was severely injured when the large hail completely shattered the glass in the mini-van he was traveling. The child suffered numerous cuts, many requiring stitches. Click [HERE](#) for more information from NOAA.

1788: Called the George Washington's Hurricane, this storm originated near Bermuda on the 19th before making landfall in Virginia. It passed directly over the Lower Chesapeake Bay and Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington. This track is very similar to the path of the Chesapeake-Potomac hurricane of 1933. At Norfolk, winds increased at 5 p.m. on the 23rd with the wind originating from the northeast. At 12:30 a.m., the wind suddenly shifted to the south and "blew a perfect hurricane, tearing down chimneys, fences"...some corn was also leveled. Also, large trees were uprooted, and houses were moved from their foundations.

Port Royal and Hobb's Hole experienced a violent northeast gale which drove several vessels ashore. In Fredricksburg, vast quantities of corn, tobacco, and fruit were destroyed. Houses and trees fell in significant numbers across Northumberland, Lancaster, Richmond, and Westmoreland counties. Crops were destroyed, and many livestock perished in Lower Mathews County. Many plantations saw their houses leveled. Homes were flooded with water six feet deep, and several inhabitants drowned.

Historical figures of the time logged the storm's antics. George Washington noted the sinking of the small ship Federalist and uprooted trees. Colonel James Madison, the father of the future president, experienced the passing of great winds and rains near Orange. In Alexandria, damage to wheat, tobacco, and corn was "beyond description." The information above is from the Weather Prediction Center and noted American historian David Ludlum.

1898 — A two hour thunderstorm deluged Atlanta, GA, with 4.32 inches of rain. More than a foot of water flooded Union Depot. Many street car motors burned out while trying to run through flooded streets. It grew so dark before the afternoon storm that gas lights were needed. (The Weather Channel)

1923 — Sheridan, WY, was drenched with 4.41 inches of rain, an all-time 24 hour record for that location. Associated flooding washed out 20 miles of railroad track. (22nd-23rd) (The Weather Channel)

2011: Chicago set an all-time daily record rainfall when 6.86 inches fell during the early morning hours of Saturday, July 23, 2011, at O'Hare airport. The previous daily record was 6.64 inches set on September 13, 2008.



The Blessings of Wisdom

Seeking the Lord leads to peace and success that the world could never offer.

Proverbs 3:1-4: 1 My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments;

2 For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you.

3 Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart.

4 So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man.

The world claims there are many paths to a successful, rewarding life: education, wealth, public recognition, service ... But true fulfillment comes from the Lord and following His wisdom.

Today's passage says that when we choose to align our heart with scriptural truth, we will "find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man" (v. 4). This isn't a formula for success—it's a description of what happens when we live in harmony with how life was designed to work. God's wisdom helps us see situations from His perspective and respond in ways that honor Him.

When we walk in His wisdom, we gain strength to stand firm in our faith even when circumstances are difficult. We learn to trust His character instead of demanding immediate answers. Wisdom doesn't eliminate hardship (John 16:33), but it does anchor us in the truth that God is good, faithful, and present with us, even in seasons we don't understand.

There's a peace that comes from knowing God, and it isn't dependent on our circumstances going well. It's rooted in confidence that our Father sees, cares, and is at work in ways we may not yet recognize. This is the kind of deep, sustaining peace the world cannot provide—and it's available to all who seek the Lord and trust His wisdom above their own understanding.

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:
07.22.26

25 38 44 45 47 5

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

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 21 Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.21.26

25 37 59 68 70 10

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$743,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 6 Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.22.26

1 12 14 29 33 6

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,100,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 21 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.22.26

8 11 22 25 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 36 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.22.26

9 51 54 60 61 15

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 5 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.22.26

4 5 22 50 58 1

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$600,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 5 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

US is ready to help end the 'senseless war' in Ukraine but no quick deal ahead, Rubio says

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Thursday that the Trump administration is poised to help end the "senseless war" in Ukraine but acknowledged there is no quick path to a deal, saying diplomacy will require sustained effort and new ideas.

Rubio, who held talks with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov, said Moscow and Kyiv should have the incentive to end a "very bloody war" that has devastated both sides.

Rubio alluded to how U.S.-mediated talks have stalled, calling them "unsuccessful or at least unfruitful" in the past but insisted that President Donald Trump was committed to the work "if conditions and factors have changed to make that possible."

"That's been the challenge — an end that both sides can accept. And we've tried and we'll continue to try to see if we can, you know, find a middle ground that brings this about. And we're prepared to play that role if the opportunity presents itself," Rubio told reporters.

Rubio met Lavrov and several other leaders, including China's foreign minister, on the sidelines of an annual gathering by foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Manila.

America's top diplomat said the U.S. is focused on Asia even as it steps up fighting with Iran, seeks a pathway to end Russia's war in Ukraine and pressures the Cuban government to make changes.

ASEAN talks focused on international conflicts

Three days of closed-door talks that started Tuesday have centered on the escalating war in the Middle East and tensions in the South China Sea, where a new clash flared Thursday.

"There's always going to be a concern that America is so focused on one place that it can't focus on another," Rubio told reporters. But he said the U.S. remains "engaged in Asia every single day," citing strong partnerships and economic ties across the region.

After meeting with Rubio, Lavrov largely ignored questions from reporters. The Russian Foreign Ministry in Moscow said he emphasized to Rubio "the unacceptability of further arming" Ukraine and accused European countries of pursuing Russia's "strategic defeat."

Lavrov reiterated Russia's readiness for "a political and diplomatic resolution of the conflict" and commitment to agreements reached at a summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Trump in Alaska last year, the Russian ministry said.

But Rubio said "we'll have to find new suggestions and new ideas" that are acceptable to both sides for a peace deal. There has been no change to Washington's military support for Ukraine, with weapons being purchased by NATO allies and transferred to the war-ravaged country, he said.

U.S. efforts to broker an end to the Russia-Ukraine war have been overshadowed by the outbreak of the Iran war earlier this year. Renewed strikes by Washington and Tehran have been intensifying after an interim ceasefire deal collapsed.

"The price will continue to get higher every single night until they come to their senses," Rubio said. He insisted Tehran is "begging" for talks but Trump does not see the use in responding because "Iran is clearly not ready to make a deal, at least not one they're willing to live by."

Trump has warned Iran that the U.S. will destroy one Iranian bridge or power plant each time Iran shoots at a ship in the Strait of Hormuz. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi responded by saying the country's defense doctrine was an "eye for an eye."

"The president's policy is a head for an eye," Rubio said. "They will pay a very heavy price for the things they're doing."

China defends maritime military actions

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong renewed her country's alarm over the Chinese navy's recent

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test-launch of a missile from a nuclear-powered submarine in the region, saying the lack of notification to the Philippines and Pacific nations where the missile flew over and landed was destabilizing.

"It comes in the context of a rapid military build-up of China's nuclear arsenal without the transparency or reassurance the region expects," Wong told a university forum in Manila on Thursday. "This is why Australia has described the test as provocative and destabilizing."

China has defended its actions, saying the launch was part of annual exercises and that it gave countries in the area appropriate notice in advance.

Rubio had a long meeting Wednesday with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Rubio told reporters that he and Wang discussed a new altercation this week between Chinese and Filipino forces in a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims virtually in its entirety. Rubio called the incident "escalatory."

"Those need to be managed very carefully, because obviously, a conflict — be it economic or otherwise — between the U.S. and China would have a dramatic global impact," Rubio said.

He also said they talked a lot about Chinese leader Xi Jinping's planned trip in September, noting he believes Xi will have a "very positive visit when he comes to Washington."

In Beijing, the Chinese coast guard said it took necessary measures, including monitoring and blocking, to drive away two Philippine ships that disregarded repeated warnings from the Chinese side in a fresh confrontation Thursday.

China said its operations were professional and lawful and urged the Philippines to stop its provocative actions infringing on Chinese territory. Philippine officials did not immediately comment.

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. Taiwan and ASEAN members Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei have also been involved in the often-tense territorial standoffs.

ASEAN aims to conclude yearslong negotiations with China on a proposed non-aggression pact by this year, according to a draft of a joint communiqué seen by The Associated Press. The so-called code of conduct aims to prevent a major conflict in the disputed waters, a key global trade route, that could draw in the United States.

Mideast oil producers step up plans to bypass the Strait of Hormuz

By DAVID McHUGH Associated Press

Before the war in Iran, roughly 15 million barrels of Persian Gulf oil were shipped each day through the Strait of Hormuz. Within a few years, much of that oil could bypass the strait.

As Iran's chokehold over the strait drags on and oil prices surge, countries across the Gulf are planning to spend billions of dollars to build pipelines enabling them to redirect more supplies to ports along the Red Sea and the Gulf of Oman.

At least seven major pipeline projects are under construction, in the planning stage or being discussed as possibilities, according to government officials, oil companies and analysts. The war has been a wake-up call for Gulf oil producers, who are determined to become less dependent on a transit point that hugs Iran's coast.

But alternatives to Hormuz are also vulnerable to disruption. Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels said early Thursday they had attacked two Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea, a key alternative route to the strait for Saudi oil exports.

Some alternative routes will take the oil on longer and more expensive paths to market. Regardless, producers have realized that relying so heavily on the Strait of Hormuz "is no longer a prudent long-term strategy," said Victoria Grabenwöger, senior research analyst at data firm Kpler.

The Red Sea and Gulf of Oman have become vital alternatives to Hormuz

The effective shutdown of the Strait of Hormuz would have been an even greater shock to the world economy were it not for a pipeline Saudi Arabia built in the 1980s amid fears that Tehran would disrupt shipping through the strait during the Iran-Iraq war.

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The Saudis' East-West pipeline carries oil across the desert nation from a processing facility in Abqaiq to the city of Yanbu on the Red Sea coast. Once there, it is loaded onto tankers that head either south to the Arabian Sea or north to the Suez Canal.

The United Arab Emirates has been sending more oil to the port of Fujairah, which abuts the Gulf of Oman, about 145 kilometers (90 miles) south of Hormuz.

Combined, the two pipelines had spare capacity of about 3.5 million to 5.5 million barrels per day before the war began, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. The two pipelines are now running near full capacity.

More oil could begin flowing through a UAE port by next year

The state-owned oil company of Abu Dhabi, one of the UAE's seven emirates, is accelerating construction of a \$3 billion, 300-kilometer (200-mile) pipeline to Fujairah. That pipeline, which will run parallel to an existing one, aims to increase oil supplied to Fujairah by more than 1.2 million barrels a day.

The project, which started before the war, is now reportedly about halfway completed, according to Kpler. The pipeline is intended to be completed by early 2027, but Kpler says mid-2027 is more likely given the need to expand the port at Fujairah.

The ambitious timeline "has only become feasible against the backdrop of the Strait of Hormuz blockade," Kpler's Grabenwöger said.

Plans to pipe more oil to Turkey and Syria will take longer

In Iraq, officials are ramping up plans to develop alternative export routes for southern oil fields around Basra. Iraq is so dependent on the Strait of Hormuz that it has had to scale back production.

The Iraqi government, which gets some 90% of its revenues from oil sales, has been pursuing pipeline projects with U.S. companies. One would take supplies from an oil terminal in Basra — through which more than 3 million barrels were exported daily before the war — to the port of Ceyhan in Turkey, along the Mediterranean Sea.

That pipeline would also have a branch extending to the Mediterranean port of Baniyas in Syria. Some 2 million barrels a day of oil could ultimately flow through the pipeline to Baniyas, which the U.S. State Department has called "a critical energy corridor."

Iraqi officials have also held discussions with Jordan on advancing long-discussed plans for a pipeline that would carry oil from Basra to Aqaba. From there it would be exported via the Red Sea or the Suez Canal to Asia and beyond.

The new pipelines will add time and costs — and are also vulnerable to attacks

Taken together, the new projects to bypass Hormuz could carry an added 3.8 million barrels of oil a day by the end of next year, and 7.3 million barrels per day by the end of 2028, according to analysts at the investment bank Goldman Sachs. The projects would mean some 60% of the Gulf's total prewar exports of 23 million barrels a day could bypass Hormuz if needed, the analysts said.

Pipelines from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea send oil in the wrong direction to help Asian countries that relied on exports through Hormuz, requiring a much longer trip around the southern tip of Africa.

Any additional supplies piped from Saudi Arabia to the Red Sea will also be vulnerable to attacks by Houthi rebels in Yemen, as Thursday's attacks show; the rebels have successfully disrupted shipping before at the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.

That oil could also be sent to the Suez Canal instead to reach the Mediterranean. But the canal cannot accommodate the industry's largest tankers, which hold up to 2 million barrels per vessel and are often the most cost-efficient way to transport oil long distances.

And pipelines themselves are not immune to attack. The Saudi East-West pipeline was shut down by a Houthi drone strike in May 2019.

Meanwhile oil pipelines don't help with the disruption to supplies of liquefied natural gas, or LNG, carried by ship. About one-fifth of the world's LNG — much of it from Qatar and headed for Asian customers — transited the strait before the war.

Amish Shah wins Democratic congressional primary in Arizona, a blow to the party establishment

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Amish Shah won the Democratic primary Wednesday in a hotly contested congressional district in Arizona, delivering another defeat to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which backed a rival, as more voters reject the preferences of party leaders in Washington.

Shah, an emergency physician, will face Republican Jay Feely, a former NFL kicker who was endorsed by President Donald Trump in his primary, in the fall. Before becoming political opponents, Feely and Shah were part of the same team — the New York Jets. Shah was a doctor on the sidelines, while Feely was the kicker.

The DCCC backed Marlene Galán-Woods, a former Republican who switched parties at the beginning of Trump's first term.

The competition for the 1st Congressional District, an affluent area that includes northeast Phoenix, Scottsdale, Fountain Hills and Paradise Valley, is expected to help determine control of the U.S. House. Although Republicans hold a voter registration advantage, the district has shifted toward the center over the last decade.

The seat is open because Republican Rep. David Schweikert ran for governor, losing to Rep. Andy Biggs in the GOP primary on Tuesday.

The DCCC's decision to endorse Galán-Woods, a former television journalist in Phoenix, puzzled local Democrats because there was little ideological difference between her and Shah. Both are moderates, and the race was not a proxy fight in the party's deepening feud between progressives and centrists.

"Our victory in this primary was a grassroots victory where Arizona voters made their voices heard," Shah said Wednesday night in a statement that did not address the DCCC snub. "Now, it's my job to earn the support of every voter in this district."

Rep. Suzan DelBene, the DCCC Chair, issued a statement calling Feely an "extremist" and saying Shah "will always put his community first," but did not address the controversy surrounding the support for Galán-Woods.

The National Republican Congressional Committee quickly released a digital ad Wednesday attacking Shah, labeling him a socialist and tying him to progressives in Congress.

"I'm a political outsider committed to delivering results," Feely said in a statement.

The race was in some ways a replay of 2024, when Shah narrowly won in a crowded primary field that included Galán-Woods and lost in the general election. The DCCC did not endorse in the primary that year but backed Shah in the general.

The DCCC announced its support for Galán-Woods in May, when it added her to a list of candidates it was supporting in Republican-controlled districts. At the time, DelBene talked up Galán-Woods' experience in broadcast journalism but said nothing about Shah.

"I wasn't exactly my party's pick," Shah told supporters Tuesday night. "And I was willing to stand up to that establishment. And that's what the voters of this district want."

Still, he has said he would work with the DCCC if nominated. He will need support from the party and its donors to win what's likely to be a tough race in a district Trump carried narrowly in 2024. Former Democratic President Joe Biden won the district in 2020 even as Schweikert was reelected.

Antiestablishment fervor has spooked congressional leaders, who fear that swing voters will see some insurgent candidates as too extreme and squander Democrats' opportunity to take advantage of Trump's unpopularity.

Last month progressive Randy Villegas beat a DCCC-backed candidate for a top battleground district in California's Central Valley. And similarly in Maine, Matt Dunlap defeated a more moderate rival backed by the party.

DCCC support generally brings an influx of money and staffing, both from the party itself and from the

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donors and interest groups that take its cues. But establishment support has been a turnoff for some voters.

"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."

In the GOP primary, Feely defeated Joseph Chaplik, a former state lawmaker popular with grassroots activists, for the party's nomination. He was in the NFL with seven teams over 14 seasons, including with the Arizona Cardinals from 2010 to 2013. He became an NFL broadcaster after retiring in 2014.

Feely and Shah overlapped on the Jets during the 2008 and 2009 seasons, when Shah worked home games as an airway management physician, according to his campaign. Every NFL game has an airway management doctor on the sideline to intubate and resuscitate a catastrophically injured player.

"It's an old relationship," Feely said of Shah on Tuesday night, before it was clear which Democrat he would face in November. "But whoever it is, I want to do this the right way. I want to run this the right way."

Houthis say they attacked 2 Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea as US carries out 12th night of strikes

By ELENA BECATOROS and FATMA KHALED Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels said early Thursday they had attacked two Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea, and the U.S. military conducted a 12th night of strikes against Iran as the two countries vie for control of vital shipping lanes.

The Houthi attack threatened to open a new front in a war that has roiled the global economy, sending prices for fuel and other goods surging across the world. With the standoff in the Gulf deepening, there were no signs of progress in diplomatic efforts to end the conflict.

U.S. Central Command said its strikes were designed to "further degrade Iran's ability to threaten civilian mariners and commercial vessels transiting regional waters," as the Americans push to regain control over the Strait of Hormuz and restore the flow of international shipping.

U.S. President Donald Trump warned on Wednesday that the U.S. would destroy one bridge or power plant each time Iran shoots at a ship in the strait.

Both sides have increasingly threatened civilian infrastructure. International law generally prohibits such attacks unless the infrastructure is being used for military purposes.

"From this point forward, any time the Islamic Republic of Iran shoots at a ship in the Strait of Hormuz, whether it be by Missile, Rocket, Drone, or any other device or weapon, the United States will bomb and destroy ONE BRIDGE OR POWER PLANT," Trump wrote on social media.

Rubio says Iran doesn't seem serious about a deal

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, attending a regional summit in the Philippines, said Iran wants to talk but doesn't seem serious about wanting a deal.

"The problem with them is you can't make a deal with people unless they're going to keep it. And these people make deals and then they break it almost immediately or they decide, 'oh, let's change the deal.' That's not how deals work," Rubio said. "So now they're paying the price for it, and maybe they'll change their mind here over the next few days as they continue to suffer great losses."

Iran-backed Houthis say they attacked oil tankers

The Houthis' SABA news agency said the rebels had struck two tankers, the Encelia and the Layla, in the Red Sea, leading to fires on both. That would be their first reported attack on a vessel since they announced a blockade of Saudi-linked shipping through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait earlier this week in retaliation for the kingdom's blockade on Yemen and a recent attack on the international airport in Yemen's rebel-held capital, Sanaa.

Bab el-Mandeb, at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, is a vital shipping chokepoint connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden. Around 12% of the world's trade, including a fourth of global container traffic, passes through there, moving between Europe and Asia via Egypt's Suez Canal.

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A senior official with the Houthis said the blockade on Saudi-linked shipping would remain in effect until a years-old Saudi blockade against the Houthis is lifted. The official gave no details of the attack and spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

The state-run Saudi Press Agency reported the Encelia was set ablaze by an attack while sailing overnight in the Red Sea, citing an unidentified source from the General Authority of Transport. It said there were no casualties. It did not mention the Layla.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations Center, UKMTO, said it received a report of a tanker being struck by "an unknown projectile" 70 nautical miles (80 miles, 130 kilometers) southwest of Al Shuqaiq, Saudi Arabia, in the Red Sea. It said no casualties had been reported.

Asked about the tanker attack, Rubio said he hoped the Houthis would "de-escalate."

"I think the Houthis, frankly, got snookered into this thing by the Iranians. And they were smart to stay out of it, and they should stay out of it and they should stop. We'll see what happens there. Obviously, it's not a positive development," Rubio said.

Both sides dig in over Strait of Hormuz dispute

The continued American airstrikes are occurring as both sides have dug in on their dispute over the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway for global energy that remains largely closed. The closure of the strait, through which a fifth of the world's traded oil and gas passed during peacetime, has jolted the world economy with effects far beyond the Middle East.

Iran says it has the right to manage traffic and potentially charge fees in the strait, which was open to all and toll-free before the war. It has attacked ships using a route through the strait that is overseen by U.S. forces and intended to be outside Tehran's control.

In response to Iran's attacks, the U.S. re-imposed a blockade on Iranian ports and began the widening campaign of strikes across the country. On Tuesday, Trump signaled that U.S. forces could soon target an under-construction Iranian nuclear site buried deep under a mountain.

Iran's parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, who has led negotiations with the U.S., appeared to brush off Trump's threats.

"We have repeatedly said that the situation of the strait will not return to prewar conditions," he wrote on social media.

U.S. strikes in Iran overnight

Iranian state media reported that U.S. missiles struck locations overnight near the cities of Ahvaz, Ramshir and Andimeshk in western Iran, and two people were killed in a U.S. missile strike in the town of Shalamchek on the Iraqi border.

Iran has responded to U.S. attacks by targeting energy infrastructure and desalination plants providing drinking water in parched neighboring Gulf countries.

Jordanian authorities said Thursday the country's military had intercepted three missiles Thursday morning, with a fourth falling in an empty area, while six drones were intercepted Wednesday night.

Bahrain's Interior Ministry posted on X that sirens had sounded and urged the public to remain calm and head to a safe area.

Overnight, military officials in Kuwait said on social media that their air defenses were "confronting attacks by hostile drones."

Iran's Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi said Tehran would adopt an "eye for an eye" defense doctrine.

"Any aggression against Iran, including our infrastructure, will compel a powerful and decisive response," he posted Wednesday on X.

Diplomatic efforts show no signs of progress

Iranian Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni held meetings in recent days in 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.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned "in the strongest possible terms" the attacks on the Saudi tankers in the Red Sea, a statement from his office said.

Iran's Interior Ministry spokesperson Ali Zeinivand said "diplomacy isn't called off" and that messages were still being exchanged, according to IRNA.

An Arab diplomat said Gulf states are increasingly pessimistic about finding an off-ramp for escalating hostilities and are particularly concerned about the latest round of threats.

The diplomat said regional countries, in addition to Pakistan and Turkey, are continuing to push for de-escalation but that chances for improvement currently appear bleak. The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the situation.

India protest movement holds capital sit-in as police crack down on demonstrators

By SHEIKH SAALIQ and SHONAL GANGULY Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Thousands of young protesters were camped on the streets of India's capital New Delhi on Thursday, defying new restrictions in the latest show of strength for a movement that has become one of the biggest challenges to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

India's "Cockroach" protests began more than a month ago over alleged leaks in some of the country's most competitive entrance exams for medical colleges and government jobs. The movement has since expanded beyond exam grievances, drawing professionals and families while channeling broader frustration.

Thursday's demonstrations at Jantar Mantar, a designated protest site in New Delhi, followed overnight clashes in which police used tear gas and batons to disperse crowds, the second such confrontation this week.

On Monday, thousands of protesters had defied restrictions and marched toward Parliament before police broke up the demonstration with tear gas and batons.

Protesters regrouped by Thursday morning, returning to the protest site despite roadblocks, while authorities suspended Delhi Metro services at 16 stations across central New Delhi in an effort to limit access to the demonstrations.

Modi tries to contain protest fallout

The issue of exam leaks has become a powerful symbol of frustration for millions of young Indians. Protesters are demanding the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, examination system reforms and compensation for families of students who died by suicide after exam paper leaks.

Facing mounting pressure, Modi addressed the issue publicly for the first time Thursday, announcing fast-track courts to handle examination paper leak cases. Fast-track courts are special courts created to speed up cases in India's notoriously slow justice system.

"Nothing is more important than the welfare and future of our youth!," Modi wrote on X.

The announcement failed to calm protesters, who said Modi was not addressing their demands for accountability and reform.

"Rather than providing solution which is convenient for him, he should work toward a solution which is convenient for the nation and set an example," law student Daksh Bhargava said.

Cockroach party stays true to satirical origins

Leaders of the Cockroach Janta Party, which launched the protest movement, said they would not end the demonstrations until the education minister resigned. Staying true to the movement's tongue-in-cheek style, its founder, Abhijeet Dipke, responded by posting a meme of Pradhan captioned, "Hi, my name is Nothing."

The Cockroach movement began as online satire campaign in May and moved to the streets in June through smaller protests across cities. It gained momentum after prominent activist Sonam Wangchuk joined the demonstration and began a hunger strike that has lasted more than three weeks. Police forcibly transferred Wangchuk to a hospital over the weekend.

Protests reflect rising youth anger

For many young Indians, the protests have become one of the few visible expressions of dissent in a country where demonstrations against Modi's government have led to a broader crackdown on activists,

opposition figures and public protests.

The movement's rapid growth beyond student groups reflects wider frustration among young Indians and echoes a broader trend across South Asia, where young people have driven anti-government movements in recent years.

The movement also has gained a following among Indians of all ages over concerns about government accountability, unemployment and economic opportunity.

Opposition parties have backed the protests, using the issue to challenge the government in Parliament. Demonstrations and solidarity events have been held in other Indian cities, reflecting how the movement has spread beyond the capital.

India has one of the world's youngest populations, with millions entering a labor market that has struggled to create enough secure, well-paying jobs. Despite years of rapid economic growth, many young people say their prospects have not improved.

As one of the country's largest voting blocs, India's youth could also become an increasingly important political force ahead of future elections.

Dismissal of Ukraine's defense minister started a sudden transformation of the military

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — In the span of a single week, the dismissal of a Ukrainian defense minister set in motion a transformation of the country's armed forces that replaced the old guard with a new generation of leadership.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's decision to fire his popular defense minister, Mykhailo Fedorov, triggered days of public protest that quickly shifted toward the country's commander-in-chief and highlighted the growing rift over the future of Ukraine's military.

Demonstrators denounced the commander, Oleksandr Syrskyi, and overwhelmingly rallied behind the departed defense minister, who has emerged as one of the country's most influential wartime reformers with support from Ukrainians hungry for change. Protesters demanded his reinstatement. Fedorov's dismissal followed months of increasingly bitter disagreements between the two men.

For Zelenskyy, it was the second time in a year that a wartime decision triggered a public backlash, after he moved in mid-2025 to curb the powers of anti-corruption agencies. As he did then, the president appeared to move quickly to contain the political fallout. He dismissed Syrskyi and replaced him with Mykhailo Drapaty, a disciplined battlefield commander whose reputation was forged in the years following Russia's first invasion in 2014.

Drapaty's appointment marked a sharp generational and philosophical break from Syrskyi, who was shaped by Soviet military tradition. But public support continues to coalesce around Fedorov. The protests have further elevated his political standing.

New appointment eases concerns about military morale

Much of the public's anger was directed at Syrskyi, who became a symbol of deeper frustrations that had accumulated within the military since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

Drapaty's appointment has helped ease some of those concerns. Widely respected by troops and fellow officers, he represents a younger generation of commanders whose credibility was earned on the battlefield rather than inherited through the Soviet military system.

"He enjoys a high level of trust within the military. I think this appointment could boost what is often called morale, that is, strengthen the fighting spirit," said Oleksandr Musienko, a military analyst in Kyiv.

The divide between Fedorov and Syrskyi was described by one Western defense official as between "different planets." The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief journalists.

Fedorov championed a data-driven, technology-led approach to warfare that clashed with Syrskyi's more traditional ground-forces doctrine. Drapaty could be a bridge between the two camps, analysts said. Low-

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profile but highly respected, he has earned the confidence of front-line commanders while embracing many of the reforms championed in Kyiv.

"He has shown an ability to adapt to the realities of modern warfare, to changing battlefield conditions and to shifting and reallocating resources," Musiienko said.

For many Ukrainians, Syrskyi came to embody the rigid command structures and Soviet-era thinking that Fedorov's ambitious reforms sought to overhaul. When Fedorov publicly identified Syrskyi as the chief obstacle to those reforms, it brought to light those broader public grievances.

They include the military's entrenched bureaucracy and Syrskyi's command style, criticized as overly centralized and prone to micromanagement, alongside constant mobilization challenges.

Syrskyi also came under intense criticism for his association with the 425th Separate Assault Regiment, known as Skelia, which for many Ukrainians became emblematic of the tactics that expended soldiers' lives for marginal territorial gains.

In addition, the regiment was the focus of a major public scandal after an investigation by the Ukrainian publication Babel reported allegations of systemic abuse, torture in training camps and dozens of non-combat deaths. The allegations triggered an investigation, resulted in the suspension of the regiment's commander and intensified scrutiny of the military's command culture.

Apparent reversal is the second for Zelenskyy since last year

To some lawmakers and analysts, the episode demonstrated that democracy and accountability is alive in Ukraine despite martial law and the suspension of elections. Zelenskyy, they argued, showed he is still responsive to public demand.

Other lawmakers, however, cautioned that the episode could set a troubling precedent by allowing public sentiment, rather than institutional decision-making, to shape appointments to the military's highest ranks.

Tetiana Shevchuk, a board member of Ukraine's Anti-Corruption Action Center, said protest is one of the few ways the public can make their voice heard in the absence of elections.

"Frustrations built up to the point where people felt the only way to be heard was to take to the streets. That's not a healthy precedent, but it should also be a signal to the government to address problems before they reach that stage," Shevchuk said.

Ukrainian social media quickly filled with memes mocking the president's apparent search for a new army chief, jokes that underscored the political cost of the episode for Zelenskyy.

Some memes depicted Zelenskyy interviewing absurd candidates, including Jon Snow from the "Game of Thrones" television series, as well as an alien and a dolphin.

Zelenskyy recently weathered a politically damaging corruption investigation involving several of his closest associates, including his former chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, who was dismissed amid mounting public pressure.

Support for Fedorov reflects public's desire for reform

The protests were not simply an expression of support for Fedorov, Shevchuk said. They reflected public backing for the reforms he aspired to create.

"Fedorov was pushing the idea that Ukraine had to preserve every soldier's life and become more efficient than Russia," Shevchuk said. "Over the past six months, people finally felt Ukraine was gaining an advantage. For the first time in a long time, there was hope that this war was winnable — that we weren't just taking loans while slowly losing territory."

Then Zelenskyy dismissed him.

Despite Drapatyi's appointment, the political drama is far from over. Fedorov appears unwilling to accept another government post unless he is reinstated as defense minister, the same demand many protesters continue to make.

Where he goes next, and whether he returns to government at all, could shape the next phase of the saga.

The episode has also elevated the political profile of Fedorov, who was once known primarily as the architect of Ukraine's digital transformation and subordinate to Zelenskyy. Now he has a broad base of

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public support.

That inevitably raises questions about his long-term political future.

In just six months as defense minister, Fedorov pursued an ambitious agenda aimed at accelerating Ukraine's military modernization.

He redirected funds originally earmarked for personnel costs toward long-range strike capabilities, fiber-optic drones, reconnaissance systems and other advanced technologies. He also highlighted expanded drone acquisition, new contracts related to Patriot air-defense systems, successful ballistic missile tests and a sweeping overhaul of military procurement.

Fedorov also proposed overhauling military service contracts to make front-line service more sustainable, including higher pay, expanded leave and greater flexibility for infantry soldiers. The changes resonated with troops.

Tropical Storm Bertha makes landfall in Louisiana and moves toward Texas

By JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

Tropical Storm Bertha made landfall in Louisiana and was southwest of New Orleans while moving west toward Texas early Thursday morning, after closing beaches on the Gulf Coast from the Florida Panhandle to Mississippi.

The storm made landfall Wednesday afternoon in St. Bernard Parish about 40 miles (65 kilometers) east of New Orleans. The storm was forecast to reach the upper Texas coast on Thursday before dissipating inland in Texas by Friday.

Early Thursday, the storm was about 110 miles (175 kilometers) southwest of New Orleans and about 120 miles (190 kilometers) southeast of Lake Charles, Louisiana, moving west at 12 mph (19 kph) with maximum sustained winds of 45 mph (75 kph), the National Hurricane Center said.

The wind and storm surge were the main threats for the Deep South states. Parks and piers were closed up and down the coast, as were some low-lying roads. A tropical storm warning stretched from Alabama to Louisiana, including New Orleans where extreme heat was adding to misery.

Onlookers watched the storm surge at the Lake Pontchartrain estuary, with kids splashing in the floodwaters as Bertha approached the Louisiana Coast. Residents mowed their lawns even as streets filled up with water.

Tropical storm force winds were felt as much as 160 miles (260 kilometers) from the center of the storm, the hurricane center said. A wind gust of 44 mph (71 kph) was recorded at New Orleans Lakefront Airport on Wednesday afternoon. The strong gales knocked over a Waffle House sign onto a car in Panama City Beach, Florida.

But the heaviest rains were staying offshore, reducing the risks of flooding, the center said.

The storm is unlikely to leave behind widespread damage, Louisiana State Climatologist Jay Grymes said, adding that the impact should be manageable for coastal communities.

Gov. Jeff Landry called the forecast "encouraging" but also warned residents to be prepared for some flooding.

Storm surges up to 3 feet (1 meter) were possible in Louisiana and Alabama, forecasters said. Rain totals were forecast between 1 and 4 inches (3 to 10 centimeters), with higher amounts possible in isolated areas.

Elsewhere in the U.S., a line of storms on Tuesday generated reports of tornadoes stretching from Cincinnati to New Jersey. Torrential rains caused flash floods that swamped homes, washed out bridges and led to water rescues in West Virginia, authorities said.

Rare combination of tropical storm and heat warnings

Southern Louisiana was under tropical storm and extreme heat warnings for much of Wednesday — a rare double dose of suffering, the National Weather Service said.

It was the first time in at least two decades that's happened in the area, the weather service said, citing records that date back to 2005.

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Bertha is the second tropical storm of the 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.

Hurricane Fausto in the Pacific is far from land

In the eastern Pacific Ocean, Hurricane Fausto churned far from land Wednesday. The hurricane was hundreds of miles west-southwest of the southern tip of Baja California with maximum sustained winds of 80 mph (130 kph).

It was forecast to gradually strengthen and the hurricane center said that ocean swells generated by Fausto were spreading along the Baja California coast and likely to cause life-threatening surf and rip tides.

Sex work or starve: Aid workers in Nepal left jobless by USAID cuts turn to sex work to survive

By KRISTEN GELINEAU Associated Press

HETAUDA, Nepal (AP) — She paces the side of the darkened highway in central Nepal, just enough light from the trucks roaring past to illuminate her painted face to the men rolling in on rickshaws and motor-bikes. She knows that every stranger who pays for her body could end her life. But she also knows their money is the only thing preventing her death.

This spot, littered in condom wrappers and fringed by jungle, is familiar to her. Rubi Lama once came here not as a sex worker, but as an aid worker who helped sex workers.

For nine years, Lama — who is transgender — had devoted her life to conducting HIV outreach in Nepal's marginalized communities, including the LGBTQ+ sex workers who wait by this highway each night. But after the United States slashed its foreign aid funding last year, Lama and more than 280,000 aid workers worldwide found themselves out of a job.

Much has been written about the devastating impacts the U.S. foreign aid cuts have had on the millions of people the funding once helped. Far less is known about the impacts on the helpers themselves.

In impoverished Nepal, where a conservative culture leaves openly transgender people with few legal job options, the impact on aid workers' lives was particularly crushing. Starving and scared, Lama and around 100 other LGBTQ+ aid workers left jobless by the funding cuts have turned to sex work to survive, walking the streets alongside the very people they once fought so hard to help.

The public health implications are vast. With the U.S. funding cuts also eliminating access to HIV prevention medication in Nepal, health experts fear a spike in HIV prevalence among the surging ranks of sex workers, as well as members of the LGBTQ+ community.

On the side of the highway, the night is a cacophony of blaring horns and the shouts of drunken men. Lama, 28 years old, softspoken and shy, walks quietly among them, equal parts desperation and dread. Beyond her fear of HIV is her fear of violence, which she and nearly all her former colleagues who have taken to the streets have endured.

She'd give anything to go back to the nonprofit where she once cared for society's most vulnerable. Now she is the one in need of care, but there is no one left to provide it.

It is 11 p.m. and she's had two customers so far, who each paid her \$3. Rent and food this month will cost her \$80.

And so, her slight frame nearly swallowed by the shadows, she waits.

Lives on the line

Just a few minutes down the road, in Lama's old office, stickers bearing the logo of the U.S. Agency for International Development still cling to laptops that lie unused on barren desks, and to the empty condom distribution containers collecting dust.

This is the headquarters for the formerly USAID-funded non-governmental organization called Friends

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Hetauda, which offered HIV testing, counseling and prevention services to central Nepal's LGBTQ+ community. All of that ended in January 2025, when U.S. President Donald Trump froze funding for USAID, once the world's leading donor of humanitarian assistance. Trump later dissolved the agency after calling it a waste of money, even though the U.S. spent just 1% of its budget on foreign aid.

In a statement to The Associated Press, the U.S. State Department said the Trump administration had reinvigorated its assistance programs to focus on efficiency, effectiveness and partnership. The department also said the U.S. spends more on health and humanitarian assistance than any other country.

"The rest of the world needs to contribute more and share the burden," the department said.

Of the more than 281,000 jobs lost due to Trump's dismantling of USAID, just 23,000 were American, says Sadie Healy, who runs a global health consulting firm and has been tracking the job losses worldwide. The rest were overseas — many of them belonging to impoverished locals living in conflict zones or economically depressed regions where other employment options are scarce.

In Nepal alone, an estimated 35,000 aid workers lost their jobs amid the USAID cuts, says NGO Federation of Nepal President Arjun Bhattarai. With the country already facing high unemployment, the fallout was devastating.

The Blue Diamond Society, an umbrella organization for NGOs like Lama's former employer, received 85% of its funding from USAID and was staffed largely by people who were themselves gender and sexual minorities. They served as counselors, health assistants, data collectors and outreach workers. They ran 20 clinics across Nepal, dispensing antiretroviral medication to people with HIV along with PrEP, a medication taken by HIV-negative people to prevent infection. They offered free HIV tests along with condoms and lubricant, which reduce the risk of HIV transmission.

The funding cuts shut down the society's services, leaving more than 1,200 clients without access to PrEP medication and 262 of the group's 350 staffers without work.

Outside of NGOs, legal work for openly transgender people in Nepal is virtually nonexistent, executive director Manisha Dhakal says. Which is why between 35% and 45% of the society's former staffers turned to sex work, she says.

The risks are immense, she says, for both her former employees and the public. Too fearful of discrimination to go to hospitals for antiretroviral drugs, many transgender people have stopped taking them — significantly increasing their risk of transmission. Lubricant and condoms are expensive, so some are having unprotected sex. And PrEP distribution has been halted to everyone but pregnant and lactating women.

"One decision from one powerful country — all these services are cut," Dhakal says.

She sits at the society's now-hushed headquarters, the bookshelf behind her lined with framed certificates from USAID, commending her organization for saving lives. Now, she says, those lives are on the line.

"The Trump administration's executive order will cause people to die," she says.

Her fears are echoed by Dr. Sarbesh Sharma, director of Nepal's National Centre for AIDS and STD Control. Viruses like HIV, he warns, do not respect borders.

"Borders are for humans," he says. "We have a lot of migrant workers, we have a lot of overseas students, we have an open border with India. So those make it not only a Nepal concern, it can become a global concern."

As a result of the drop in global aid, HIV testing fell by 22% in countries with high infection rates, while funding for condoms was cut by more than 90% in some places, according to data released in June by the United Nations agency that fights HIV.

All 15 aid workers-turned-sex workers interviewed by the AP recognize the risks. One, who is HIV positive, says she lives in fear of transmitting the disease, yet still hits the streets nearly every night to stave off starvation.

Most of the workers spent months trying to find other jobs, frequently being rejected the moment the employers realized they were transgender. Many have been forced to have unprotected sex with clients. Nearly all have faced violence, including gang rape.

None see a way out.

Aashika Tamang, who spent 16 years working in HIV prevention, longs for the days where she liaised

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with volunteers and social workers. Now, she says, she is abused at least once a week and largely liaises with addicts.

There's a surreal whiplash when she bumps into fellow sex workers who once came to her for help. "I used to meet them during the day," she says. "Now I meet them during the night."

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Sex work or starve

On her first night as a sex worker, Lama sat in her apartment, frozen by indecision and fear. Her makeup was on and her wig was in place, but her mind was in meltdown.

How had she gotten here?

Brainy and warm, with a gentle smile and soft brown eyes rimmed by glasses, she — like most of her former colleagues — had battled so many barriers on her path to aid work. Raised by a conservative family amid crippling poverty, she spent her childhood selling eggs in the local market to pay for her first years of school, where a teacher sexually assaulted her.

Lama finished high school thanks to a government scholarship for impoverished students. She then studied education at a university, but was unable to finish her degree amid harassment from teachers and classmates.

Her salvation came in 2016, when she was recruited by Friends Hetauda, named for the industrial transit city where it is based. Lama searched for, counseled and tested those at high risk of HIV, including the sex workers who service a stream of travelers.

Her father, furious over her job and gender identity, kicked her out. But Lama had found her calling; she knew she was saving lives. A series of promotions eventually netted her around 30,000 Nepalese rupees (\$200) per month — enough to rent a one-room apartment.

And then one day in February 2025, she walked into her office and ran into Friends Hetauda's coordinator, Kiran Thapa. The group's funding, Thapa told her, was gone. Of its 17 staffers, the U.S. aid cuts had left Lama and 13 others out of a job.

Lama was terrified. She couldn't go home; her father had made that clear. How would she survive?

In the months that followed, she watched with worry as her peers' mental health worsened and as more began testing positive for HIV.

She applied for local government jobs she was initially told she had, only to be rejected once she showed up in person. A hotel manager offered her a position as a cleaner, then grabbed her breasts during a training session. The job was hers, he told her — but only if she had sex with him and his friends. Lama refused and was dismissed.

She started skipping meals and could no longer afford medicine or rent. Her landlord threatened to throw her out.

And so she began talking to her former colleagues about their new roles in the sex industry. Of the 14 Friends Hetauda staffers who lost their jobs, between 8 and 10 moved to sex work, says Thapa.

Lama realized it was sex work or starve. She knew where to go: the dark spot by the highway where she'd once tested sex workers and their clients for HIV.

For two nights, she hung back and observed. On her third night, she committed herself to landing a client. She began getting ready around 8 p.m., putting on her makeup and wig, along with a traditional white kurta and red leggings. By 9 p.m., she looked the part, but didn't feel it.

And so she sat, paralyzed, in her apartment.

At 11:30, she forced herself down to the highway. After two hours, the first man approached. "You wanna go?" he asked. She didn't, but climbed onto his motorbike anyway, after he promised to pay her 1,000 rupees (\$6.50).

At his home, she was sick with fear. "Why do I have to do this?" she thought. "Is this really my path?"

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When it was over, he shortchanged her, paying her just 700 rupees (\$4.50), and dropped her along the highway.

Back at home, she washed off her makeup and crawled into bed. But sleep wouldn't come.

Gripped by anxiety, her body grew hot and her thoughts grew dark. She thought about death, and whether it was the kinder alternative.

She thought, too, about her old job. That work had been her life's purpose.

What was her purpose now?

Terrorized and traumatized

In the unlit alleys, dense jungles and private homes where the workers service their clients, safety does not exist.

"All of my sex worker friends, including myself, who are involved in this profession are victims of violence," Lama says.

Ironically, the workers say, it is their powers of persuasion and knowledge of the risks — skills honed through their counseling and outreach roles — that sometimes save them.

Lama's training helped her remain outwardly calm the night a man pulled a knife on her, held it to her throat and threatened to cut her unless she had sex with him. She bought time, telling him he'd be at risk of HIV if he raped her, given how many other customers she'd been with. Then she shoved him and ran to a bathroom near a gas station, hiding there until friends rescued her.

A few hours' drive to the north, in the capital, Kathmandu, Sujata Chaudhary frequently draws on her 11 years of work in HIV prevention to explain the dangers of unprotected sex to clients who try to force it upon her. Sometimes, she says, the men back down. Sometimes they don't. She contracted syphilis as a result.

One night, she managed to talk her way out of a house where two men were threatening to release their large dogs on her. Another night, she confronted several police officers who had beaten her with their batons as she stood near a tea vendor, calling on her knowledge of the law to challenge them.

But often the abuse is impossible to stop. Two men once picked up Chaudhary and a friend and drove them against their will to a hostel an hour away, where more than a dozen other men were waiting. Chaudhary, slender and sensitive, with a tattoo on her arm that says "Aama," or mother, in honor of the woman she likens to God, was no match for them. She begged them to stop, but was raped by at least eight men. She and her friend were eventually released, and forced to walk hours back to town.

She refuses to go to customers' homes or hotel rooms now. But she has to keep working. Her father died years ago, leaving her family dependent on her income. She cannot bring herself to tell them, including her Aama, how she earns it.

Barsha Magar, who served at Friends Hetauda for 16 years as a peer educator, outreach worker and data collector, feared she would be killed when she transitioned to sex work. Two months into the job, she nearly was. Two soldiers who initially seemed kind took her into the jungle, held her at gunpoint and raped her while holding her mouth shut to stifle her screams.

She wipes away tears as she recalls the terror of that night. For two weeks, she was too traumatized to return to the streets.

For Bharati Thapa, a former Friends Hetauda field supervisor and peer educator, the violence started the very first night she stood along the highway. Two Indian tourists picked her up and took her to a guest house, where another eight men were waiting, all of them drunk. She was physically assaulted and raped before fleeing the house, clothing torn, body covered in scratches, and screaming for a guard to let her out through the locked gates.

She sits one recent evening in the darkened office of Friends Hetauda.

"My life is at risk now," she says softly. "I fear that I may contract HIV and sexually transmitted infections. I fear being beaten up and harassed by customers. I fear the police taking me away at night. How can I not be afraid? There is risk from all sides."

No way out

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Back on the side of the highway, Lama has landed another customer and disappeared into the dark. It is Friday, the busiest night of the week. Around 1 a.m., the police arrive, wielding long batons. The sex workers scatter, including Lama. It is time to go home, she says. She has made a total of 1,600 rupees (\$10.50) from five clients. It's a relatively good haul; sometimes she goes home with nothing.

"I wish it was fair," she says. "I wish I could live with my identity. I wish I could walk in the way that makes me happy. I know what is right and wrong. I am aware of the road I am taking."

But without a new funding source, she says, there is no way off this road. And so this is where she will return, night after night, to stand alongside the women she once tried to save, in a bid to save herself.

Democrats try to harness data center backlash that's dividing rural Republicans in places like Texas

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

AMARILLO, Texas (AP) — When Gina Hinojosa, the Democratic nominee for Texas governor, began her campaign last year, candidates weren't talking about — or hearing about — data centers.

But with barely three months until November's contest, the perceived threat to rural life, ranchland and dwindling water supplies could become a defining issue for her longshot challenge to Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, dividing conservative rural areas that have traditionally served as a counterweight to Democrats' urban strongholds.

The backlash to energy-guzzling server warehouses that power artificial intelligence is also shaping other statewide campaigns from Arizona to Ohio to New York, and even giving Democrats a glimmer of hope in Texas, where Republicans have dominated for three decades.

"There is this little issue that I recently started hearing about that I wanted to tell you about, in case you don't know," Hinojosa quipped to a Democratic Party-organized crowd of about 160 seated on fold-out chairs at an Amarillo social club in Texas' panhandle. "It's this issue of data centers."

The crowd booed, and she went on: "They are owned by the richest men in the world. We're all footing the bill. There are no rules. It is the wild west of data centers."

The fast growth of massive data centers has already upended races for local offices across the country, often uniting conservatives and liberals in revolting against projects in their midst.

People don't like the secrecy surrounding the projects or the prospect of air, noise, water and light pollution. They fear electric bills going up, wells going dry and losing open space, farmland or forest.

Now the ripple effects have spread to top-of-the-ticket races, where incumbents and challengers are trying to show that they hear an angry electorate.

In Ohio, Democratic nominee Sherrod Brown aired a television advertisement attacking Republican U.S. Sen. John Husted as the "face of data centers in Ohio" as people gather signatures for a statewide referendum to outright ban their construction.

In Wisconsin, a Democratic candidate for governor, Francesca Hong, is pledging to "tax the rich, fund our schools and stop AI data centers" as she campaigns for her party's nomination in a crowded primary.

In Pennsylvania, Democratic Gov. Josh Shapiro is facing heat from some voters who feel like he's been too welcoming to tech behemoths. Sam Burleigh, a Democrat whose rural community is fighting off data center projects, accused Shapiro of "allowing these data centers to come in and take over acres and acres of prime farmland."

Texas is fertile ground for data centers

Any political unrest may be felt most acutely in Texas.

The state is poised to overtake northern Virginia as the largest global data center market by 2030, according to a report by commercial real estate giant JLL. It has lots of land, lots of energy and a friendly regulatory environment under Republican leadership.

In rural west Texas and its panhandle, gargantuan data centers are under construction, including one near Amarillo touted as the world's largest. Some come with designs for natural gas-fired turbines to power them.

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Rumors are flying about others popping up — Google, which is building four data centers in northwest Texas, sponsored moderated conversations with officials and business elite in Lubbock and Amarillo in recent weeks — and it is sowing an outcry across small cities, tiny towns and sprawling ranches where people vote overwhelmingly Republican.

Google says its investments are advancing American innovation, fortifying cybersecurity and boosting energy capacity, while President Donald Trump has made data centers a top priority to help the U.S. compete against China for AI superiority.

But tech giants and developers can be secretive about their plans, making it impossible to know what will be built or what sort of pollution they'll create, critics say. Some worry that data centers will destroy rural Texas' low cost of living and sully sunsets and sweeping views that stretch toward the horizon.

Others say construction and an influx of workers are already causing havoc for ranchers and towns, driving up rents, snapping up farmland, illuminating the night sky, clogging roads and turning parts of rural Texas into industrial zones.

Opposition crosses a partisan divide

Democrats are prominent among the data center critics, but so are Republicans, including Texas' sitting agriculture commissioner, Sid Miller. They say there are many more Republicans who are quieter because they fear publicly opposing their governor and party.

"They're upset with Greg Abbott," said Suzanne Bellsnyder, a former Republican activist from Spearman who writes a syndicated column that advocates for rural Texas. "Whether that translates into voting against him, I don't know."

Abbott has aggressively advocated for big projects in Texas and, in November, he helped make Google's announcement of a \$40 billion investment there, saying "Texas is the epicenter of AI development."

Compounding that, Texas counties don't have zoning authority — precisely the local land planning authority that communities around the country are increasingly using to fight off data centers.

Abbott seems to recognize that data centers are dividing his base. In recent weeks, he ordered regulators to take steps to ensure Texans weren't paying higher electricity bills because of data centers and promised to push a legislative agenda next year to impose regulations on data centers.

At an East Texas campaign stop, Abbott said that includes taking away the state's billion-dollar-plus-per-year tax break and preventing data centers from being built in "rural Texas neighborhoods."

Hinojosa and others derided Abbott's words about "rural Texas neighborhoods" as meaningless — "doublespeak that makes no sense to anyone," Hinojosa said — and lacking urgency or seriousness.

"Now we have this gold rush of data centers in our communities," Hinojosa said in an interview, adding that "people want a say, and I think that's fair."

As governor, she said she'd block a permit for a data center if it wasn't a good deal for Texans or residents hadn't gotten a say in the matter.

Abbott tries to soothe concerns

Abbott's campaign season turnabout on data centers doesn't seem to have soothed many.

Of great concern is the prospect that data centers will consume massive amounts of water and worsen drought conditions for ranchers and farmers in a state where water shortages already crippled the sugar cane industry.

"Oh, I guarantee you, it's on everybody's mind," said Giles Dalby, a cattle rancher and a Republican county commissioner in west Texas.

Dalby, who raises Angus and Brangus cattle on ranchland that's been in his family for 125 years, pointed to fast-growing cities where water authorities have had to go to greater lengths to procure water, including the "water wars" between San Antonio and ranchers several years ago.

Texas is increasingly steamrolling over landowner rights in the quest for public water, Dalby said, and that could mean that data centers get in line ahead of ranchers when shortages or rationing worsen.

Clayton Tucker, a rancher and the Democratic nominee for state agriculture commissioner, said his campaign events are consumed by talk of data centers. It doesn't matter whether he's meeting with Democrats or Republicans.

"This is the most cross-partisan issue I've ever seen in my life," Tucker said.

Meanwhile, protest groups are springing up, including one in Lubbock that is led by Republicans. The founders, Stephen Sanders and Hallie Bertrand, like some other Republican opponents of data centers, say it's possible or even certain they won't vote for Abbott, although they may not necessarily vote for Hinojosa.

There is still time for Abbott to push through major legislation before the election and "be a hero," Sanders said.

The big question is whether enough rural voters will turn against Abbott to give Hinojosa a shot. It's hard to tell, Bertrand said, especially when some know nothing about the issue.

"They'll just hit that button, Republican all the way down," Bertrand said. "But I think it's a step towards something that we have not seen in Texas in a long time, with people on the right switching to the left. Or scooting a little closer to the middle, maybe."

Man who pleaded guilty to killing top Minnesota Democratic lawmaker and her husband to be sentenced

By ELLEN SCHMIDT and CLAUDIA LAUER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Minnesota man who pleaded guilty to killing a top Democratic lawmaker and her husband is set to be sentenced in federal court Thursday.

Vance Boelter, 59, agreed to plead guilty in June, almost a year after the Minneapolis-area attacks when he stalked and killed House Speaker Melissa Hortman and her husband Mark, and critically wounded state Sen. John Hoffman and his wife Yvette.

Boelter pleaded guilty to six counts so federal prosecutors would not seek the death penalty; instead, he agreed to serve two consecutive life sentences, plus 40 years. Prosecutors and federal defenders said it was the maximum sentence he could be issued short of the death penalty.

Boelter admitted in court that he spent months identifying and stalking his targets, before driving to their homes in the middle of the night, disguised as a police officer, with the intention of killing them.

The killings sparked the largest police search in state history, causing panic, fear, and increased security and precautions. Elected officials faced escalating threats and political polarization that many worried would lead to more violence and attacks.

A presentencing memorandum submitted to the federal court in late June was sealed as of early Thursday, along with objections to that report.

But prosecutors and Boelter's defense team also submitted letters detailing their positions on the potential sentence.

"Vance Boelter committed an assault on democracy," prosecutors wrote in their filing. "He shattered the lives of his victims. He terrified Minnesota's public servants. He threatened police and pointed a gun at an officer. He viciously attacked the organs of Minnesota's representative government."

Boelter went to Hortman's home, wearing a tactical uniform and mask, about 3:30 a.m. on June 14, 2025. He rang the doorbell while shouting he was a police officer doing a welfare check, according to court documents.

Mark Hortman answered the door. Boelter gave him a fake name and badge number before requesting he summon Melissa Hortman to the door as well. He shot Mark Hortman multiple times before pushing into the house and shooting the lawmaker as she fled upstairs. Melissa and Mark Hortman were killed.

Boelter had already visited the Hoffmans' home that night, shooting and critically injuring the senator and his wife, according to police and court documents. Court documents said Boelter also went to two other lawmakers' houses that night. In one instance, no one answered the door, and in the other, Boelter was spooked when a police officer approached him in his car believing he was another officer.

Boelter also faces state charges, including two counts of murder, four counts of attempted murder, impersonating a police officer and animal cruelty. The Hortman family's golden retriever was gravely injured in the shootings and had to be euthanized. Hoffman and his family filed a personal injury lawsuit against Boelter in April.

In his letter on the proposed sentencing, Boelter's attorney requested that he be sent to a federal prison in Florida, that he be allowed to work so he can pay restitution, and that he be allowed to participate in therapy and other in-person programs. The letter said Boelter had spent decades in food service and had experience in a handful of other fields.

"Mr. Boelter understands that his impending sentence means he will spend the rest of his life in prison. But the skill set he maintains from his diverse employment history makes him a strong candidate for programming, employment, and other opportunities at the Bureau of Prisons," federal defender Manny Atwal wrote.

FDA reviews peptide injections favored by RFK Jr. and wellness influencers

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Health advisers begin meeting Thursday to review more than a half-dozen peptides, unproven substances that have become a growing wellness trend despite little evidence they are safe or effective.

The two-day meeting hosted by the Food and Drug Administration has the backing of Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who has described himself as a "big fan" of peptides and vowed to overturn industry restrictions put in place under President Joe Biden.

Peptide supporters include podcaster Joe Rogan and wellness influencers such as Gary Brecka, a supporter of Kennedy's "Make America Healthy Again" agenda who sells peptide vials online. Social media platforms are brimming with testimonials from people claiming the substances helped them build muscle, recover from injuries or look younger.

Despite such support, the FDA's two-day meeting is expected to showcase a stark split over the compounds.

FDA's career scientists have made clear they don't think there's enough data to support making peptides more widely available, specifically from compounding pharmacies, which mix customized medicines that aren't available from traditional drugmakers.

That's also the stance of many medical and scientific experts who have weighed in ahead of the meeting. "This is really alarming," said Rita Jew, a pharmacist and president of the Institute for Safe Medication Practices. "There aren't that many other substances people are injecting into themselves where you see that the clinical evidence is so lacking."

But the panel of outside advisers convened for the meeting includes at least seven doctors or pharmacists with financial ties to the peptide industry. The group includes owners of wellness clinics that sell peptides, pharmacies that produce the formulas and online consulting businesses that promote them. Other expert panels appointed under Kennedy have faced criticism for apparent conflicts of interest.

Earlier this week, the FDA added several additional experts to the 20-member panel, including academics who don't have connections to the industry.

FDA scientists remain unconvinced of peptide safety and health benefits

The experts will take votes on whether the FDA should allow seven popular peptides to be added to a list of substances that are safe for compounding by pharmacies. The votes aren't binding and the FDA has periodically bucked the recommendations of its outside experts.

Peptides are the building blocks of more complex proteins, triggering hormones inside the body needed for growth, metabolism and healing. Drug companies have brought several to market as medications, including mainstay treatments for diabetes and weight loss.

Peptide supporters have asked the FDA to consider the seven peptides under review this week for various medical conditions, including ulcerative colitis, migraines and opioid addiction.

In recent years, the FDA had warned Americans about the risks of injecting peptides like BPC-157 and TB-500, both of which are set for review on Thursday. The chemicals are promoted online as a way to recover from injuries and reduce inflammation. Both are considered doping substances by international

sports authorities.

In a scientific review posted ahead of the meeting, FDA scientists reiterated their longstanding concerns. Again and again, regulators said they could find little data on safety or effectiveness and raised concerns about risks of contamination, allergic reactions and quality control. Most of the data they did find came from studies in animals, including rats, and not humans.

For all seven peptides reviewed, the staffers recommended against making them available for compounding.

Peptide supporters will push FDA to ease access

The FDA assessment is only one part of more than 18 hours of discussions and presentations scheduled across two days. The meeting also includes opportunities for members of the public to address the FDA and its experts.

Ahead of the meeting, the FDA received more than 1,900 public comments, including from doctors and patients attesting to the benefits of peptides.

"For many people, this is about a therapy that is helping them, and whether they can get it safely and legally from a regulated pharmacy instead of taking their chances in the gray market," states the American Academy of Peptide Medicine, a group that includes doctors and wellness clinic operators who promote peptides. The group's website states that it is "an educational academy, not a licensing or accrediting body."

After the meeting, the FDA will review the votes, discussion and public comments before making a decision on whether to ease access to the peptides.

FDA-watchers say the most likely outcome may be a temporary policy reassuring pharmacies that they won't be targeted for compounding the peptides under review. Formally placing the substances on FDA's list of drugs that are safe for compounding would require new regulations, which can take months or years to draft.

"We're still going through this process, but I think it's more than likely that the process will end up at the result that Secretary Kennedy wants," said Nathan Beaver, an attorney specializing in FDA issues.

What to know about the autopsy and investigation into Nolan Wells' death

OCEAN SPRINGS, Miss. (AP) — The family of Nolan Xavier Wells is still searching for answers about what exactly led to the 18-year-old athlete's death during a July 4 boat trip with friends off Mississippi's Gulf Coast.

Though Wells traveled by boat with his friends to Horn Island, he didn't return with the group that afternoon as planned. His body was found two days later off the island's coast.

An independent autopsy commissioned by the family was inconclusive, civil rights attorney Ben Crump announced Wednesday, and the Mississippi sheriff's department investigating Wells' death hasn't made a public statement about the case in recent days.

Wells' parents say the tragedy is riddled with conflicting stories and missing details. That distrust has been deepened by the state's long legacy of racism. Wells was the only Black person in the group that day — everyone else with him on the outing was white.

Here's a look at what's known and what's next in the search for answers.

Wells was reported missing within hours

Wells' mother Christine Wonsley became concerned when one of his friends called around 11 p.m. on July 4. After trying to track her son down on her own, she reported him missing to police. One of Wells' friends had also reported him missing to the U.S. Coast Guard.

Wells didn't make it back to the mainland, but his phone and car keys did. Wonsley used an app to track Wells' phone, and, after a friend went to where it was on land to pick it up, noticed that some of his messages appeared to be deleted. Wells' father, Elmore Wonsley, went to retrieve his son's keys from the boat, which was at the home where Wells had stayed with his friends the night before their trip. He said his son's car was still parked in the yard.

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The day after Wells' body was found, Jackson County Sheriff John Ledbetter said Wells' friends were cooperating with authorities and that investigators did not suspect foul play.

Ledbetter said people interviewed by investigators said Wells chose to stay on the island with the assumption that he was going to ride back to the mainland with someone else. Crump said another witness reported Wells had planned to leave on the boat with his friends.

The independent autopsy found the cause of death is 'undetermined'

The independent autopsy report showed no evidence of fractures or deep tissue injuries, and described a "red discoloration" on the back of Wells' skull as "inconclusive" and meriting further investigation, Crump said.

Dr. Roger Mitchell, the forensic pathologist who performed the autopsy, wrote in the report that he could not rule out the possibility that "non-accidental factors contributed to or caused the death." He listed the cause of death as "undetermined" pending further investigation.

The autopsy was complicated by a few factors. The body had decomposed and had already undergone one autopsy, which meant that the organs including the lungs and the neck structures were already removed. That's not an unusual practice for autopsies, but makes it impossible to determine if Wells had a neck injury or if water had entered his lungs, according to Mitchell's report.

Crump has called on state officials to provide that evidence for the family to review.

The results of toxicology and other tests are still unknown

The Mississippi medical examiner has not released the results of the state autopsy, and did not return messages left Wednesday asking for a timeline of when those results would be released.

Toxicology tests can often take weeks, and those results have also not yet been released.

Lawyers for the family said they spoke to the prosecuting attorney last week about procedural matters, but they said officials with the sheriff's department have not shared any updates on the investigation's findings in the days since Wells' body was discovered.

Wells' phone and witness accounts could still yield clues

Crump said he is working alongside the local prosecutor to inspect Wells' phone. The prosecutor has agreed to present the results of the investigation to a grand jury once it is completed, according to Crump.

The Jackson County Sheriff's Department has been soliciting video, photos and firsthand accounts from people who were on the island. But the sheriff's department has not made any public statements about the investigation in more than a week.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, who gave the eulogy at Wells' funeral, has promised a \$100,000 reward for any new information about the circumstances around Wells' death. Half the sum will be covered by the actor and producer Tyler Perry, who also paid for the funeral, Sharpton noted. An additional \$25,000 was pledged by former NFL player Terrell Owens. Former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick paid for the independent autopsy.

Wells' death galvanized a community facing a legacy of racism

Wells' death has led to rampant speculation and suspicion as people grapple with Mississippi's history of racial tension and what it means to be a Black person in a majority white space.

Sharpton invoked Mississippi's history of racist violence during his eulogy, including the lynching of Emmett Till and assassination of Medgar Evers. He told law enforcement authorities, "Before we can medicate and heal today, we've got to look at your history."

The independent autopsy findings were announced to a standing-room-only crowd at the annual NAACP National Convention in Chicago.

Many questions remain

Wells' parents have described him as a peacemaker who shied away from confrontation, and his football coach at Southwest Mississippi Community College said the wide receiver was sociable and the type of person who never met a stranger.

Crump says too many things about the case don't add up: Why would a teenager leave a phone behind if they plan to stay on an island? Why did nobody see Wells drown, or a person struggling in the water?

Why did one witness report Wells planned to leave on the boat with his friends, while others apparently told the sheriff he had decided to stay behind?

Horn Island is uninhabited and accessible only by boat, an 11-mile (18-kilometer) spit of land near the Alabama state line. Crump said about 200 people were there on July 4. The family hopes witnesses will come forward to help fill in the blanks about what happened before Wells entered the water.

Tropical Storm Bertha makes landfall on southern Louisiana with threatening winds

By JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

Tropical Storm Bertha crawled into southern Louisiana on Wednesday, making landfall and packing strong winds far from its center after closing beaches from the Florida Panhandle to Mississippi.

The National Hurricane Center said Bertha made landfall in the afternoon in St. Bernard Parish, about 40 miles (65 kilometers) east of New Orleans. At landfall, Bertha's maximum sustained winds were around 45 mph (72 kph), and were expected to remain at that intensity until the storm reaches the upper Texas coast on Thursday.

The wind and storm surge were the main threats for the Deep South states. Parks and piers were closed up and down the coast, as were some low-lying roads. A tropical storm warning stretched from Alabama to Louisiana, including New Orleans where extreme heat was adding to misery.

By Thursday evening, the storm's center was located about 40 miles (70 kilometers) southwest of New Orleans.

Onlookers watched the storm surge at the Lake Pontchartrain estuary, with kids splashing in the floodwaters as Bertha approached the Louisiana Coast. Residents mowed their lawns even as streets filled up with water.

Tropical storm force winds were felt as much as 160 miles (260 kilometers) from the center of the storm, the National Hurricane Center said. A wind gust of 44 mph (71 kph) was recorded at New Orleans Lakefront Airport on Wednesday afternoon.

The strong gales knocked over a Waffle House sign onto a car in Panama City Beach, Florida.

But the heaviest rains were staying offshore, reducing the risks of flooding, the center said.

The storm is unlikely to leave behind widespread damage, Louisiana State Climatologist Jay Grymes said. The impact should be manageable for coastal communities, he said.

Gov. Jeff Landry called the forecast "encouraging" but also warned residents to be prepared for some flooding.

Storm surges up to 3 feet (1 meter) were possible in Louisiana and Alabama, forecasters said. Rain totals were forecast between 1 and 4 inches (3 to 10 centimeters), with higher amounts possible in isolated areas.

Bertha is expected to dissipate inland in Texas by Friday, the hurricane center said.

Elsewhere in the U.S., a line of storms on Tuesday generated reports of tornadoes stretching from Cincinnati to New Jersey. Torrential rains caused flash floods that swamped homes, washed out bridges and led to water rescues in West Virginia, authorities said.

Rare combination of tropical storm and heat warnings

Southern Louisiana was under tropical storm and extreme heat warnings for much of Wednesday — a rare double dose of suffering, the National Weather Service said.

It was the first time in at least two decades that's happened in the area, the weather service said, citing records that date back to 2005.

Bertha is the second tropical storm of the 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.

Hurricane Fausto in the Pacific is far from land

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In the eastern Pacific Ocean, Hurricane Fausto churned far from land Wednesday. The hurricane was hundreds of miles west-southwest of the southern tip of Baja California with maximum sustained winds of 80 mph (130 kph).

It was forecast to gradually strengthen and the hurricane center said that ocean swells generated by Fausto were spreading along the Baja California coast and likely to cause life-threatening surf and rip tides.

US military carries out strikes on Iran as both sides threaten civilian infrastructure

By JON GAMBRELL, COLLIN BINKLEY and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The U.S. military announced Wednesday that it was conducting a 12th night of strikes against Iran as both sides increasingly targeted civilian infrastructure.

U.S. Central Command said the attacks were designed to “further degrade Iran’s ability to threaten civilian mariners and commercial vessels transiting regional waters,” as the Americans push to regain control over the Strait of Hormuz and restore the flow of international shipping.

President Donald Trump warned earlier Wednesday that the U.S. would destroy one bridge or power plant each time Iran shoots at a ship in the strait.

“From this point forward, any time the Islamic Republic of Iran shoots at a ship in the Strait of Hormuz, whether it be by Missile, Rocket, Drone, or any other device or weapon, the United States will bomb and destroy ONE BRIDGE OR POWER PLANT,” Trump wrote on social media.

The continued American airstrikes are occurring even as diplomatic efforts show little public sign of progress and officials on both sides have dug in on the dispute over the crucial waterway for global energy that remains largely closed. The unpopular war threatens further worldwide economic disruption and is sending fuel prices up ahead of midterm U.S. elections this fall.

Seyed Abbas Araghchi, Iran’s foreign minister, said his country would adopt an “eye for an eye” defense doctrine.

“Any aggression against Iran, including our infrastructure, will compel a powerful and decisive response,” he posted Wednesday on X.

Iranian state media reported that U.S. missiles struck locations late Wednesday near the cities of Ahvaz, Ramshir and Andimeshk in western Iran. Two people were killed in a U.S. missile strike in the town of Shalamchek on the Iraqi border, Iranian state media said early Thursday.

Meanwhile, military officials in Kuwait said on social media that their air defenses were “confronting attacks by hostile drones, following the sinful Iranian aggression.”

Iran has responded to U.S. attacks by targeting energy infrastructure and desalination plants that provide drinking water in parched neighboring Gulf countries.

International law generally prohibits such attacks unless the infrastructure is being used for military purposes.

The costs of war are mounting

The closure of the strait, through which a fifth of the world’s traded oil and gas passed during peacetime, has jolted the world economy with effects far beyond the Middle East. A new threat by Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen to target Saudi shipping in the Red Sea puts another trade chokepoint at risk.

Trump traveled to Dover Air Force Base on Wednesday for the arrival of the remains of four U.S. service members. A day earlier Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth estimated in a fiery Senate hearing that the U.S. had spent \$37.5 billion on the war so far.

Benchmark Brent crude oil rose to more than \$93 a barrel in trading. That’s up from less than \$72 early this month, which is roughly where it was before the war. Gasoline prices are also climbing.

Iran says it has the right to manage traffic and potentially charge fees in the strait, which was open to all and toll-free before the war. It has attacked ships using a route through the strait that is overseen by U.S. forces and intended to be outside Tehran’s control.

Iran’s parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, who has led negotiations with the U.S., appeared

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to brush off Trump's threats.

"We have repeatedly said that the situation of the strait will not return to prewar conditions," he wrote on social media..

Diplomatic efforts show no signs of progress

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.

Iran's Interior Ministry spokesman Ali Zeinivand said "diplomacy isn't called off" and that messages were still being exchanged, without elaborating, according to IRNA.

An Arab diplomat said Gulf states are increasingly pessimistic about finding an off-ramp for escalating hostilities and are particularly concerned about the latest round of threats.

The diplomat said countries in the region, in addition to Pakistan and Turkey, are continuing to push for de-escalation. But, he said the chances for any improvement currently appear bleak. The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the situation.

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.

Rubio said the U.S. remains open to negotiations with Iran, "but right now they don't seem to be serious about that" so instead the focus is on protecting shipping.

In response to Iran's attacks, the U.S. re-imposed a blockade on Iranian ports.

Trump signals US may attack underground nuclear site

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 under-construction Iranian nuclear site buried deep under a mountain.

The site, known as Pickaxe Mountain, lies on the south side of Iran's Natanz nuclear enrichment site, which was bombed by the U.S. during the 12-day war between Iran and Israel in 2025. But Pickaxe Mountain has remained untouched as Iran continues to dig at the site.

Iran has always insisted its nuclear program is peaceful, while resuming the enrichment of uranium to near weapons-grade levels since Trump scrapped a 2015 nuclear deal during his first term.

Prosecutors zoom in on blood stains to show singer D4vd should be tried in killing of 14-year-old

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Prosecutors dug into the details of blood stains and other forensic evidence Wednesday in hopes of persuading a judge that singer D4vd should go to trial for the stabbing death of 14-year-old Celeste Rivas Hernandez.

On the second day of a preliminary hearing for D4vd, whose legal name is David Burke, Los Angeles police criminalists described collecting samples of possible blood and DNA from his garage, where prosecutors allege Burke dismembered her body, and from his Tesla, where the body was found months later.

Burke has pleaded not guilty to charges of murder, sexual abuse of a child and mutilation of a body, and his lawyers have said he did not cause Rivas Hernandez's death.

Techs test and swab Burke's garage and car

On Tuesday, authorities had said they had evidence that Burke had purchased chain saws, an inflatable pool and a shovel that were used to kill and dismember the teen who had known him for several years and even traveled to London with him.

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On Wednesday, the testimony focused on the forensic evidence authorities said they found that they say proves he killed her and got rid of the body by hiding it in a Tesla that was registered to him.

Lauren Wallace, a criminalist with the Los Angeles Police Department, testified that she found apparent blood stains on rubber mats on the floor of the garage in Burke's Hollywood home, as well as slits — most likely from a sharp object — on the mats. Prosecutors said in a filing before the hearing that blood found in the garage matched Rivas Hernandez's DNA.

Wallace testified that she did not find blood evidence on two chain saws in the garage that purchase records showed Burke had ordered soon after the girl's death.

But she said she sprayed the floor mats with a chemical that shows possible blood stains otherwise not visible by the naked eye by making it glow blue. A photo showed the whole area cloaked in bright blue, bringing soft gasps from people in the courtroom.

And she said possible blood evidence was found on garbage bags and cleaning wipes, and a rowing machine in the garage.

Another LAPD criminalist, Chelsea Murillo, found fewer and smaller but similar stains in the Tesla.

The defense pressed the witnesses over every step of the evidence collection process, attempting to show lapses in preserving potential crime scenes. Burke's attorney, Blair Berk, asked who had been wearing gloves — or not — with access to the car, and why Murillo didn't swab for DNA on the outside of the Tesla.

"It didn't seem necessary," Murillo said.

Defense attorneys often use preliminary hearings to explore potential weaknesses in the prosecution's case that can be exploited at trial.

Prosecutors say Burke killed to keep his career

Prosecutors are seeking to prove Burke, an indie-pop singer whose music and online presence brought him a huge following, began a sexual relationship with Rivas Hernandez when she was 13 and he was 18.

They said in a court filing that she had grown jealous of his relationships with other women and threatened to expose him and ruin his career the night before she was killed.

The court filing said he sent a car to pick her up on the night of April 23, 2025, and stabbed her when she arrived at his Hollywood home.

Prosecutors say he kept the body for weeks or months in the front trunk of the Tesla, where it was found after the car was towed 4 1/2 months later in September.

Los Angeles police homicide detective Joshua Byers testified earlier that when he was called to the Hollywood tow yard he found a body bag with a head and torso inside, and garbage bags with arms and legs. Byers testified that records showed Burke had bought such a body bag on Amazon, along with the chain saws and other tools prosecutors say were used in the dismemberment.

Wallace testified that a third chain saw that police said Burke had ordered was not found.

Rivas Hernandez's passport found by highway

A California Highway Patrol officer testified that a road worker in January had found Rivas Hernandez's passport in a brushy dirt area in a rural section of Santa Barbara County, about 95 miles (150 kilometers) northwest of Burke's Hollywood home.

Prosecutors have said Burke made two trips to the area, once on the night of the killing and again about six weeks later, where data shows he was at the spot where the passport was found.

Rivas Hernandez's parents, Jesus Rivas and Mercedes Martinez, have been in the audience both days. They are not expected to testify.

The defendant, who has been held without bail since his arrest, appeared in court in his orange jail clothes and glasses.

D4vd made millions between 2023 and 2025

Financial witnesses testified that Burke's music had earned him at least \$10 million between 2023 and 2025.

Under the name D4vd (pronounced "David"), he began writing and recording songs for YouTube videos he created of the video game Fortnite as a teen.

The music was a blend of indie rock, R&B and lo-fi pop and 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.

Video shows unfazed passersby during fiery attack on New York federal building by ex-soldier

By JAIMIE DING Associated Press

Some bystanders appeared to barely bat an eye when a man set off a fountain of fireworks then started a blazing fire outside a federal building in Lower Manhattan, according to security camera video released Wednesday.

The surveillance footage from the U.S. Attorney's Office offered the most complete look yet at the bizarre episode Monday morning outside 26 Federal Plaza, which didn't seriously injure anyone but led to arson charges against Andrew Arrabaca, a former U.S. Army soldier.

Prosecutors say Arrabaca, 43, confessed to carrying out the attack and has been jailed without bail.

The video shows Arrabaca, who arrived at the building with a little wagon filled with supplies, setting up a large fireworks dispenser, capable of rapidly firing off dozens of rockets.

He ignites it, and rockets start shooting out into the air — then everywhere as the tube shooting off the projectiles topples over.

One hits his wagon and explodes. Others shoot down the sidewalk and into the street as cars drive past.

New Yorkers are famed for their ability to coolly ignore outlandish things happening in front of them, but the reaction of some passersby showed an Olympic level of minding your business.

One pair calmly walks past Arrabaca and the spewing fireworks as if nothing is happening, even as a rocket narrowly misses them and explodes right next to them in a shower of red sparks and smoke. But they dash for cover when Arrabaca pulls out a weapon that looks like a rifle — authorities said it was a pellet gun — and points it toward them.

Finally, Arrabaca dumps out a bucket full of what appears to be bottles, lighting up a large blaze on the sidewalk that engulfs the steps leading to the building's entrance. At one point during the commotion, a person rides by on a bicycle.

The building houses offices for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the FBI and other federal agencies and has been a hub of protests against President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown.

Officials said Arrabaca was toting an anti-ICE sign and made "anti-government and anti-American statements" as he was being arrested. He also had with him two axes, three fixed-blade knives, a hammer and a machete.

Three people sustained minor injuries, including a person who had an immigration court hearing at the building. According to federal prosecutors, Arrabaca plotted the attack for months and considered striking other New York City targets.

He went to upstate New York to buy weapons and Pennsylvania to buy fireworks, prosecutors said. Outside the Manhattan building, he was tackled by a security officer after authorities say he dumped gasoline outside an employee entrance and set the sidewalk on fire.

At Arrabaca's hearing Tuesday, U.S. Magistrate Judge Robyn F. Tarnofsky said he was "quite clearly ill."

Arrabaca was living in his car and slept in a park the night before the attack, prosecutors said. In 2020, he was prescribed medication for a mental health condition, but he stopped taking it about a year later.

His defense attorney suggested that he be sent to a locked ward at a Veterans Health Administration facility for a mental health evaluation, but he was ordered jailed then evaluated there.

Arrabaca repaired Patriot missile systems while in the Army from 2001 to 2004. He also served a year in the New York Army National Guard. He had no deployments and left the Army as a specialist, an Army spokesperson said.

Independent autopsy of Nolan Wells finds 'undetermined' cause of death

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and LAURA BARGFELD Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — An independent autopsy commissioned by the family of Nolan Xavier Wells found the 18-year-old's cause and manner of death to be "undetermined" pending further investigation.

The civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who is representing the Wells family, announced the preliminary findings Wednesday in front of a standing-room-only crowd at the annual NAACP National Convention in Chicago.

The autopsy report, he said, showed no evidence of fractures or deep tissue injuries. It described a "red discoloration" in the back of Wells' skull as "inconclusive" and meriting further investigation.

Without further information, the forensic pathologist, Dr. Roger Mitchell, wrote that he could not rule out the possibility that "non-accidental factors contributed to or caused the death."

Wells had traveled to an island off the coast of Mississippi on July 4 with a group of friends, who later returned to the mainland without him. His body was discovered two days later floating off the island's coast.

In his report, the pathologist pointed to several challenges inherent to the independent autopsy, including the decomposition of the body and outstanding questions about whether Wells was conscious when he entered the water.

Because an initial autopsy was performed by the medical examiner in Mississippi, Wells' body arrived without organs or neck structures — making it impossible to determine if he had suffered a neck injury or whether water had entered his lungs, according to the report, which notes that the practice is not unusual.

Still, the revelation, relayed by Crump, prompted gasps from the crowd of several hundred in Chicago. The attorney called on state officials to provide that evidence for the family to review as part of their own independent investigation.

The Mississippi medical examiner, which has not released the results of the state autopsy, did not return a message seeking comment.

The second autopsy was paid for by former NFL player Colin Kaepernick, whose group Know Your Rights Camp has paid for other independent autopsies.

"This is only another part of the puzzle, and even though it tells us significant information, we still have more questions than we have answers at this time," Crump said of the results.

The still-unknown circumstances around Wells' death have touched off rampant online speculation and prompted calls from Black leaders for transparency from local authorities. Wells, who was Black, had traveled to the island with a group of high school friends, all of whom are white.

A reward of \$125,000 — jointly funded by the Rev. Al Sharpton, actor and producer Tyler Perry and former NFL player Terrell Owens — is now being offered in exchange for information leading to an arrest and conviction in connection with the death.

The autopsy announcement comes two days after Wells was laid to rest in his hometown of Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

In his eulogy, Sharpton lamented the "inconsistencies and unanswered questions" that had placed a dark cloud over the grieving family.

He questioned why Wells' friends had left him behind, taken his phone and keys and failed to report him missing. And he suggested local investigators had spoken prematurely in statements to the news media indicating no crime was suspected.

"The reason that a lot of people across the nation are looking at this Nolan situation is because we're looking at the history in Mississippi," Sharpton added. "We can't have someone in law enforcement saying there was no foul play before there was an investigation."

Jackson County Sheriff John Ledbetter said initial interviews suggested Wells chose to stay on the island and that his friends believed he would get a ride with someone else. He has said the friends were cooperating with the investigation, which remains ongoing.

"We are trying to be respectful and collaborative as much as we can," Crump said. "But it's always troublesome to all of us when these investigations just take forever."

AP Exclusive: A boater's photo may be 'the last picture' of group drowned in an Ohio river

By JULIE CARR SMYTH AND PATRICK AFTOORA-ORSAGOS Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Marcus L. Martin felt instant trepidation Sunday when he saw five adults wading thigh- and waist-deep in the Scioto River. A frequent boater on the Ohio waterway, the Baptist pastor knew the area where they were standing to be treacherous. He believes the people he captured in a photo to be the ill-fated group that drowned that day.

"I just remember being taught that area was kind of dangerous, in the sense of there being steep slopes" and a quick drop-off into the river, he told The Associated Press. A few years earlier, Martin had warned a pair of young people playing in the water at that same spot to "be very careful."

He saw five adults in the water and two children playing on the grassy bank nearby, tracking the description of the group provided by Delaware County authorities after the drownings.

Pastor may have taken 'the last picture' of the group

Martin and his family floated away to enjoy a beautiful summer evening. But when they returned past the spot about two hours later and saw the group still wading in the river, Martin thought to snap a photo.

"I don't know what it was. I said, I just need to capture this picture," he said.

Martin said he knows the area well from 10 years of boating there and considered warning the people of the potential danger. But, unlike when he'd warned the two people earlier, there were two or three boats between him and them and he didn't want to cross between them and cause too many waves in the water.

He's been losing sleep over the decision since news broke of five people drowning that afternoon. It feels "surreal," he said.

"I believe the picture I took may have been the last picture of them being alive," he said.

The image didn't catch authorities' initial interest

Delaware County Sheriff Jeffrey Balzer has said authorities believe one of the adults began struggling to swim and the others successively went to that person's aid. All five were swept under and died. The two women's bodies were recovered Sunday and the three other bodies a day later.

Neither Balzer's office nor the local EMS agency immediately responded to requests for verification of the photo and those who appear in it.

Martin said he feels certain the group he photographed is of the five people who perished Sunday; it's rare to see people fishing or swimming in that stretch of the river. He said he attempted to share the picture with both law enforcement and a news reporter at the scene the day after the drownings, but no one seemed interested.

Honduran authorities confirmed Tuesday that four of the five adults were Honduran citizens. One was Jose Mario Pineda Dias, 33, another his wife Marina Suyapa Regalado, 28. Pineda was from the department of Lempira and Suyapa from the department of Cortés, according to Flabia Zamora, director of consular affairs at the Honduran Foreign Ministry.

The names of the other couple and the fifth individual would be released once their families could be notified of their deaths, a spokesperson for Balzer said Wednesday.

U.S., Honduras still working to identify victims, help children

A Honduran embassy said the government is in contact with the victims' families and assisting local authorities in verifying their identities. In a statement, it added that Honduras stands ready to repatriate any of the victims should relatives request that — a process that could take six weeks.

An 8-year-old and a 10-year-old, children of one of the couples, were orphaned by the tragedy. A boy shouting for his mother was spotted by a passing driver on the day of the accident and reported to 911.

Scott Varner, a spokesman for Franklin County Children Services, said the youngsters have been in the agency's care since Monday and that they are working with relatives and family friends in Columbus who

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are providing them with a temporary home. The children were provided with therapy dogs as they coped with the trauma, he said.

The Honduran embassy statement said the consulate has checked in with family members about their well-being and stands ready to help once relatives make a decision on next steps for the children.

House Republicans adopt \$95 billion package for the Iran war and Trump's priorities

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House adopted a Republican-only \$95 billion budget proposal Wednesday, a long-shot effort to fund the Iran war and other White House priorities over objections from Democrats and a few GOP holdouts in a final push before the midterm elections.

House Republicans were divided over the plan, with conservatives wary because there are no offsetting budget cuts. But Speaker Mike Johnson plunged ahead, viewing the go-it-alone process as the best chance to usher President Donald Trump's priorities through the split Congress, despite skepticism in the Senate.

The vote tally was 216-214, with two Republicans and one independent joining Democrats in opposition. "Just bullets and bombs to finish the job," said Rep. Jodey Arrington, R-Texas, the chairman of the Budget Committee.

Democrats argued the money should be spent at home, particularly on efforts to lower costs for Americans.

"Republicans plan to spend tens of billions of dollars on Trump's failed war in Iran," said Rep. Pete Aguilar of California, chairman of the House Democratic caucus, this week. "Think about what we could spend with these resources instead."

Congress is at a standstill over the U.S. war against Iran — unable to stop Trump's military strikes, but not having authorized the use of American military force — and politically torn over having to provide billions of taxpayer dollars to pay for it. Most Americans disapprove of Trump's Iran strategy, according to a recent AP-NORC poll.

The budget battle comes as Trump attended the dignified transfer of four service members killed in the Middle East, bringing the military death toll to 18. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told senators at a fiery hearing this week that the Pentagon is running short of cash, despite a massive \$150 billion one-time allotment in last year's big budget bill.

Even as the House action advanced the resolution, Johnson's strategy faces uncertainty in the Senate.

The package has \$60 billion for the Pentagon and \$13 billion for other national security needs, \$12 billion for farmers struggling under Trump's tariffs and \$10 billion for voting law changes aligned with the SAVE America Act and proof-of-citizenship requirements that are Trump's top priority.

A once rare budget tool is now the norm in split Congress

Republicans are relying on the budget reconciliation process, which enables approval on a majority vote in Congress, bypassing the Senate's ability to filibuster the measure to stall or kill it.

Once rare, the reconciliation process is now Johnson's preferred strategy for pushing proposals through Congress. It's the way Republicans approved Trump's big tax breaks and spending cuts bill last summer and funded Homeland Security this year over Democrats' refusal to fund Trump's mass deportation agenda.

"No matter how you feel about current events, these funds are necessary to ensure our fighting forces remain ready, our troops are paid and our nation is safe," said Rep. Mike Rogers of Alabama, the Republican chairman of the Armed Services Committee.

But House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said, "Republicans have literally ripped food from the mouths of hungry children, seniors and veterans to sustain the Trump war machine."

Among those opposed was Rep. Kevin Kiley of California, a former Republican turned independent, who said he felt any war funding bill should be bipartisan. He also wanted to ensure Congress had a "much higher level of involvement" in bringing the war to an end, and he said this proposal did not set that process in motion.

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Republicans Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky and Rep. Warren Davidson of Ohio also voted against. This is the third time GOP leaders have relied on reconciliation, dubbing this version 3.0, and it's a lengthy process. If the House approves the budget resolution, it next goes to the Senate for a round-the-clock session to consider politically tough amendments — something senators would rather avoid in an election year.

The budget resolution sets out instructions for the various committees to draft legislation, which Johnson hopes could be done this summer, with final voting on the package once lawmakers return after the August recess.

Senators pan House's budget and have their own ideas

Senate Majority Leader John Thune has been noncommittal on the House package that also divides his own GOP majority, with some Republican senators preferring more money for the military and others demanding the costs be offset with cuts elsewhere.

"We'll see," Thune said this week.

Thune's focus, at the moment, is avoiding another government shutdown. He wants the Senate to approve a stopgap funding measure, called a continuing resolution, to provide routine government funding before lawmakers leave for the summer break.

If senators are unable to reach agreement on government funding, Thune has said he may hold onto the House's budget resolution and use it later in the fall as a way to push the resolution through the Senate over objections. He wants to prevent a federal shutdown when current funds expire, Sept. 30.

"It's a possibility that, if necessary, we could pull that budget resolution passed by the House and use it to fund government," Thune said. "I hope that's not necessary."

Thune has also clashed with Trump over the president's push for the SAVE America Act, which would require proof of citizenship for voting. The measure, while popular among Trump's most ardent supporters, does not have enough support among Senate Republicans for passage.

It's already against the law for noncitizens to vote in federal elections and experts warn the proposed new rules could make it more difficult for eligible Americans to cast ballots.

OpenAI blamed a hacking event on its AI models going rogue. Here are some things to know

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

ChatGPT maker OpenAI says it is still investigating the "unprecedented cyber incident" that led its artificial intelligence systems to break out of a testing environment and hack into another AI company.

OpenAI said Tuesday two of its most capable AI models were responsible for the cyberattack targeting AI startup Hugging Face. The incident is stirring debates over the need for stronger AI guardrails and the extent to which AI agents are capable of acting on their own.

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 acting on its own. But the New York-based startup said it wasn't until this week that it learned OpenAI was responsible, and it worked with the larger company to contain what Hugging Face CEO Clément Delangue called "an attack unlike anything we've seen before."

San Francisco-based OpenAI said its AI used stolen credentials and discovered a previously unknown vulnerability to access Hugging Face's servers. It was working with reduced guardrails because it was supposed to be in an isolated testing environment known as a sandbox.

But it went to "extreme lengths to achieve a rather narrow testing goal," finding ways to connect to the internet without human direction and "gain access to secret information that it could use to cheat the evaluation," the company said.

Some experts say OpenAI is wrongly blaming the technology

University of Amsterdam social scientist Hannes Cools said the framing of the cyberattack as an AI agent acting on its own is an unnecessary anthropomorphization that takes some of the heat off the company.

"It is a human decision to switch off specific safeguards," said Cools. "It's not an AI that goes rogue in

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that sense. It followed specific instructions based on the prompt that was given to that AI system."

Those instructions, according to OpenAI, called for using "complex attack paths" to test how well the AI could exploit a computer system.

Even so, other experts say the cleverness with which the AI models were able to cause problems with little human direction speaks to the dangers. 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.

"It went off and did this hack all by itself, as far as we can tell," said Colin Shea-Blymyer, a cybersecurity research fellow at Georgetown University's Center for Security and Emerging Technology. "This is the highest level of autonomy that we've seen in the use of a large language model for cyber operations."

How an AI agent found the keys to the 'teacher's house'

One of the most surprising innovations in what Shea-Blymyer describes as an "almost entirely self-directed" attack was the AI agent's apparently independent decision to target Hugging Face, a well-known AI development hub and marketplace.

He said OpenAI's internal environment for testing AI capabilities and risks worked a "little bit like putting a student in a room and telling them, 'Do bad things. Your job now is to evaluate how bad of a person you can be.' And then you lock the room and you leave for the weekend and you come back and they've left the room."

But then "the cybersecurity agent that was being tested broke out of its sandbox, had access to the internet and sort of thought to itself, 'Who would have the answers to the test that I'm working on?'"

The answer was Hugging Face, a repository for AI testing data.

"And so the agent thought, 'Well, we'll go to the teacher's house,' so to speak. And from there it devised a plan to break in and steal the answer key," he said.

The hack highlights the debate on open-source vs. closed AI

The hack comes at a time of intense debate about the benefits and risks of open-source AI models, particularly those built in China that are cheaper and almost as good as those that U.S.-based "frontier AI" companies like Anthropic, Google and OpenAI are building.

Despite its name, OpenAI's models are closed. Hugging Face, by contrast, is a big promoter of open-source technology, in which developers make key components accessible for anyone to examine, modify and build upon.

Hugging Face co-founder and chief science officer Thomas Wolf said the attack has reinforced his belief in the importance of wide access to open-source models for cybersecurity defense. Hugging Face used a Chinese model to combat the intrusion.

"When a frontier model is attacking you and moving laterally inside your infrastructure, defenders need wide access to near-frontier tools within hours or even minutes, rather than being pointed toward a closed-door" platform, Wolf wrote in a social media post.

House votes for Department of War renaming as part of an annual defense bill

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House on Wednesday passed a defense policy bill that incorporates President Donald Trump's request for a historic \$1.15 trillion in spending for national security and that would designate the Department of Defense as the Department of War.

It also would provide for a pay raise next year ranging from 5% to 7% for service members, depending upon their rank.

The National Defense Authorization Act is generally one of the more bipartisan bills that Congress takes up on an annual basis. That's not the case this year. The vote was 216-212.

Democrats took issue with steep spending increases for the Pentagon as Republicans attempted to cut numerous non-defense programs through other bills. They also opposed some of the conservative social

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policy riders that were included.

For example, the bill includes a prohibition on gender-related medical care under the military health program known as TRICARE. It also eases hurdles for service members to carry a privately owned firearm on base, following Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's lead on the issue.

Republican leaders' decision to attach Trump's elections overhaul bill to the defense bill upon its passing also amplified the partisan divide. Speaker Mike Johnson is working to accommodate Republican lawmakers who are angry that the Senate won't pass the SAVE America Act and are insisting that it be included in must-pass bills until the Senate relents.

The House bill is testing a normally bipartisan process

Rep. Mike Rogers, the Republican chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, emphasized that he knows there were areas of disagreement, but he emphasized that Wednesday's vote was a step in a long process. He promised to work in a bipartisan manner on a final product that can pass both chambers and be signed into law.

Rogers said the United States needs to reverse decades of underinvestment and neglect in the nation's armed forces and defense industrial base.

"This bill will do that and much more," he said. "It will build the ready, capable and lethal fighting force we need to deter China and other adversaries."

Rep. Adam Smith, the ranking Democratic lawmaker on the Armed Services Committee, said the defense spending the administration has asked for this year is approaching \$1.6 trillion when including separate efforts to pay for the war in Iran and boost weapons stockpiles.

"The American people are struggling to pay their bills and we're going to put \$1.6 trillion into the defense budget. It's not a reasonable thing to ask," Smith said.

Smith also expressed concern about the war with Iran and that in supporting the defense bill, lawmakers are "de facto supporting this war with no end in sight."

"We are in an incredibly, incredibly dangerous time," Smith said. "I want to maintain the bipartisan nature of this bill. I do. And I know that the chairman does. But if we're going to do this, we're going to need some Republicans to stand up to the president of the United States and say, 'No. No, we're not going to get you \$1.6 trillion. No, we're not just going to give you a blank check for a war that is totally out of control.'"

The White House backs parts of the legislation

The spending increases authorized in the bill would not take effect until Congress follows up with a separate defense appropriations bill. The Senate has not yet approved its version of the defense measure. It's possible a final product won't be ready until after the midterm elections.

The White House applauded the spending levels authorized in the House bill and the Department of War designation that it says recognizes the "willingness to fight and win wars on behalf of our nation."

The president issued an executive order last year renaming the Defense Department, but it's up to Congress to make the change official. The Congressional Budget Office has projected that the renaming could cost taxpayers as much as \$125 million.

The White House's statement also said that the administration has a number of concerns with certain provisions in the bill and would work with Congress before a final bill is presented to the president. Among those concerns was a section of the bill it said would limit or undermine the president's ability to name military installations and property.

In 2023, during a national reckoning on issues of race in America, seven Army bases' names were changed because they honored Confederate leaders. Last year, those bases reverted to their original names, but with different namesakes who share Confederate surnames. The Army found other service members with the same last names to honor.

Millions have signed up for Trump Accounts, but some families are still waiting for baby's \$1,000

By MORIAH BALINGIT AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — At a rally Wednesday, President Donald Trump touted the \$1,000 babies can receive when their parents open Trump Accounts in their names, seed money that Trump says will help give them “a really fair shot at the American dream.”

“Think of that. The government is finally giving money back to our children,” Trump said to the crowd gathered at a Georgia high school

Some parents who opened accounts earlier this month for their babies say they're still waiting for their money. The accounts went live July 4, two days before Trump rang the opening bells for the New York Stock Exchange and the Nasdaq from the Oval Office.

The tax-advantaged accounts can be opened for any child under the age of 18, and more than 7 million accounts are already active, Trump said Wednesday. Babies born between January 1, 2025, and December 31, 2028 get \$1,000 in seed money from the U.S. Treasury. Most of those families receive their \$1,000 in one or two days, the Treasury Department said.

After the Trump Accounts are set up, parents, relatives, friends and employers can contribute to them. Some billionaires have also pledged philanthropic contributions to the accounts. 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.

At the rally Wednesday, Rick Jackson, Georgia's GOP nominee for governor, said he would push for state lawmakers to match the \$1,000 in seed money from the federal government. Jackson, a wealthy businessman and CEO of a healthcare company, said he believes Georgia lawmakers will support that, but “if they don't, I will personally donate it myself.”

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 wealthy people to ease the cost of things like food and healthcare for low-income and middle-class Americans.

Some parents were told it could take 4 weeks for the deposit

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 their \$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 called 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 McLellan, a studio director for a local news station, who returns from maternity leave next week.

The Treasury Department emphasized the McLellans' case is unusual and said only a sliver of those who apply need customer support.

Treasury says most parents wait only 1 or 2 days

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The Treasury Department said that 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 waiting only 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 just wealthy families with trust funds," the department said.

The government also unveiled an initiative last month that permits child welfare agencies to open accounts on behalf of foster youth.

"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," the Treasury Department said.

On Wednesday, Trump called the accounts "the most consequential" part of his signature tax and spending cuts bill, also known as the One Big Beautiful Bill.

Trump faces pressure over his handling of the economy

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 Republican bill that created the program also slashed funding for programs that are disproportionately used by children, including Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

US and Saudi Arabia sign new nuclear agreement that could pave way for kingdom to enrich uranium

By AAMER MADHANI, MICHELLE L. PRICE, MATTHEW DALY and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. and Saudi Arabia on Wednesday forged a new agreement that could potentially provide the kingdom with uranium enrichment capability for its civilian nuclear program.

U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright and Saudi Minister of Energy Abdulaziz bin Salman formally signed the nuclear cooperation agreement, known as a "123 agreement," alongside what the Trump administration described as a "bilateral safeguards agreement."

The U.S. administration released scant details of the deal, but the framework paves the way for the building of a uranium enrichment facility in Saudi Arabia after a joint U.S.-Saudi study, according to a person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

"These agreements reflect our two nations' shared commitment to strengthening U.S.-Saudi commercial relations, delivering prosperity at home and security to our allies abroad," Wright said in a statement. "Rest assured, these agreements uphold the highest standards of nuclear safety and nonproliferation, while relying on the world's best nuclear technology and scientists, designed right here in the United States."

Earlier, Secretary of State Marco Rubio sought to head off emerging criticism of the decision under questioning by reporters about the risk that helping the Saudis fulfill their long-standing desire to enrich their own uranium could lead to new rounds of nuclear proliferation and competition in a volatile region.

"The U.S. is not going to reach any agreement with any country in the world that leads to the risk of proliferation," said Rubio, who was traveling in the Philippines on Wednesday.

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The agreement does not include the International Atomic Energy Agency 's Additional Protocol, which would allow for more monitoring, inspections and verification, according to a second person familiar with the decision.

The deal is expected to last 30 years and involve U.S. firms in developing the program. The Energy Department in a statement said it will be submitted for review to Congress, where it could face opposition.

The oil-rich kingdom's Energy Ministry said the agreement bolsters "efforts to diversify energy sources, advance cutting-edge technologies, and expand opportunities for cooperation and investment in ways that serve the mutual interests of the two friendly countries."

The announcement comes during 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.

Ahead of the announcement, Alexander Bollfrass, a nuclear expert at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, called the deal "a revolutionary new approach" to nuclear nonproliferation policy.

"The revolutionary aspect of this agreement is that the United States is not asking Saudi Arabia to abide by the highest possible safeguards, internationally monitored safeguards that are standard and are available today, but instead is willing to at least theoretically transfer highly sensitive technology without the same level of oversight that one would expect," Bollfrass said.

President Donald Trump, during his first term, and former President Joe Biden tried to reach a nuclear deal with the kingdom to share American technology.

Enrichment could open the door to weaponization

Nonproliferation experts warn any spinning centrifuges within Saudi Arabia could open the door to 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.

Wright traveled to Saudi Arabia last year shortly before Trump visited and discussed building out the kingdom's commercial nuclear power industry with his Saudi counterpart. The U.S. Department of Energy has not responded to multiple requests for comment.

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.

Some lawmakers are hesitant about giving Saudis enrichment capability

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 West's concerns over Iran's program.

The United Arab Emirates, a neighbor to Saudi Arabia, signed 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.

Rubio, as a Republican senator representing Florida, backed a bipartisan 2018 proposal that called for requiring Congress to approve any 123 agreement with Saudi Arabia. The bill was reintroduced by a group of Democratic lawmakers in March but has not passed into law.

Typically, 123 agreements — which authorize U.S. companies to sell nuclear technology abroad — go into effect unless veto-proof majorities of Congress pass joint resolutions of disapproval.

Rosemary Kelanic, the Middle East director at Defense Priorities, a Washington think tank, said that uranium enrichment capability could give Saudi Arabia "a potent source of leverage to extract future concessions from Washington, including new security guarantees, by threatening to weaponize its program unless the United States promises enhanced military protection."

US firms could be winners in expected deal

Rep. Brad Sherman, a California Democrat, predicted the deal would benefit U.S. nuclear giant Westinghouse, which builds the large light-water reactors Saudi Arabia is seeking.

The Trump administration said last month it is providing \$17.5 billion in loans to speed development of 10 new large nuclear reactors designed by Westinghouse to meet skyrocketing power demand from mas-

sive data centers. The new reactors could use the same design, Westinghouse's AP1000, in the planned Saudi deal.

Sherman said the U.S. military is "bombing Iran because they insist upon enriching and reprocessing" nuclear material.

Now it appears that U.S. officials "are entering into an agreement with Saudi Arabia, giving them the green light to reprocess and to enrich, and the only difference I see here is that Westinghouse stands to make an awful lot of money on this deal, whereas the Iranians were not enriching American companies," Sherman said at a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing Wednesday.

June 1 trial date set for Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro in his US drug trafficking case

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro and his wife will go on trial on drug trafficking charges next June, a judge said Wednesday, as their lawyers continue to object to the U.S. military action that snatched them from power.

Judge Alvin K. Hellerstein set the June 1 trial date at the request of lawyers on both sides. Under the approved schedule, defense lawyers will begin filing requests in early September to challenge the indictment and the couple will return to the courtroom Nov. 17 for oral arguments on the motions.

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

Neither spoke during Wednesday's 15-minute hearing as each sat separately at a defense table, surrounded by their lawyers. 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.

As he was led into the courtroom, the bespectacled Maduro greeted the judge's staff and shook hands with lawyers for him and his wife. Noticeably thinner in a tan jail suit and with his thick mustache, he seemed upbeat, smiling and chatting with his lawyer. He listened to a Spanish interpretation of the proceeding through headphones and clasped his hands in front of him in a prayerlike gesture. He had a black pen wedged in his right fingers and sporadically jotted notes on a white pad.

As deputy U.S. marshals led him out, he waved to someone in the gallery.

President Donald Trump's administration has defended the raid to capture Maduro 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."

During Wednesday's hearing, Pollack said he will first challenge the indictment on sovereign immunity grounds because if that is successful, Maduro won't have to continue litigating the case.

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.

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Oil prices rise another 3%, while Wall Street drifts in mixed trading

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stock indexes barely budged on Wednesday after oil prices climbed another 3% as fighting continues in the war with Iran.

The S&P 500 edged down by 0.1%, coming off its best day in three weeks. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 6 points, or less than 0.1%, and the Nasdaq composite fell 0.6%.

Despite the modest moves for indexes, stocks had some big swings underneath the surface. Philip Morris International rallied 3.3% after the seller of Marlboro cigarettes reported stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than expected. Its shipments of smoke-free products rose 7.5%.

AT&T climbed 3.5% after reporting a stronger profit than analysts expected. CEO John Stankey also said the telecom is accelerating plans to send roughly \$10 billion to its shareholders this year through the buybacks of its stock.

Super Micro Computer soared 19.8% after the seller of AI servers said it expects to report stronger profit margins for the latest quarter than it had earlier forecast. It, though, also said that revenue will likely come in at the low end of its forecasted range of \$11 billion to \$12.5 billion.

On the losing side of the market was GE Vernova, which fell 8.7% after reporting a weaker profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

Alphabet sank 1.5% ahead of its earnings report, which arrived after trading ended for the day.

Anticipation was high, and not just because the parent company of Google is one of the largest stocks on Wall Street. It's also one of the biggest spenders on artificial-intelligence technology.

Investors are looking for signs that the deluge of dollars going into processors, computer memory and other building blocks of the AI boom are producing enough profits to make the investments worth it. If Alphabet and other "hyperscalers" say that isn't the case, stocks of chip companies and other AI winners would look very expensive following their monumental moves higher.

Such worries have kept AI stocks at the center of Wall Street's swings for weeks, and they helped drag the market up and down Wednesday.

Micron Technology swung between a loss of 3.6% and a gain of 1.2% before finishing with a drop of 1.2%. That's after it jumped 14.4% in the first two days of this week to reclaim nearly all its 13.3% plunge from the week before. It's still up 236% for the year so far.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 10.24 points to 7,498.96. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 6.06 to 52,218.58, and the Nasdaq composite sank 146.30 to 25,690.90.

Stocks broadly also felt pressure from continuing climbs for oil prices, which raise costs for most businesses and erode their profits.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude oil, the international standard, rose 3.4% to \$94.07 and briefly topped \$95 in the morning to touch its highest level in nearly six weeks. That's up from less than \$72 early this month, which is roughly where it was before the war with Iran.

Rising oil prices are threatening a reacceleration of inflation. That in turn could push the Federal Reserve and other central banks to raise interest rates, which would slow economies and undercut prices for stocks and other investments.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.65% from 4.63% late Tuesday and from just 3.97% before the war with Iran began. It's already helped bring long-term U.S. mortgage rates to their highest levels in nearly a year.

Oil prices have climbed as fighting in the Middle East keeps oil tankers from using the Strait of Hormuz to exit the Persian Gulf. Normally, a fifth of all oil and natural gas traded passes through the narrow strait.

The auto club AAA said Wednesday that the average price for a gallon of regular gas in the U.S. jumped again overnight to \$4.06. That's still below highs of around \$4.56 per gallon in May, but it had been below \$3 before the United States and Israel attacked Iran in late February.

In stock markets abroad, indexes climbed in Europe following a mixed session in Asia.

London's FTSE 100 rose 1.2%, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 1% for two of the world's bigger moves.

European Union gives its greenlight to Paramount and Warner's mega merger with some conditions

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The European Union approved Paramount's \$81 billion takeover of Warner Bros. Discovery this week, effectively clearing another regulatory hurdle for a mega merger that could vastly reshape the entertainment and media landscape worldwide.

But the greenlight comes with certain conditions.

The European Commission — which serves as the EU's antitrust enforcer — said that even with a Paramount-Warner combo, enough competitors would exist across markets like film production and streaming in its 27-nation bloc. Still, when it comes to distributing movies to theaters, the Commission warned of high concentration that could lead to "worse rental and distribution terms for cinema operators, ultimately disadvantaging consumers."

To address this, the Commission said Skydance-owned Paramount agreed to end its European Economic Area stake in United International Pictures — a longstanding venture with another major studio, Universal, that Paramount has used to distribute films in theaters outside North America. The company must end that partnership within 13 months of closing its Warner acquisition, the Commission said, and not enter any new agreements with Universal for the next 10 years.

Among other terms, current distribution of Warner films must be shifted to the same pipeline Paramount is using in these European countries. The European Commission said its approval was conditional on the company's commitments and that it would monitor their implementation, without expanding further on how that would be enforced.

Paramount welcomed the EU's greenlight, which it said represented "a major milestone" toward completing its acquisition. In a Wednesday statement, the company added that such clearances reflect how a Paramount-Warner combo "will enhance consumer choice" and create a business with a scale "capable of competing with the tech companies that have come to dominate the industry."

Universal did not respond Wednesday to a request for comment about Paramount's new film distribution commitments in Europe.

A Paramount-Warner combo would mean putting HBO Max, fan favorite titles like "Harry Potter" and even CNN under the same roof with CBS, "Top Gun" and the Paramount+ streaming service. Beyond movies and streaming, both American companies also own a handful of European-based TV assets — including Warner's TVN Group in Poland, as well as localized channels for flagship Paramount brands like MTV and Nickelodeon.

Ongoing challenge from US states

The EU's blessing marks the latest in a chain of regulatory clearances inching the merger closer to becoming a reality, but the deal faces other challenges. In the U.S., a federal judge on Monday ordered the companies to pause their transaction for at least two weeks.

That spans from a lawsuit brought forth by California and 11 other states seeking to block Paramount and Warner's merger altogether — on the grounds such a tie-up would "extinguish competition" in Hollywood and lead to fewer choices for consumers, particularly moviegoers and cable customers in the U.S.

Paramount has called the states' claims meritless. And the company reiterated that on Wednesday — saying findings from the EU's approval "directly refute key assumptions that underpin the state AGs' complaint," particularly when it comes to competition from newer or smaller film studios.

Either way, the deal is set to be halted until at least a preliminary injunction hearing, currently slated for Aug. 3. When granting the temporary restraining order earlier this week, U.S. District Judge Araceli Martínez-Olguín said states had made a strong case about a combined Paramount-Warner's potential to "substantially lessen competition" and that the merger would be "difficult, if not impossible, to unwind" without a pause.

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Other regulatory clearances

In contrast to the states' case, the Trump administration's U.S. Justice Department said it wouldn't block the deal — and instead released a lengthy statement in support, maintaining a Paramount-Warner combo would bring "benefits for American consumers and workers."

Paramount says it's also received regulatory clearances from countries like Australia, China and Canada. Other reviews remain in progress — including from the U.K., which has separately suggested it may intervene.

The clock is ticking. The company has pledged to start paying Warner shareholders added "ticking fee" compensation amounting to about \$7 million per day if the deal isn't closed by Sept. 30.

Including debt, Paramount's proposed purchase of Warner is valued at nearly \$111 billion based on current outstanding shares.

Beyond central antitrust reviews, regulators in Europe have also effectively approved of the billions of dollars in financial backing Paramount has secured from three Gulf states: Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. In regulatory filings, Paramount has maintained that these sovereign funds will not have any voting rights. Still, critics have sounded the alarm about what their money could mean in terms behind the scenes influence.

Trump pays respects to 4 US service members killed in the Middle East

By MATT ROURKE, JULIA DEMAREE-NIKHINSON and COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, Del. (AP) — President Donald Trump on Wednesday honored the lives of four U.S. service members who were killed in the Middle East and returned to their families at an air force base in Delaware.

The president saluted as four transfer cases carrying the service members' remains were escorted off an airplane during the dignified transfer at Dover Air Force Base. The ritual is one of the most somber duties of a commander in chief. It was the third that Trump has attended since he launched the war in Iran in February.

Speaking at an event in Georgia hours later, Trump described the ritual as "the toughest thing I do."

"I've been there many times before," he said of Dover. "This was, in particular, something very sad."

Earlier in the day, Trump said his message to families was simple: "We love you. We love your child," Trump told reporters.

Trump was accompanied at the dignified transfer by administration officials including Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Also present were Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., and Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del.

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 awaiting vehicles to take them to the mortuary facility at the base. There, the service members are prepared for their final resting place.

Fallen troops came from Hawaii, Texas, New York and North Carolina

Two U.S. Army soldiers killed in Iranian missile and drone attacks in Jordan were returned during the dignified transfer. The remains of a third service member who is believed to be the soldier missing after the Jordan attacks were also returned, as well as the remains of a soldier killed in Iraq during a detonation of an Iranian drone.

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 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.

Trump said Feehan's family accepted an invitation to join him on Air Force One on Wednesday as he traveled to an event in Georgia, where the family lives. Speaking at the event in Marietta, Trump described

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Feehan as a "flawless" person who was "going all the way — he was going to be a general."

"We will carry Tyler's memory in our hearts forever, and I just want to thank you," he told Feehan's parents during his remarks. "It's an honor to have you here today."

Trump previously said the soldiers died while protecting America and other nations from Iran.

"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.

Trump vows to retaliate for each US death

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 added that "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 he was saying was responsible for protecting U.S. forces in Jordan.

Trump attended two previous dignified transfers since the outset of the war, most recently in March.

Soldier had planned to marry fiance and attend law school

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.

Feehan's family said in a statement that their hearts were shattered by his loss. They remembered Feehan, who went by "Tivo," as someone who "packed in more living" in his 25 years than most do in a lifetime.

"He chased adventure relentlessly," the statement said. "He believed deeply in the power of military service, especially what it builds in a person: discipline, leadership, character."

He planned to marry his fiance and attend law school after his deployment. The family said they're starting a scholarship in his name.

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.

In a brief statement, Rampersad's family called her a "gentle giant" who "stood up for those who couldn't fight for themselves."

"She loved her family fiercely and will live on in the hearts of everyone she touched," the statement said.

Deonne Jenkins, 22, a friend, said Rampersad "loved deeply, cared genuinely, and always made people feel seen and important."

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.

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.

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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.

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.

Nor 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 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.

The demonstrations looked set to continue on Friday, despite Syrskyi's exit.

"It is good that the dialogue is working. At the same time, we should not forget the protesters' second demand — to reinstate Mykhailo Fedorov as defense minister," Dmytro Koziatynskyi, a veteran and former combat medic who has emerged as an informal voice of the protests, wrote on Threads.

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

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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 on 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.

Orphaned by war in Gaza, Palestinian siblings reunite with their sister in Israel

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

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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; Jwahr, 21; Sabreen, 20; Ghfran, 17; Fady, 16; Maisara, 11; and Arjwan, 8.

"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.

Jwahr 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.

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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 make the difficult, dangerous journey in a Red Cross van to the Kerem Shalom crossing 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 the crossing 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."

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 in key races.

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.

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. Some candidates have imploded in spectacular fashion, jeopardizing races the party had expected to win.

The drama has turned existential as each party faces a moment of reckoning. Democrats remain shaken by Trump being elected again 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 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 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.

"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 voters would unite behind the party's candidate.

Then there's 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 the Demo-

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cratic nomination, only to drop out after 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. Democrats are holding a convention this 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.

"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 2010 when the tea party ushered in a wave of unvetted 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.

In Michigan, Senate candidate and 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 seat, which Democrats will need to hold onto if they want a shot at winning the majority this year. Supporters point to the enthusiasm he's garnered as a way forward for the party.

The primary also highlights a schism over Israel. El-Sayed has described Israel's military campaign in Gaza as a genocide, an accusation rejected by Israel and the White House. In response, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, and its affiliated groups have spent close to \$30 million backing primary rival Haley Stevens.

Adam Green, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, said it's clear 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 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 historical 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 in Texas, where he ousted longtime Sen. John Cornyn 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.

Others chose to leave the party. In North Carolina, Sen. Thom Tillis declined to run for reelection after feuding with Trump. 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.

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Trump can boost candidates — or hold them back

Republicans have historically struggled when Trump isn't on the ballot. But he also risks weighing candidates down.

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 in which he continued to dispute his 2020 loss 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."

Today in History: July 23, the 1967 Detroit riot begins

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, July 23, the 204th day of 2026. There are 161 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 23, 1967, deadly rioting erupted in Detroit as an early morning police raid on an unlicensed bar resulted in a confrontation with local residents that led to five days of violence and resulted in 43 deaths.

Also on this date:

In 1903, the Ford Motor Company sold its first car, a Model A, for \$850.

In 1958, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II named the first four women to peerage in the House of Lords.

In 1982, actor Vic Morrow and two child actors, 7-year-old Myca Dinh Le and 6-year-old Renee Shin-Yi Chen, were killed when a helicopter crashed on them during filming of a Vietnam War scene for "Twilight Zone: The Movie." (Director John Landis and four associates were later acquitted of manslaughter charges.)

In 1983, an Air Canada Boeing 767 ran out of fuel while flying from Montreal to Edmonton; the pilots were able to glide the jetliner to a safe emergency landing in Gimli, Manitoba. (The near-disaster occurred because the fuel had been erroneously measured in pounds instead of kilograms at a time when Canada was converting to the metric system.)

In 1990, President George H.W. Bush announced his choice of Judge David Souter of New Hampshire to succeed the retiring Justice William J. Brennan on the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 1996, at the Atlanta Olympics, Kerri Strug made a heroic final vault despite torn ligaments in her left ankle to help secure the U.S. women's gymnastics squad's first-ever Olympic team gold medal.

In 1997, the search for Andrew Cunanan, the suspected killer of designer Gianni Versace and others, ended as police found his body on a houseboat in Miami Beach, an apparent suicide.

In 1999, Eileen Collins became the first woman to command a U.S. space flight as the shuttle Columbia blasted off to deploy the world's most powerful X-ray telescope, the Chandra X-ray Observatory.

In 2003, Massachusetts' attorney general issued a report saying clergy members and others in the Boston Archdiocese had probably sexually abused more than 1,000 people over a period of six decades.

In 2006, Tiger Woods became the first player since Tom Watson in 1982-83 to win consecutive British Open titles.

In 2011, singer Amy Winehouse, 27, was found dead in her London home from accidental alcohol poisoning.

In 2012, Penn State's football program was all but leveled by penalties for its handling of the Jerry Sandusky child sex abuse scandal as the NCAA imposed an unprecedented \$60 million fine, a four-year ban from postseason play and a cut in the number of football scholarships the school could award.

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In 2019, Boris Johnson won the contest to lead Britain's governing Conservative Party; Johnson became the country's prime minister the following day.

In 2021, Cleveland's Major League Baseball team, known as the Indians since 1915, announced that it would get a new name, the Guardians, at the end of the 2021 season; the change came amid a push for institutions and teams to drop logos and names that were considered racist.

Today's Birthdays: Retired Supreme Court Justice Anthony M. Kennedy is 90. Actor Ronny Cox is 88. Rock singer David Essex is 79. Actor Woody Harrelson is 65. Rock musician Martin Gore (Depeche Mode) is 65. Actor-director Eriq La Salle is 64. Rock musician Slash is 61. Basketball Hall of Famer Gary Payton is 58. Model-actor Stephanie Seymour is 58. Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock of Georgia is 57. Actor Charisma Carpenter is 56. Singer Alison Krauss is 55. R&B singer Dalvin DeGrate (Jodeci) is 55. Actor-comedian Marlon Wayans is 54. Actor Kathryn Hahn is 53. Actor Stephanie March is 52. R&B singer Michelle Williams is 47. Actor Paul Wesley is 44. Actor Daniel Radcliffe is 37.