

Groton Daily Independent

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Community Calendar

Saturday, July 25

State B Legion 14U at Vermillion

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.

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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



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.

State B Legion 14U at Vermillion

Monday, July 27

Senior Menu: Hot turkey sandwich, creamy noodles, peas and carrots, fruit.

Senior citizens meet at the Groton Community Center with potluck at noon.

United Methodist Vacation Bible school, 5 p.m. to 7:45 p.m.

Elementary Volleyball Camp, 8 a.m. to noon, GHS Gym and Arena

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

Junior Legion Regional Tournament at Sisseton: 5 p.m.: Groton vs. Big Stone City; 30 minutes after first game: Claremont vs. Sisseton.

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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.

Hunt for Earhart's Plane

An expedition to find the plane Amelia Earhart disappeared in is set to begin this October. The news was announced yesterday, on what would have been Earhart's 129th birthday.

A 16-person team of archaeologists, filmmakers, and other experts will travel by boat on Oct. 7 to a remote island in the central Pacific nation of Kiribati. The expedition believes Earhart and her navigator, Fred Noonan, got stranded there while trying to circumnavigate the globe in 1937. Radio signals, human bones, and 1930s-era artifacts—including anti-freckle cream—all suggest Earhart and Noonan may have died on an unplanned stop at the uninhabited island. Shortly after a strong tropical storm in 2015, satellite imagery also captured a visual anomaly the expedition team believes could be the wreckage of Earhart's long-lost Lockheed 10-E Electra aircraft. Other experts say it's likely a downed coconut tree.

Before her fatal 1937 mission, Earhart became the first woman to fly solo and nonstop across the Atlantic Ocean, a college professor, and a fashion designer.

LeBron James to play record-extending 24th NBA season with the 76ers.

The legendary 41-year-old forward said yesterday that he signed a two-year, \$8M deal. James joins the Philadelphia-based team vying to win his fifth league championship and break the 76ers' 43-year championship drought. He broke a 52-year drought for the city of Cleveland in 2016, after beginning his NBA career with the team in 2003, directly out of high school.

Trump attends rescheduled White House Correspondents' Association Dinner.

President Donald Trump and members of the media gathered in Washington, DC's Waldorf Astoria hotel for the annual gala, which was rescheduled after a shooter opened fire at the original event in April. The association honored the Secret Service officer who was shot in a protective vest, as well as the Washington Hilton staff who worked that night. Mentalist Oz Pearlman also returned as yesterday evening's entertainer.

Measles cases reach a 35-year high, surpassing last year's total.

Federal officials yesterday reported 2,318 confirmed measles cases across 43 states and Washington, DC, so far this year. Roughly 93% of the cases are among unvaccinated people, and nearly 69% are among those under age 20. No deaths have been reported. Last year saw 2,289 confirmed cases, with three deaths. A panel of international experts is set to meet in November to discuss whether the US can keep its designation as a country that officially eliminated the disease.

Wildfires in Spain and France force over 200,000 people to evacuate.

Spain declared its first-ever wildfire-related state of emergency yesterday, while France ordered a total evacuation of the Cap Ferret peninsula, with some residents fleeing by boat. Both nations have asked fellow European Union members for help, as high winds and a heat wave make it more difficult to contain the blazes.

Singer Chris Brown pleads guilty in London nightclub altercation case.

The Grammy-winning singer reached a plea deal yesterday in a case stemming from a 2023 altercation in a London nightclub with a music producer. Brown pleaded guilty to affray in exchange for more serious assault and weapons charges being dropped. The 37-year-old was freed on bail and will be sentenced Oct. 26; the affray charge carries a maximum three-year prison sentence.

... separately, disgraced music executive Sean "Diddy" Combs is reportedly in solitary confinement after being involved in a fight with a fellow inmate.

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Ugandan park rangers relocate endangered giraffes to escape oil drilling.

Rangers this week began relocating 12 critically endangered Nubian giraffes from Uganda's largest national park, which also holds roughly 40% of the country's oil deposits. A French company began drilling in 2023, and activity has increased in recent months. The giraffes were transported about 65 miles by truck to the Ajai Wildlife Reserve, which is trying to rebuild its wildlife population after poaching and political instability nearly wiped out the population.

Linguists say they've discovered the "golden age" of languages.

Humans spoke tens of thousands of languages between 1,000 and 3,000 years ago, according to a study published this week. This so-called golden age ended with the rise of large states and empires, such as the Roman Empire, which compelled people to adopt their languages. The study challenges the long-held theory that language extinction began 500 years ago with European colonialism.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Bennett L. in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

"My wife had to be rushed to the emergency room. I pulled up and was struggling with the hospital door, all the while trying to manage my wife, who was close to being comatose. Out of nowhere, someone who was on his break rushed to lend a hand. He not only did that, but also stayed with us during registration, told me where to park my car, and waited until I came back to escort me to where the doctor was doing the examination. This wasn't his job; I don't even think he worked in the department. Just someone who saw someone in desperate need and pitched in where needed without hesitation."

GROTON CUSTOMER APPRECIATION



Walking Tacos!

11 am - 2 pm
Groton Bank

TUESDAY, JULY 28

DACOTAH BANK

MEMBER FDIC

Pennington County Pursuit

What: South Dakota Highway Patrol pursuit of single vehicle
Where: I-90 at mile marker 67, Box Elder, South Dakota
When: 10:39 a.m., Friday, July 24, 2026

Driver 1: 50-year-old-male from Rapid City, South Dakota, no injuries
Vehicle 1: 2019 Toyota Tundra
Seat Belt Used: No

Pennington County, S.D.- A 50-year-old man is in custody following a pursuit with the South Dakota Highway Patrol in Box Elder, South Dakota and the surrounding area.

Preliminary information indicates the driver of a 2019 Toyota Tundra left Love's Truck Stop in Box Elder after Pennington County dispatch received a call of a theft on the premises. The Box Elder Police Department located the vehicle traveling east on I-90 and attempted a traffic stop. The driver failed to stop and a pursuit was initiated. The South Dakota Highway Patrol joined the pursuit which extended to Highway 14/16 and rural roads before turning west on I-90. Shortly after crossing into Wyoming, the vehicle entered a spin and ran off the road. The driver attempted to regain control when a South Dakota Highway Patrol unit pinned the Toyota against a tree. The driver was taken into custody without further incident.

Other agencies involved were the Box Elder Police Department, the Meade County Police Department, the Pennington County Sherriff's Office, the Cook County Sherriff's Office, and the Wyoming Highway Patrol.

All information released is preliminary.

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

Social Security Announces Significant Improvements in the Supplemental Security Income Program

The 2026 Annual Report of the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Program highlights new initiatives under Commissioner Bisignano

Baltimore, MD – The Social Security Administration (SSA) today transmitted the 2026 Annual Report of the Supplemental Security Income Program to the President and Congress. Highlighted in this year's report are significant service improvements for the SSI program under the leadership of Commissioner Frank J. Bisignano.

New initiatives under Commissioner Bisignano have led to a reduction in improper payments, higher levels of accuracy, and better, faster, and higher-quality service for America's most vulnerable populations. The significant improvements include:

- Streamlining SSI policy instructions for increased transparency.

- Deploying technology and call segmentation curating better service for customers.

- Expanding use of the Access to Financial Institution (AFI) tool, allowing the agency to identify improper payments early and avoid large overpayments.

- Fully implementing the Payroll Information Exchange (PIE), helping to prevent improper payments with timely wage reporting and reducing the reporting burden for recipients.

- Strengthening the control environment with tools like the SSI non-medical redetermination process, where SSA conducts scheduled interviews of all non-medical factors to determine ongoing SSI eligibility.

- Working closely with recipients and their representatives to promote understanding of the SSI program and maintain trust placed in the agency.

"Under President Trump's leadership, we are protecting and strengthening Social Security for all Americans, including the nation's most vulnerable. As part of this commitment, I renewed SSA's focus on SSI over the last year," said Commissioner Frank J. Bisignano. "For the first time in the agency's history, I named a lead executive and established the SSI Improvement office to transform the service we provide to SSI recipients. We have made the program better for the people who rely on it and the SSA employees who support them."

For more than 50 years, the SSI program has provided financial safety for aged, blind, and disabled Americans with limited resources. They rely on SSI benefits to meet basic needs of food and shelter. The program provides security for more than seven million people and is funded from general tax revenues.

BROWN COUNTY FAIR

GETTIN'
ROWDY
IN THE STIX



ABERDEEN, SD

AUGUST 10-16, 2026

TICKETS ON
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!



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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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2026 South Dakota American Legion State Class "B" 14U Baseball Tournament

South Dakota American Legion
State Class "B" 14U Baseball Tournament
Prentis Park Baseball Field, Vermillion, SD
Hosted by Vermillion Post 1
July 24th - July 26th, 2026

DELL RAPIDS POST 65 **12**

Region 5B Champ

July 24th Game 1
11:00 AM

GROTON POST 39 **8**

Region 1B Champ

WINNER/COLOME POST 169 **11**

Region 7B Champ

July 24th Game 2
30 Min After G1

S/M/F/C POST 152 **5**

Region 4B Champ

ELK POINT POST 134 **5**

Region 3B Champ

July 24th Game 3
30 Min After G2

LENNOX POST 174 **7**

Region 6B Champ

MADISON POST 25 **14**

Region 2B Champ

July 24th Game 4
7:00 PM

VERMILLION POST 1 **0**

Host

There will be an opening
ceremony between games 2
and 3.



Dell Rapids

Winner G1

July 25th Game 7
30 Min After G6

Winner G7

Winner/Colome

Winner G2

Lennox

Winner G3

July 25th Game 8
30 Min After G7

Winner G8

Madison

Winner G4

July 26th Game 11
30 Min After Game 10

Champion

July 26th Game 10
30 Min After G9

3rd Place

Groton

Loser G1

July 25th Game 5
11:00 AM

Winner G5

S/M/F/C

Loser G2

Elk Point

Loser G3

July 25th Game 6
30 Min After G5

Winner G6

Vermillion

Loser G4

July 26th Game 9
10:00 AM

5th Place

Tournament MVP:

Big Stick Award:

Porter T. Talcott Sportsmanship Award:



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Groton 14U falls in state opener, faces Scotland/Menno/Freeman/Canistota Saturday

VERMILLION — Groton Post 39 saw an eighth-inning rally by Dell Rapids end its comeback bid Friday, as Dell Rapids escaped with a 12-8 victory in the opening round of the South Dakota Class B 14U State American Legion Baseball Tournament.

Groton will continue play at 11 a.m. Saturday against Scotland/Menno/Freeman/Canistota (SMFC) Post 152 79ers, who dropped an 11-5 decision to Winner/Colome in Friday's first round.

In the opposite side of the bracket, Lennox edged Elk Point 7-5, while Madison rolled past host Vermillion 14-0.

Dell Rapids struck first with four runs in the second inning before adding another run in the third to build a 5-0 advantage.

Groton answered in a big way in the bottom of the fourth. The locals erupted for seven runs to surge ahead 8-5, despite collecting just one hit in the inning. Trayce Schelle delivered the biggest hit of the rally, driving home two runs with a single as Groton capitalized on walks and Dell Rapids miscues.

Dell Rapids battled back in the seventh, tying the game at 8-8 on an RBI single by Oakley W. and a run-scoring double by Dawson B. The game remained tied until the eighth inning, when Dell Rapids regained the lead for good. Henry B. was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded to force in the go-ahead run before Oakley W. added a two-run single and another run scored on a fielder's choice.

Schelle started on the mound for Groton and worked five innings, allowing five runs — only two of them earned — on six hits while striking out three and walking five.

Schelle also led Groton offensively with two RBIs. He and Asher Zimmerman each had a hit, while the Post 39 offense showed patience by drawing eight walks. Bentley Ehresmann and Mason Locke each walked twice, and Keegan Kucker stole two bases.

Dell Rapids finished with 11 hits, led by Dawson B., who went 3-for-4 with four RBIs. Oakley W. and Easton D. each collected multiple hits as Dell Rapids also drew eight walks and turned a double play.



GROTON AMERICAN WING NIGHT!

★ SAT., JULY 25 ★
SERVING STARTS AT 6:00 P.M.



\$12 WING BASKET
6 Wings (1 Flavor)
Fries • Celery • Ranch

FLAVORS

BBQ	Mild
Mild	Medium
Spicy Garlic	Garlic Parmesan

NEW FLAVOR: SPICY PEACH 

+ ADD ON Order of Fries - \$6

**Cold Drinks.
Hot Wings.
Great Company!**

GROTON POST #39 ★ SQUADRON #39 SOL ★ AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY
ALL PART OF THE GROTON AMERICAN LEGION



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota universities' Native American enrollment rises to pre-pandemic level

28% increase at Black Hills State accounts for much of systemwide growth in last year
BY MAKENZIE HUBER

Native American student enrollment at South Dakota public universities has returned to its pre-pandemic level, according to a new report.

Black Hills State University in Spearfish had 227 Native American students during the 2025-26 school year, up 49 from 178 the year before. That 28% increase was a major factor in the 6% systemwide growth in Native American students compared to the prior year.

The university's student body typically has the highest percentage of Native American students of the six institutions in the system. Urla Marcus, director of the Center for American Indian Studies at the university and a member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, said the recent numbers are a sign that new programs are working to recruit and retain more students.

Higher enrollment leads to a "ripple effect," Marcus added.

"They can go back to their communities and make an impact, set that example that more people are attaining these degrees," Marcus said.

In 2019, the Legislature required the South Dakota Board of Regents, which oversees the public universities, to develop programs aimed at increasing Native American student enrollment and retention. The board submits a report by July 1 each year detailing activities and progress made.

Systemwide, Native American enrollment decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic and stayed lower for several years afterward despite increases at some universities.

The Native American percentage of the systemwide student body also dipped below 3% for several years but now stands at 3.2%. South Dakota's overall population is 9% Native American.

Black Hills State's latest increase pushed systemwide Native American enrollment to 1,155 — nearly reaching the 1,157 recorded in 2017. Native American enrollment increased this past school year by 16 students at South Dakota Mines and 15 at the University of South Dakota, but decreased by five at South Dakota State University, four at Northern State University and two at Dakota State University.

This is the first year since the pandemic that Native American enrollment decreased at South Dakota State. The university has played a significant role in increasing Native American enrollment within the South Dakota public university system in the last decade. President Barry Dunn, a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, launched the Wokini Initiative in 2017 to recruit, retain and support Native American students. Enrollment of Native Americans at the university grew from 259 in 2017 to a peak of 329 in 2024.

Scholarships and financial aid awarded to Native American students across the state have nearly doubled since the 2022 school year, driven largely by a near doubling in Pell Grants and scholarships from institutions and private foundations.

Black Hills State has not yet recovered its own pre-pandemic Native American enrollment numbers, despite the recent gains. Students at the time of the pandemic, Marcus said, were "very cautious," and many chose not to enroll outside tribal land, with some opting for tribal colleges instead. Those schools offered incentives that the university did not, such as tuition discounts and supplies.

Between 2015 and 2022, the latest data available from the National Center for Education Statistics, enrollment at Oglala Lakota College on the Pine Ridge Reservation fell by 189 students and at Sinte Gleska

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University in Rosebud by 103. Sisseton Wahpeton College on the Lake Traverse Reservation gained 55 students over the same period.

As the pandemic receded and tribal college incentive programs ended, Marcus said more students have shown interest in enrolling at Black Hills State. Marcus said the university's location in the Black Hills, an area of historical and spiritual significance for several tribes, is a draw for students. The school has Native faculty and staff working with the center.

"Students see a lot of opportunities for them to grow and be successful," Marcus said.

In addition to more targeted recruiting efforts, Marcus said the center has strengthened or created new programs to support students, including mentorship and scholarship programs.

The Native Scholars program is in its third year. Students in the program regularly engage with advisers and the center's administration, participate in cultural activities and mentor their peers. Graduates receive a stole and star quilt. The program graduated six students last spring and expects to graduate another 13 next spring.

The peer mentor program grew organically before being formalized in recent years, Marcus said. The center pairs upperclassmen with freshmen and sophomores who share similar fields of study and home regions.

"We have a lot of silent leaders in our center," Marcus said. "These students have taken some years getting closer and closer to graduation. Younger students look up to them, ask them questions and allow upperclassmen to share what they've learned and what they've stumbled on."

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.

COMMENTARY

Only you — and the government — can prevent forest fires at Mount Rushmore by Seth Tupper

It's easy to imagine people taking government warnings about forest fires less seriously after their government explodes \$700,000 worth of fireworks over a forest.

That's one of many problems with July fireworks displays at Mount Rushmore — problems that will apparently be ignored as long as Donald Trump is in the White House.

On July 3, the National Park Service permitted fireworks at the mountain carving for the president and 4,800 guests. It's not difficult to understand the fire risk posed by the event. Fireworks go up, and embers come down. Mount Rushmore is surrounded by the Black Hills National Forest. When embers fall on pine needles and other dry vegetation, wildfires can start. A wildfire near Mount Rushmore could endanger thousands of people at the memorial and 2 miles down the road in the town of Keystone.

Nobody summed it up better than the late Bill Gabbert, a former Park Service fire management officer who once said that shooting fireworks in the summer over the forest surrounding Mount Rushmore was "an insane concept."

Gabbert said that during his involvement with past fireworks shows, 60 to 80 firefighters roamed the rocky terrain around the mountain, toting 5-gallon bags of water on their backs to douse fires. Fireworks displays at Mount Rushmore from 1998 to 2009 caused 21 wildfire ignitions, according to the Park Service's own 2020 environmental assessment. Firefighters quickly suppressed those fires, but each one that flared up tempted fate.

The wildfire risk is one of the reasons the Park Service stopped allowing fireworks at Mount Rushmore after 2009 — until Trump's pal Kristi Noem, then the governor of South Dakota, convinced him to approve them again in 2020. She used Trump's appearance at the event to boost South Dakota tourism and her

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own national political profile.

Trump spoke publicly that year about his conversations with Park Service officials regarding the fire risk. "I said, 'What can burn? It's stone,'" Trump recalled.

On the basis of that flippant or ignorant analysis, the Park Service obediently set aside its concerns from prior years. Sanity was restored during the Joe Biden administration, but the return of Trump to the presidency brought a return of fireworks to Mount Rushmore this year.

Before and after this year's event, something incongruous happened: Local, state and federal officials warned and scolded the public about the fire-sparking potential of various activities in the drought-stricken Black Hills, including the use of fireworks.

On May 29, after a string of Black Hills wildfires, the sheriff's office in Pennington County (which includes Mount Rushmore) said it would enforce a "zero tolerance" policy toward unpermitted open burning and other types of illegal fires.

On June 22, Pennington County officials reminded residents of the state ban against selling and discharging fireworks in the Black Hills Fire Protection District. The district encompasses the entire portion of the Black Hills that lies within South Dakota, excluding cities, and its restrictions are intended "to protect timber on areas subject to unusual fire dangers," according to state law. Violations are punishable by 30 days in jail and a \$500 fine, but there's an exception for fireworks authorized by the government.

On July 1, two days before the Mount Rushmore event, children accidentally started a grass fire in Rapid City — 20 miles from the national memorial — with fireworks.

"Independence Day should be a time for celebration, not tragedy," said Rapid City Fire Chief Jason Culberston in response to that incident, adding that he wanted everyone to enjoy the holiday safely by "making smart decisions that reduce the risk of injury or fire."

This week, after a run of 100-degree temperatures with little rain, the U.S. Forest Service announced a higher level of fire restrictions in the Black Hills National Forest, prohibiting activities such as smoking outdoors, welding or driving offroad. "Fire danger is increasing, and these restrictions are being implemented to protect public and firefighter safety amid current and anticipated elevated wildfire risk," the Forest Service said.

That's the government agency that gave us Smokey Bear and his famous admonition to the public: "Only you can prevent forest fires."

If Smokey wants the public to behave, maybe he should turn that slogan back around on the government. Because a government torches its own credibility on wildfire safety when it lights a barrage of fireworks over a forest.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

USDA union leaders rally against proposed DC downsizing

BY SAM GAUNTT

A group of current and former U.S. Department of Agriculture employees are calling on the Trump administration to halt the mandated relocation of more than 2,500 employees from its Washington, D.C., headquarters to five regional offices across the country.

In an online briefing hosted by federal union leaders Thursday, speakers said the reorganization process USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins has led will amount to widespread layoffs, as many workers will choose not to relocate across the country.

Rollins' effort, launched one year ago Friday, would move department staff away from the nation's capital. The department should have no more than 2,000 employees in the region, according to a July 2025 memo Rollins signed.

Kevin Shea, former acting secretary of the USDA under President Joe Biden, said the relocation could impact the department's ability to carry out its core services such as fighting pests and diseases, protecting forest land and ensuring food safety.

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"All of this requires an adequate and qualified workforce," he said. "These new proposed actions, added to the damage already done, all but ensures that we'll not have one."

Department layoffs

Since President Donald Trump returned to office last year, the USDA has lost more than 20,000 employees, according to Office of Personnel Management data. Most left through early retirement or buyouts offered by the U.S. Dole Service, union officials said.

But speakers Thursday warned that thousands more will choose to leave instead of relocating across the country to a regional USDA office. Those offices, as outlined in Rollins' July 2025 memo, include Raleigh, North Carolina; Kansas City, Missouri; Indianapolis, Indiana; Fort Collins, Colorado; and Salt Lake City, Utah.

In that memo, she wrote that the relocation will ensure that the USDA is "closer to the people it serves while achieving savings to the American taxpayer."

But most USDA staff already work outside the nation's capital. The department had about 4,600 employees in Washington when Rollins announced the reorganization efforts last year. A majority of the staff reductions have come from across the country.

'A forced choice'

Genny Kotyk, a Forest Service employee and president of the National Federation of Federal Employees' Forest Service Council, said the impacts of federal cuts are already being felt.

She said that the employee reductions and reorganizations of the Forest Service, which is the largest U.S. firefighting agency, are affecting the response to the damaging wildfire season currently impacting Canada and some Midwestern and northern states.

In 2025, the Forest Service saw more than 6,500 employees leave through a combination of layoffs, buyouts and early retirements, according to OPM.

"We're looking to lose, potentially, another 6,500 employees that are going to be forced to either change their job duties, have a longer commute, or move completely across the country, or resign, or retire," she said. "Forty percent of those employees have some kind of fire qualification, and because they're higher level staff, they typically also have a more seasoned career and have higher level fire qualifications."

Kotyky said that her union polled nearly 3,000 of its bargaining unit employees about the reorganization, and only 7% said they'd be willing to relocate.

Cheerice Vaughn, who works for a USDA office that oversees grants and loans for rural development projects, said she and 45 members of her team received a notice to relocate from Washington to Dallas, Texas. She said of those who received relocation notices, 86% were people of color.

"It's a forced choice: uproot your entire life, or leave federal service," Vaughn, also president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 3870, said.

Still, she said, it's not about "45 names on a spreadsheet in Washington."

"It's about whether the next little town waiting on clean water gets it in time," she said. "It's about whether the next small business owner in a town with no other lender gets a chance at all. We built these things once. We're asking to be allowed to keep building them."

Legal challenge

Although USDA is continuing with its relocations and department-wide reorganization, some employees are seeking to block the change.

Several national labor unions, as part of their efforts over the past year to block the Trump administration's reshaping of the federal government, filed a request for an injunction in federal court in San Francisco seeking to block USDA from ordering the relocations.

The case is ongoing.

USDA spokespeople did not return a message seeking comment Friday.

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.

Trump imposes new host of tariffs on trading partners, alleging they use forced labor

BY ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump reignited his tariff agenda Friday by imposing new import taxes on products from dozens of top U.S. trading partners, immediately replacing temporary global tariffs he levied after the U.S. Supreme Court delivered a major blow to his sweeping “Liberation Day” duties.

As of Friday morning, American importers will now pay an extra 10% to 12.5% of a product’s value on most goods from nearly 60 countries, including Canada, the European Union, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, Taiwan and the United Kingdom, among dozens more. The tariffs could affect 99.4% of imports, according to U.S. trade authorities.

The fresh round of import taxes, first announced late Thursday afternoon, replace a blanket 10% tariff on global goods under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974, which expired at midnight Friday. Those tariffs invited new legal challenges, including from Democratic-led states.

The latest tariffs were imposed after the Office of the United States Trade Representative allegedly found forced labor conditions in all of the economies investigated under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974.

U.S. Trade Ambassador Jamieson Greer said in a statement Thursday that Trump “recognizes that decades of moral suasion have not eradicated forced labor from global supply chains. The United States has had a forced labor import ban for nearly a century, and rigorously enforces it; it’s well past time for our trading partners to do the same.”

Supreme Court ruling

The Office of the United States Trade Representative announced two broad investigations in March, less than one month after the Supreme Court struck down Trump’s unprecedented global tariffs under the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act, commonly called IEEPA.

Shortly after the Supreme Court’s blow to his IEEPA tariffs, which he announced in early April 2025 on what he dubbed “Liberation Day,” the government was on the hook for roughly \$166 billion in refunds to American importers who already paid the duties.

The latest batch of duties, in effect as of Friday, is the second round of import taxes the Trump administration announced this week. The White House introduced 50% tariffs on most Canadian imports Monday, triggering the duties under Section 338 of the Tariff Act of 1930.

The Depression-era provision, which has never before been enforced, authorizes the president to impose duties up to 50% of a product’s value in response to discrimination against U.S. commerce.

States Newsroom has spoken with numerous small business owners since 2025 about the effects tariffs have on their capacity to keep prices steady, hire employees, invest in new equipment and inventory, and just generally remain in operation.

‘Ridiculously blunt’

Critics slammed the administration’s new series of sweeping duties on a large swath of the country’s imports.

Scott Lincicome, vice president for general economics at the libertarian Cato Institute, wrote Thursday the outcome of the Section 301 investigations were “clearly predetermined” and “both ridiculously blunt and wildly out of proportion to any measurable economic distortion.”

“And the whole thing establishes precedent for an ‘automatic tariff generator’ that Trump or a future president can deploy at will. It makes a mockery of a real issue and might poison legitimate reform. And Congress probably won’t do anything about it,” Lincicome wrote.

Some Republicans in the U.S. House rebuffed Trump’s tariff agenda in February, but legislative change has not emerged.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a statement Thursday the president has “bled the inflation-battered American people dry with his tariffs.”

“Now he’s coming back for more. Trump’s chaotic tariff taxes have made life harder and more expensive

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for the American people. Families are paying more for everyday necessities. Small business owners are struggling to keep the lights on. Manufacturers are shedding jobs and farmers are getting squeezed. Meanwhile, Trump and his billionaire family and friends get richer on the backs of working families," Schumer, D-N.Y., said.

The Yale Budget Lab estimates consumer prices could rise up to 1% under the new tariffs, increasing household costs by roughly \$1,100.

If the duties remained in place, the U.S. would gain about \$2 trillion in revenue over the next decade, though the number would likely be lower after accounting for negative impacts on the economy, according to the Yale Budget Lab.

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

As national death rate dips, some states did better than others

BY TIM HENDERSON

The nation's death rate may have fallen to a historic low last year as many of the killers of young people such as drug overdoses, gun homicides and traffic accidents continued receding in 2025, according to new federal statistics.

States have not shared equally in the success, though, according to a Stateline analysis of provisional data by state. And the low ebb may reflect the effects of past health care expansion efforts that are threatened by today's Trump administration moves to curtail Medicaid expansion and cut funding for rural hospitals.

Some states in the Northeast have seen death rates drop by the most between 2015 and 2025 — led by New Jersey (down 8.3%), Rhode Island (down 8%), New York (down 7.9%), Massachusetts (down 7.4%) and the District of Columbia (down 7.0%). Some experts credit states' attention to health care, traffic issues and gun violence.

New Jersey has taken the lead in decreases because of a long-term commitment to expanding health care to people with low incomes, said Stephen Crystal, director of Rutgers University's Center for Health Services Research.

Even before Medicaid expansion under the federal Affordable Care Act, New Jersey and Massachusetts, among other states, were pooling funds with hospitals to cover more low-income residents, Crystal said.

"New Jersey has been doing this for a long time, and you're seeing the effects in the lower mortality rates for the big killers," he said.

The state stands out for having less than half the national rate of firearm deaths, both suicide and homicide, as well as deaths from heart and kidney diseases caused by high blood pressure. The rate of traffic accident deaths is also well below the national rate.

There's also a more confrontational attitude toward speeding and less tolerance for guns in the Northeast, he said.

"Here's something that annoys a lot of New Jerseyans. The state troopers have the cojones to pull you over if you're doing 90 on the turnpike. This is not the case in Wyoming," Crystal said. "Also if you go out West where gun possession is very high, then the firearm suicide deaths become enormous."

Nationally most of the decrease between 2024 and 2025 came from young age groups. The things most likely to kill them dropped after spiking during the early pandemic, including drug overdoses, traffic accidents, gun violence and suicide, according to an analysis of death counts by Mary Pat Campbell, an actuary and life insurance analyst in New York state.

Northeastern states have an advantage in tackling those problems based on wealth, she said.

"There has been an increasing separation of mortality outcomes by socioeconomic status," Campbell said, noting that traffic accidents are rarer in places like New Jersey partly because so many people commute on public transportation.

"For New Jersey, a lot of it really is that there are a bunch of high-income people who have lower-than-average mortality, just like people on Long Island and the rich parts of Westchester [in New York state],"

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she added.

Some states have not improved since 2015 in the provisional statistics analyzed by Stateline, which may change as the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention makes new age adjustments at the state level.

New Mexico had an age-adjusted death rate 9% higher last year than 10 years ago, as drug overdose deaths continue to plague the state at more than twice the national rate.

In June, New Mexico Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham called for restitution from the federal government over allegations that U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration officials knowingly let fentanyl shipments into the state during multiple presidential administrations. In one case, a whistleblower alleged, agents stood by while 1.8 million fentanyl pills were trafficked in hopes of catching higher-ranking dealers and suppliers down the line.

New Mexico also struggles with higher death rates from alcoholic liver disease and gun homicide. Neighboring Arizona, where the death rate is 5% higher than 10 years ago, also stands out for a high overdose death rate and a high gun suicide rate.

Iowa and Oklahoma death rates are also up 5% from 2015. Iowa stands out for a higher-than-national rate of fall-related deaths, typical of an aging rural population with little day-to-day supervision. Oklahoma has a similarly high rate of fall-related deaths, as well as almost four times the national rate of deaths from high blood pressure and hardening of the arteries — both problems that can be controlled with medication.

Iowa “recognizes fall-related deaths as a significant public health concern,” wrote a spokesperson for the state Department of Health and Human Services, Danielle Sample, in an e-mail statement. Those falls are associated with older age groups and possibly rural access to health care and preventive services, she said.

The state has a falls prevention program that stresses exercise to maintain mobility and monitoring excessive medication that could cause dizziness, poor vision and unsafe home conditions.

Almost two-thirds of the national death rate improvement for 2024 to 2025 came from people between the ages of 15 to 44, Campbell told Stateline.

Improvements were especially large for young people 25 to 34, a group including younger Millennials and older Gen Z, a demographic hard hit by homicides and drug overdose deaths early in the pandemic, Campbell told Stateline. The rate for accidents, a category that includes drug overdoses, gun accidents and traffic accidents, dropped 6% in one year, and the homicide rate dropped 14%, she said.

It’s hard to be sure how much death rates really changed between 2024 and 2025 because the methodology changed, Crystal noted, accusing the CDC of “grabbing for a good news headline” by reporting the apparently historic decrease prominently in a blog item.

For 2025, the CDC used different methods to calculate rates, including more adjustments to 2020 census data used as a basis for age adjustment, noting in the report that the results could change and “should be interpreted with caution.”

Asked about the issue, the CDC said in a statement to Stateline that “as this is a provisional report, we did not go in depth about the change in population denominators” and that it is “planning a brief report that will show the impact” of the changes on death rates and birth rate in new statistics.

In any case, the Trump administration likely can’t claim credit for current decreases in death rates, which would reflect policy changes from years ago that slowly take effect, Crystal said.

“This is not the time to see the effect of what Trump is doing now. It’s going to take five years,” Crystal said.

One killer of young people has not dropped: The rate of gun suicide has increased 14% since 2015, according to the Stateline analysis. Suicide has affected Gen Z young people more than previous generations.

Over the past 10 years, rates for Black and Hispanic people have increased while rates for other groups have gone down, according to the Stateline analysis.

“As a country we are improving. We should celebrate that. But many segments of the population are left behind,” said Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington.

Mokdad credited some medical advances for decreases in heart disease that came in spite of increased

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obesity.

"That decline in cardiovascular disease was due to better controlled blood pressure," Mokdad said. "Blood pressure medication, when it came out, was very expensive. Now blood pressure medication is so cheap you can get a three-month supply for less than the price of a cup of coffee."

Stateline reporter Tim Henderson can be reached at thenderson@stateline.org.

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

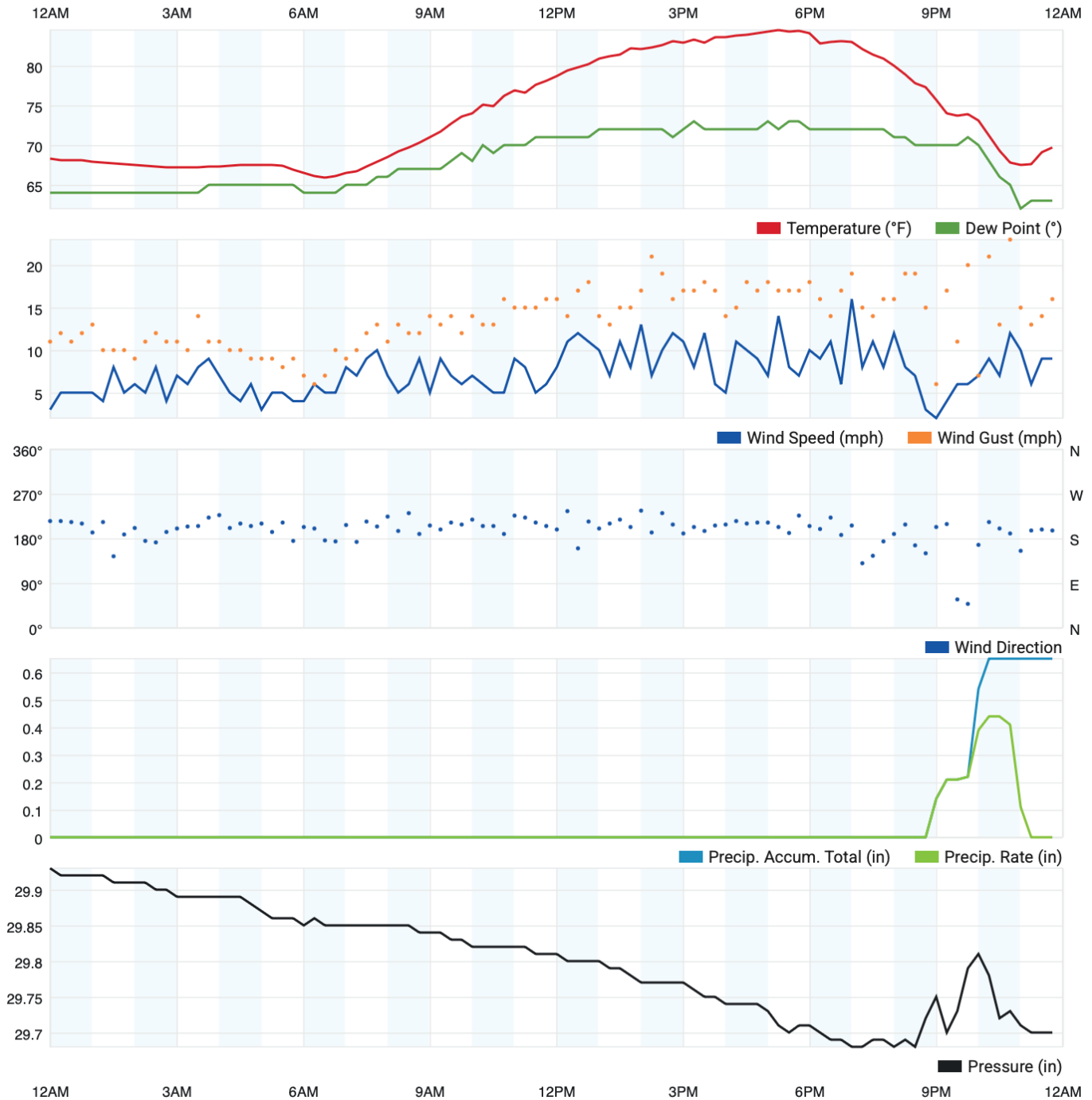
Tim Henderson covers demographics for Stateline. He has been a reporter at the Miami Herald, the Cincinnati Enquirer and the Journal News.

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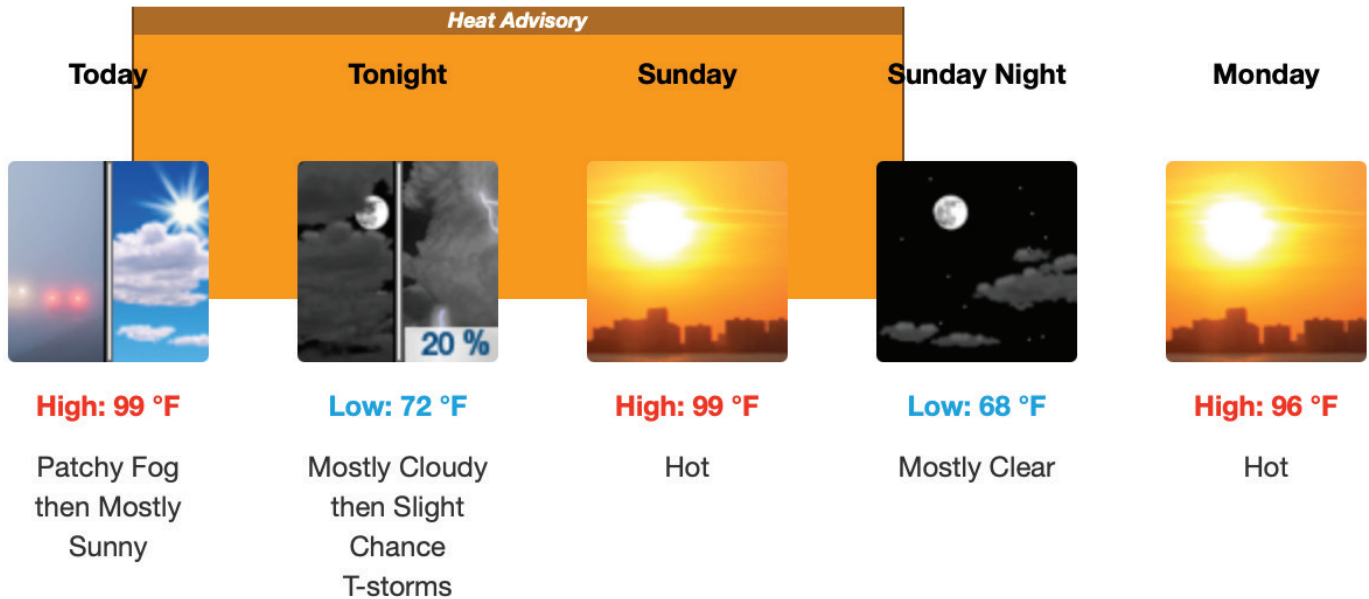
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

July 24, 2026



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THREAT ASSESSMENT

HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

2

WHAT THIS MEANS:
SCATTERED severe storms
possible

TIMING

6 PM to 3 AM CT

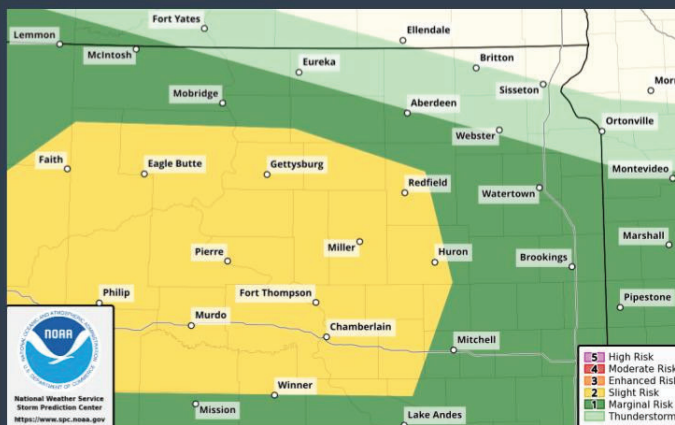
PRIMARY THREAT


DAMAGING
WIND
75mph+

SECONDARY THREAT


LARGE HAIL

Scattered SEVERE STORMS this Evening/Overnight



- Storms move from western to central SD this evening, with some becoming severe
- Damaging wind gusts of 75mph+ possible
- Storms to weaken & move across southeastern SD overnight

What To Do?

- Stay Weather Aware!
- Be ready to take shelter indoors when storms approach
- Have multiple ways to receive warnings



INDOOR
SHELTER



OUTDOOR PLANS?
STAY WEATHER
AWARE



MULTIPLE WAYS
TO RECEIVE
WARNINGS

There is a Slight Risk (level 2 out of 5) of severe storms this evening and overnight, mainly from 6 PM until 3 AM, over central South Dakota. Expect storms to move from western to central South Dakota this evening, with some storms becoming severe. Damaging wind gusts of 75 mph or higher will be possible. Large 1" diameter hail will also be possible, but damaging winds will be the main threat. The storms should weaken as they move across southeastern South Dakota overnight. Stay weather aware if you are outdoors this evening into the overnight hours. Think ahead about what sturdy shelter you would head to if storms approach.

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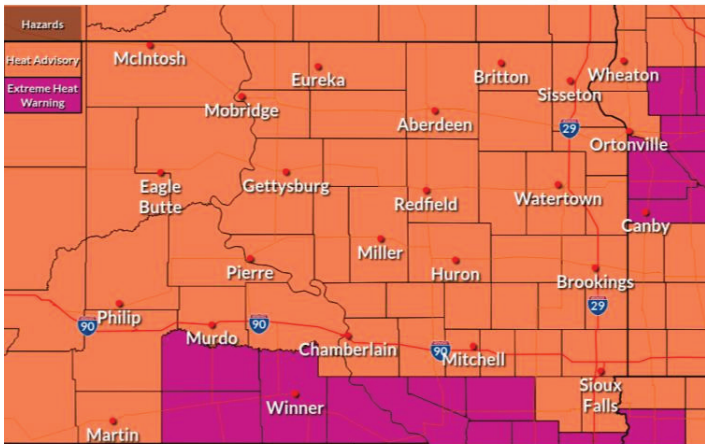
Heat Advisory Today - 1 to 9 PM CT

July 25, 2026
2:34 AM

Heat Advisory Today (1 to 9 PM CT). **Highs will be in the Upper 90s to 105 degrees through Sunday**, with lows in the 70s. Heat Index values 100 to 109 degrees.

Heat Headlines Today

Take action when you see symptoms of heat exhaustion and heat stroke!



Heat Exhaustion

ACT FAST

- Move to a cooler area
- Loosen clothing
- Sip cool water
- Seek medical help if symptoms don't improve

Dizziness
Thirst
Heavy Sweating
Nausea
Weakness

Heat exhaustion can lead to heat stroke.

Heat Stroke

ACT FAST

CALL 911

- Move person to a cooler area
- Loosen clothing and remove extra layers
- Cool with water or ice

Confusion
Dizziness
Becomes Unconscious

Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not given.

Stay Cool, Stay Hydrated, Stay Informed!



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Highs will be in the Upper 90s to 105 degrees through Sunday, with lows in the 70s. Heat Index values 100 to 109 degrees are expected this afternoon. Safety: Take action when you see symptoms of heat exhaustion and heat stroke! Heat Exhaustion includes dizziness, thirst, heavy sweating, nausea, and weakness. If experiencing Heat Exhaustion: move to a cooler area, loosen clothing, sip cool water, and seek medical help if symptoms don't improve. Heat Stroke symptoms include confusion, dizziness, or becoming unconscious. If someone is experiencing Heat Stroke, call 911, move the person to a cooler area, loosen clothing and remove extra layers, and potentially cool them with water or ice.



HeatRisk at 3 - Major through Monday

July 25, 2026
2:45 AM CDT

This heat will affect anyone without adequate cooling, hydration (water), and those sensitive to heat.

Heat Impacts: Vulnerable Populations



PREGNANT



NEWBORNS



CHILDREN



ELDERLY



CHRONIC ILLNESS

Everyone is at risk from the dangers of extreme heat, but these groups are more vulnerable than most. Age and certain conditions make the body less able to regulate temperature.



NEVER leave anyone alone in a closed car



Use air conditioners and stay in the shade



Drink plenty of water, even if not thirsty



Wear loose-fitting, light-colored clothing

→ **Don't forget about your pets!** Make sure to provide them with lots of water and shade. Bring them inside an air conditioned building if possible. **Never leave pets in a hot vehicle!**



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 85 °F at 5:02 PM

Low Temp: 66 °F at 6:25 AM

Wind: 24 mph at 10:40 PM

Precip: 0.65

Today's Info

Record High: 111 in 1931

Record Low: 44 in 1911

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 2.60

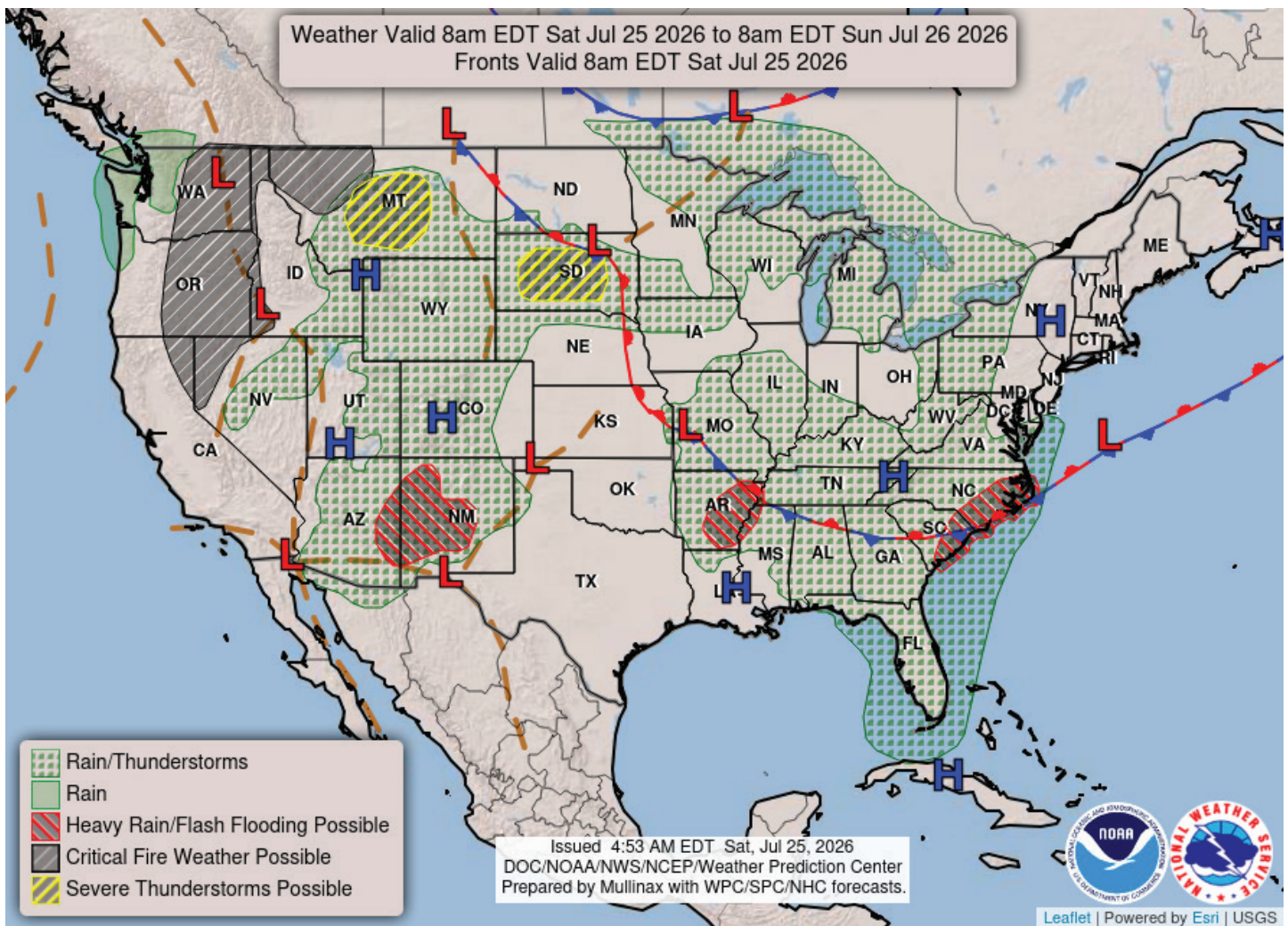
Precip to date in July.: 5.42

Average Precip to date: 13.61

Precip Year to Date: 14.89

Sunset Tonight: 9:09 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:09 am



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Today in Weather History

July 25, 1961: A thunderstorm started late in the evening on the 25th and went into the early morning hours of the 26th. A sizeable area suffered 50 to 100 percent loss of crops resulting from hail over the following counties, Bison, Perkins, Faulk, Sully, and western Hand. Corn was stripped of leaves and broken off. Oats and wheat were flattened. High winds with recorded gusts of 75 to 80 miles per hour cause numerous power failures and damaged trees in Pierre.

July 25, 1972: Unofficial rainfall amounts of 8 inches caused flash flooding in Ferney and surrounding area in Brown County. Water, over two feet depth was reported in a parking area. Basements were flooded, and foundations were damaged. The torrential rains caused extensive damage to crops in the area.

July 25, 1984: Severe thunderstorms caused considerable damage to the Pierre area. Winds were gusting to 83 mph at the Pierre airport, where thirteen planes, as well as several hangars, were destroyed. In town, a home and three businesses lost their roofs, and a trailer home was destroyed. Rains of four inches in thirty minutes produced flash flooding with some streets closed for some time. Some basements were reported to have 6 to 8 inches of water in them. At Dupree, high winds caused extensive damage to the grandstand roof at the fairgrounds. Along the entire path of the thunderstorms, hail and high winds broke windows, damaged cars, downed trees, damaged crops, and caused power outages.

July 25, 1993: Lake Kampeska, near Watertown, reached near record level at 37 inches over full mark due to runoff from heavy rains in previous days. Dozens of homes and two businesses were flooded out. About 100,000 sandbags were distributed to help prevent more flood damage to lakeside property owners.

July 25, 2000: A powerful F4 tornado hit the city of Granite Falls in Minnesota. The tornado first touched down in rural parts of the county west-northwest of Granite Falls. The tornado struck the city at 6:10 pm. After tearing through the residential sections of town, the tornado lifted at approximately 6:25 PM after being on the ground for over nine miles. The tornado caused one fatality and injured more than a dozen.

1891 — The mercury hit 109 degrees at Los Angeles, CA, marking the peak of a torrid heat wave. (David Ludlum)

1936: Lincoln, Nebraska saw an all-time high temperature of 115 degrees. The low only dropped to 91 degrees and the average temperature was 103. Many people spent the night sleeping outside to escape the heat.

1956: The Andrea Doria sank in dense fog near Nantucket Lightship, Massachusetts. The Swedish-American liner, Stockholm, hit the ship forty-five miles off the coast of Massachusetts. Fifty-two persons drowned or were killed by the impact. Click [HERE](#) for more information from PBS.

1986 — Tremendous hailstones pounded parts of South Dakota damaging crops, buildings and vehicles. Hail piled two feet deep at Black Hawk and northern Rapid City. Hail an inch and a quarter in diameter fell for 85 minutes near Miller and Huron, piling up to depths of two feet. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — Sixteen cities in the eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Beckley, WV, equalled their all-time record high of 91 degrees, established just the previous day. It marked their fourth day in a row of 90 degree heat, after hitting 90 degrees just twice in the previous 25 years of records. The water temperature of Lake Erie at Buffalo, NY, reached 79 degrees, the warmest reading in 52 years of records. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather from central Kansas to western Kentucky and southern Illinois during the day. Thunderstorms produced tennis ball size hail at Union, MO, and winds gusts to 65 mph at Sedalia, MO. Five cities in Washington and Oregon reported record high temperatures for the date. Medford, OR, hit 107 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Early afternoon thunderstorms over west central Missouri drenched the town of Ferguson with four inches of rain. Early evening thunderstorms in Pennsylvania produced more than two inches of rain north of Avella in one hour. (The National Weather Summary)

2005: The citizens of Sand Point, Alaska saw a rare tornado touchdown on two uninhabited islands. Sand Point is part of the Aleutian Chain and is located about 570 miles southwest of Anchorage.

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Daily Devotion

Can God Use You?

No circumstance falls outside God's ability to use us for His kingdom purposes.

Acts 16:14-15: 14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

15 And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

Lydia welcomed Paul and his companions into her home. As a new believer and a businesswoman in Philippi, she immediately understood that her resources—her home, hospitality, and influence—could serve the kingdom. By opening her doors to traveling ministers in need of rest and a base for their work, she provided a place where the gospel could take root in her city.

God's plan for every believer is made up of a lifetime of opportunities. No matter what our career or calling may be, we should each seek ways to serve the Lord daily. We do this by ministering—wherever we are—to family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers (Romans 12:10-13).

The Lord gives His children gifts and talents suitable for fulfilling His purposes, so we know He wants to use us. You can be sure that when you make yourself available to follow Him in any circumstance, He'll equip you with the right tools for the task.

Are you ready to say, "Yes, God can use me"? If so, then tell the Lord you are available to work for Him in any way He desires. He will respond by placing people and opportunities in your path. Through His strength, you will do more to further the kingdom than you ever imagined—one day and one small act of service at a time.

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:

07.24.26

22 23 27 38 54 1

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 23 Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.24.26

2 5 42 44 60 1

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$800,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[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: 16 Hrs 23 Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.22.26

8 11 22 25 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 38 Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.22.26

9 51 54 60 61 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 7 Mins 26 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: 17 Hrs 7 Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

India's education minister resigns after weeks of student-led protests

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's education minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned on Saturday after weeks of protests that demanded his removal over alleged leaks in some of the country's most competitive entrance exams and irregularities in the education system.

Pradhan announced the decision in a post on X, handing a major victory to the "Cockroach" movement, which had spearheaded nationwide demonstrations, sit-ins and hunger strikes. His resignation also marks the first significant concession by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to one of the most visible waves of public dissent it has faced in recent years.

The movement began more than a month ago after allegations of leaks in some of India's biggest entrance exams. It started as a call for education reforms but has grown into a broader protest over unemployment, government accountability and economic opportunities. Students, professionals, families and activists have joined rallies in New Delhi and other cities across India.

News of Pradhan's resignation sparked celebrations among the thousands of protesters who have camped at New Delhi's protest site for more than a month. Many embraced each other and waved the Indian flag.

"DEMOCRACY WINS!" the Cockroach Janta Party, which launched the protest movement, wrote on X following the minister's resignation.

The demonstrations have become one of the most persistent challenges to Modi's government in recent years, with thousands returning to the streets even after police used tear gas and batons to disperse marchers.

Tensions escalated on Monday when police moved to disperse thousands of protesters marching toward Parliament. Several students were injured in the crackdown, intensifying anger among demonstrators.

Modi's government had earlier sought to ease tensions by announcing fast-track courts for cases involving exam paper leaks and saying it would introduce legislation to strengthen measures against cheating and corruption in the examination system.

But protest leaders said the demonstrations would continue until Pradhan stepped down. They are also demanding broader exam reforms and compensation for families of students who died by suicide after alleged exam paper leaks.

Iran reports no new U.S. strikes as tensions remain high

By SAMY MAGDY and GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Iran reported no strikes overnight into Saturday, an apparent break from nearly two weeks of consecutive nights of U.S. attacks, but tensions remain high following a recent escalation over control of the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

Iranian Health Ministry spokesperson Hossein Kermanpour posted on X, saying that "Iran had a peaceful night," without any attacks reported. The U.S. Central Command didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. However, unlike the previous 13 nights, it did not announce new strikes.

Sirens sounded multiple times early Saturday in Saudi Arabia's Yanbu and Jizan provinces, which house crucial oil facilities on the Red Sea, according to the Saudi Civil Defense. It said the sirens were because of a "potential danger" that was later lifted, without providing further details. Bahrain also sounded missile alerts early Saturday, but no casualties have been reported.

A tenuous ceasefire that appeared to halt major operations in the conflict that started with American and Israeli attacks on Iran seemed to unravel early July. Iran was accused of striking three ships in the strait. The U.S. responded by striking dozens of targets in Iran, which retaliated by firing at Arab states in the region.

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The Strait of Hormuz, a crucial passage for world energy supplies effectively shut down by Iranian attacks, has been at the center of the conflict. The U.S. military fired Friday on a merchant vessel in the Gulf of Oman that was trying to breach its renewed blockade of Iran's ports, while Iran targeted U.S.-allied Gulf Arab countries.

Iran's Houthi allies targeted two Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea this week, raising concerns the group may again try to block Red Sea shipping routes. In response, Saudi Arabia struck the port city of Hodeida in Yemen, the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen said early Saturday.

U.S. embassies in the Middle East also alerted Americans in the region on Friday that options to leave could become more limited, as Iran's Revolutionary Guard advised residents of neighboring countries to stay away from bases with U.S. troops.

The war has so far killed more than 3,400 people in Iran, according to the Iranian Health Ministry. Eighteen U.S. service members, 24 civilians in Israel, and smaller numbers of civilians were reported dead in countries across the region.

In Lebanon, more than 4,000 people have been killed, as well as 38 Israeli troops, after the Iran-backed Hezbollah militants fired at Israel in support of the Islamic Republic.

Russian, Ukrainian officials report 11 dead in latest attacks

By The Associated Press undefined

Ukrainian forces attacked tourist resorts in the partly Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia region, killing eight people, Moscow-installed officials said on Saturday, while authorities in Ukraine's northeastern Sumy region said a Russian drone strike killed three people.

Two children were among the eight people killed in the attack on the resorts, Yevgeny Balitsky, the Kremlin-installed regional head, said Saturday, adding that 14 people were wounded.

Ukraine did not immediately comment on the attack.

Sumy regional head Oleh Hryhorov said on Saturday three people were killed when a large fire broke out after a Russian drone struck a "civilian facility," adding that the victims were drivers for private Ukrainian postal and courier service Nova Poshta.

Russia's defense ministry said it attacked a "storage and launch site" for Ukrainian drones in the Sumy region.

In Zaporizhzhia, in southeastern Ukraine, a Russian drone attack late Friday hit a shopping center, causing a fire that spread over a 500-square-meter area and injuring several people, regional head Ivan Fedorov said.

A major Russian attack on Friday on a site hosting a defense industry event near Kyiv killed at least 10 people and wounded nearly 100 others.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned in his evening address on Friday that intelligence assessments indicated that Russia was preparing missiles for a large attack, saying there were indications that this could happen in the next 48 hours.

On Saturday, Romania's defense ministry said its forces "safely shot down" a drone that breached its airspace in an "unpopulated area" near the Ukrainian border. The drone was "shot down by a Romanian pilot from an F-16 aircraft," President Nicușor Dan said in a post on Facebook.

Saturday's interception came after a drone was shot down around Padina, northeast of the Romanian capital, Bucharest, on Friday.

A series of drone incursions by Russia and Ukraine have hit Romania and other NATO members since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

In June, a Ukrainian maritime drone exploded at the Black Sea port of Constanta, while three other sea drones exploded outside the port. No one was hurt.

A Russian drone that was part of an attack on Ukraine in May went astray and struck an apartment building in eastern Romania, injuring two people.

The ICC looks ahead after the ouster of its chief prosecutor

By MOLLY QUELL Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Supporters of the International Criminal Court were trying to chart a course forward on Saturday, a day after the global institution was plunged into uncharted territory following the ouster of its chief prosecutor over allegations of sexual misconduct.

A lengthy and bruising process ended swiftly and decisively on Friday, when a large majority of the court's 125 member states voted to remove Karim Khan from his post.

The British barrister was accused of sexual misconduct with a female aide, as outlined by the AP in a series of stories, allegations he has steadfastly denied. According to documents seen by the AP, Khan engaged in a sexual relationship with the woman and tried to prevent her from pursuing her allegations.

Khan's removal comes at a time when the court is already facing daunting challenges, including a campaign by the United States to "dismantle" the ICC, which was established to prosecute people responsible for humanity's worst crimes.

Supporters of the court are looking forward

Several countries where the ICC has open investigations met together on the sidelines of the event on Friday to discuss the ways out of any potential impasses created by Khan's removal, according to three senior diplomatic officials familiar with the discussions.

One of the officials said a number of states began planning for how to move forward before the final votes were tallied.

"Whether Khan is removed or not, we must bring everyone back together," the official said. They all spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak on the record.

The vote was surprisingly clear

A special session at U.N. headquarters in New York was scheduled to take all of Friday. Instead, a morning motion that would have made it harder to oust Khan failed and diplomats quickly moved forward to vote on removal, several hours ahead of schedule, according to three diplomats familiar with the proceedings.

Iva Vukusic, a researcher at Utrecht University who has been following the process, said she was surprised by how decisive it was. "The numbers indicate that there is more agreement than previously thought," she told the AP.

Khan's ouster comes at an already difficult time

The decision comes at a time when the global tribunal is under enormous pressure. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced last week that Washington was launching a "sweeping campaign to dismantle the threat posed by the International Criminal Court to U.S. sovereignty."

Hours after Friday's vote, Venezuela announced it would withdraw from the court, saying its work reflects a "demonstrated geographical bias." Félix Plasencia, the country's foreign affairs minister, made the announcement in a statement.

Trump's administration already has brought sanctions against Khan and a dozen other ICC staff in retaliation for investigations into Israeli officials in Gaza and U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan.

The allegations became entwined with the court's investigation into the war in Gaza, with Khan's supporters arguing that the warrants the court has issued for top Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, were at stake.

Palestinian representatives were quick to push back on that narrative. "The vote by the Assembly of States Parties to remove the Prosecutor was not a political proxy vote on any Situation before the ICC," Palestinian Ambassador to the Netherlands Ammar Hijazi said in a statement.

Khan's removal will have no immediate impact on the arrest warrants which can only be withdrawn by ICC judges.

The work of the court will continue

Khan's two deputy prosecutors have helmed the office since he stepped down in May 2025. In a statement, the office of the prosecutor said the pair will continue with its "leadership, management and administration," until a new chief is selected.

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It is not clear yet when member states will be able to decide on Khan's replacement. His election in 2021 took nearly 18 months and drew criticism from civil society groups over the lack of stringent background checks on the candidates to ensure they met the requirement of "high moral character."

There may be more legal proceedings to come

The removal vote may not be the end of the process for Khan. He intends to "challenge the lawfulness and fairness of the decision through all available legal mechanisms," attorney Tayab Ali said in a statement.

There is no appeals process for his removal but all ICC staff are entitled to bring complaints to a special labor tribunal based in Geneva.

Khan's lawyers criticized the process leading to his ouster, complaining that he was blocked from addressing the session Friday and arguing the regulations had been rewritten to disadvantage him.

On Monday, lawyers and investigators will return to the court's headquarters in The Hague with at least some clarity about the future. "I hope now the court can move on and focus on its core work of dealing with cases," Vukusic said.

Bridges and infrastructure are hit as US strikes deeper into Iran

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

The United States has gradually expanded the scope of its attacks against Iran over the course of two weeks of punishing airstrikes that increasingly resemble the war's opening salvos.

After a brief ceasefire in June following the signing of an interim deal to end the conflict, a battle for control over the Strait of Hormuz erupted, shattering the truce and pushing the countries back to the precipice of an all-out war across the Middle East.

The U.S. started off with intense waves of strikes on Iran's navy and coastal defenses earlier this month, aiming to blunt Tehran's ability to attack ships in the strait vital to world energy supplies. In recent days, the U.S. has expanded its targets, hitting bridges and infrastructure in the south and striking deeper into the center of Iran and the outskirts of its capital, Tehran.

Despite its growing intensity and scope, the renewed U.S. aerial campaign is not as fierce in either way as the one at the start of the war, which began on Feb. 28. In just the first 100 hours of the war, the U.S. and Israel hit hundreds of military targets and killed top leaders of Iran, including Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The Iranian Health Ministry says 3,434 people have been killed since the war began, including 55 during the recent escalation. The latest U.S. strikes temporarily disrupted transportation and communications within Iran, and damaged water infrastructure used by thousands of people.

The U.S. military has said its recent barrages were aimed at degrading Iran's ability to threaten vessels in the strait. But Iran hasn't backed down.

It has intensified strikes on ships in the strait and on Gulf countries housing U.S. bases, killing at least four American soldiers and damaging critical infrastructure. Israel has so far not been targeted in this latest round of fighting, and it has not joined the U.S. in launching attacks.

Here is a look at what the U.S. has been striking and what it may have achieved:

The first days focused on Iran's coast

Not long after the countries had reached an interim ceasefire deal, Iran began striking ships in the Strait of Hormuz, triggering tit-for-tat attacks with the U.S. By July 12, the U.S. military intensified its bombing campaign, and a day later, President Donald Trump reimposed a U.S. blockade on Iranian ports.

In two days of bombardment, the U.S. military said it struck dozens of targets, including air-defense systems, coastal radar sites, missile and drone factories and launchers, and small boats. It used precision munitions, naval vessels and, for the first time, one-way attack sea drones.

The strikes focused on coastal provinces along the strait and Persian Gulf: Khuzestan, Bushehr and Hormozgan. The city and port of Bandar Abbas, which is on the strait and home to critical naval and trade infrastructure, bore the initial brunt. Strikes also hit key islands in the Gulf -- Qeshm, Abu Musa and Kish. Further east, naval and military bases in Sistan and Baluchistan province on the Gulf of Oman have been hit.

Strikes have aimed to take out roads, bridges and infrastructure

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A flurry of strikes over two days damaged at least six bridges and a tunnel around Bandar Abbas, images on state TV showed. The goal appeared to be to sever the links of the Revolutionary Guard bases there with the rest of the country. Another strike hit a railway junction west of the port city.

Residents captured images of traffic jams on some roads following the strikes.

Over the past two weeks, other strikes in Bandar Abbas hit the offices of the radio and communications regulatory authority, which manages Iran's radio-frequency spectrum. For three days, the U.S. hit a maritime communications tower in one of the city's ports, totally destroying it on July 17. Another communications tower was hit about 120 kilometers (75 miles) down the coast.

Strikes also disrupted communications temporarily between the mainland and the islands of Kharg and Qeshm, though by the 10th day of the campaign, Iranian authorities said they had restored connections. A fishmeal production factory was hit in Qeshm.

At the northern end of the Persian Gulf, power outages were reported in parts of Khuzestan province after strikes there.

Other infrastructure has also been hit, including an agricultural water pumping station in Khuzestan, killing one person, according to local officials. A reported strike on July 18 hit a water desalination plant in Jask, on a peninsula just outside the Strait of Hormuz, destroying the pumping stations and affecting water supply to 10,000 residents nearby, according to Iranian officials. That attack followed an Iranian strike on U.S. bases in Jordan, where at least three soldiers were killed and others were injured.

A U.S. strike on a border crossing with Iraq, where hundreds of pilgrims had gathered, killed two people, according to state media.

The American military has said it is hitting "logistics infrastructure." Last week, Trump warned that for every Iranian attack on the strait, a power plant or bridge will be hit.

Iranian media have been quick to report that roads and tunnels hit by the Americans were under repair, or that alternative routes were established to connect the south with the rest of the country.

More strikes are targeting Iran's interior

By the third day of the reignited conflict, U.S. strikes moved to hit deeper inside Iran. Targets included Revolutionary Guard and military bases believed responsible for attacks on American bases in the Gulf, as well as reported missile production units, military installations and airports used by the Guard.

U.S. forces hit a military barracks in the city of Iranshahr in the far southeast of the country, killing seven soldiers and wounding a dozen others, according to Iranian officials. The Iranian military had recently claimed it conducted drone attacks against American bases in the region, including one in Jordan on July 15, according to a report by the Institute for the Study of War and the Critical Threats Project.

At least two strikes hit a Revolutionary Guard Aerospace Force installation in Khuzestan province, also believed to have been involved in attacks on U.S. bases.

So far, the Tehran area has only been hit twice, in contrast to the first round of the war, when the capital was pounded by hundreds of strikes, mainly by Israel. A July 19 strike hit the Khojir military complex near Tehran, one of Iran's main missile factories. A missile site outside the capital was later hit.

The 'rockets and feathers' effect: Inflation eases but grocery bills do not

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Economics has a term for what U.S. grocery prices have done in recent years: rockets and feathers.

Rockets, because the cost of food eaten at home zoomed up in the aftermath of the pandemic. Feathers, because once prices rise, they're slow to come down.

That's been frustrating for Americans hit with the sharpest increase in grocery prices in 50 years. While food price inflation peaked in 2022, when prices jumped 11.4%, prices have not reversed course. An acceleration in inflation after the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran has prolonged the aggravation.

"I think the public is coming to grips with, 'Well, I'm hearing inflation has slowed, but things aren't get-

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ting any cheaper.' It has to be deflation for prices to go down, and that's very rare," said Matt Hamory, who leads the global grocery practice at the consulting company AlixPartners.

Prices for food at home are expected to rise 2.7% across the country this year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported Friday. That's higher than the grocery inflation shoppers saw in 2024 and 2025 but close to the historical average of 2.6%.

It's the compounding effect of the post-pandemic price shocks that consumers are still feeling, and they're reacting to them in ways that could have repercussions for the U.S. economy.

A recent study by the consulting firm Bain & Co. and the market research company NielsenIQ said the number of items purchased at U.S. grocery stores declined in the second half of last year and dropped more sharply starting in February of this year. The study said high gas prices, rising GLP-1 usage and cuts in the number of people receiving government food aid are all affecting grocery spending.

Consumers are also looking for deals and shopping around to find them. In the second quarter of this year, discounters like Costco, Walmart and Aldi took market share away from traditional grocers like Kroger and Albertsons, according to Numerator, a market research firm.

Many U.S. shoppers are also replacing name-brand products with store brands to save money. Total sales of store brands at supermarkets, drugstores and other retailers grew to a record \$282.8 billion last year, the Private Label Manufacturers Association said.

"Now that this option becomes available, why would I go back? You have the convenience, it's the same, but my cost is 40% less and it's a brand that I know and trust," said Sean Hooper, a senior solution principal at Relex Solutions, a retail and grocery consulting firm.

Prices rocketed up for lots of reasons in the wake of the pandemic, from the war in Ukraine to a highly contagious bird flu that pushed retail egg prices to record highs last year. And when prices rocket upward — whether for food, gas or other items — consumers can count on a slow, downy descent.

For one thing, retailers are reluctant to lower prices on inventory they ordered when wholesale prices were high, said Jared Bernstein, a senior policy fellow at the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy who served as chair of President Joe Biden's Council of Economic Advisers.

Stores and food companies also want to maximize their profits and were reluctant to give up some of the sales gains they saw after the pandemic, Bernstein said. PepsiCo hiked its prices by double-digit percentages for eight straight quarters in 2022 and 2023, for example, citing higher ingredient and packaging costs. After customer demand faltered, the company began lowering prices on some snacks last year.

Customer behavior also can contribute to prices staying elevated. When prices spike, people shop around for lower ones. But consumers often stop deal hunting when they see prices coming down, giving retailers less incentive to lower prices even further.

"There's less competitive force on the feather side of the mountain," Bernstein said.

In some cases, grocery inflation is the result of long-term issues with no quick fix. Consider the average price of coffee, which has risen 54% in U.S. cities since 2019, according to government data. Climate issues — including drought in Vietnam, heavy rain in Indonesia and hot, dry weather in Brazil — are blamed for reducing coffee yields and driving up global prices.

In other cases, there are clearer causes and simpler fixes. For example, U.S. consumers paid 19.5% more for fresh tomatoes in June compared to a year earlier due to a 17% import tax the Trump administration placed on fresh tomatoes from Mexico. Coffee was subject to a tariff for most of 2025 as well, but the duty was eventually removed.

Hamory said the feather may be starting to fall as big retailers invest in price cuts. In early July, Walmart said it was rolling back prices on ground beef, corn, red cherries, ice cream, potato chips and Coca-Cola and Pepsi products. Target also cut prices on some foods in March.

"If the big guys are really investing, saying, 'That's what I need to do to get right with my customer,' that will force others in the market to act," Hamory said. "It's just in the process of starting, but that's a thing we could be seeing."

Wildfire leads to evacuations in some suburbs of the French city of Bordeaux

By MARK CARLSON, EMMA DA SILVA and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

LEGE-CAP FERRET, France (AP) — Authorities in France evacuated some suburbs of Bordeaux on Saturday as a massive wildfire shifted toward the city famous for its wines. The government mobilized soldiers to join the battle against the flames and rushed in 1.5 million face masks to protect against choking smoke.

The prefect of the Gironde region that includes Bordeaux ordered the evacuation for parts of three of the city's western suburbs, including its airport. Other towns and villages further west of the city were also ordered to evacuate, adding to the tally of 141,000 people who'd previously already been told to move in the face of two major fires in the southwestern Gironde and Landes regions.

Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu described the fires as unprecedented and said the Gironde blaze had become so strong that it was generating its own winds.

"Our priority is clear: protecting human lives," he posted on X, adding that evacuation orders "must be respected without delay."

He said firefighting teams were being reinforced Saturday with the addition of hundreds of soldiers and that breathing masks to filter out smoke particles were being rushed to the Gironde region for those exposed to the clouds of potentially noxious fumes.

All told, massive forest fires have forced the evacuation of some 200,000 people in southwestern France and central Spain, including 60,000 forced from their homes west of Madrid and the 141,000 told to move in the Gironde and Landes departments of France.

Blazes caught authorities off guard

The virulence of the wildfires, fueled by high temperatures and the long-term effects of climate change, caught firefighters and authorities off guard in both countries. Firefighters in Spain said the blazes spread so fast and violently that they could not be tackled head on. In France, some people even fled by boat when flames swept through touristic towns on the Atlantic coast.

Dozens of French firefighters have been injured, authorities said, but no deaths were reported in either country despite the scenes of panic as townsfolk fled by car and police went door to door to tell people to leave as large plumes of smoke darkened the skies.

On Saturday, the Madrid regional government said the fires there decreased in intensity overnight as winds and temperatures dropped.

Spain's Civil Protection Service said it was expecting the arrival Saturday of four more water-dumping aircraft — two from Italy and two from Greece — sent as part of a European Union response to the emergency. Firefighting aircraft from the Netherlands and Portugal are already deployed in Spain.

France was expecting to be reinforced by two Canadair firefighting aircraft from Croatia as well as two other planes from Portugal and two heavy-lift Black Hawk helicopters from the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Wildfire headed toward Bordeaux

Gironde region prefect Sophie Brocas said on Friday night that strong winds from the west were pushing the fire closer to the Bordeaux metropolitan area and that it had grown to "an unprecedented magnitude."

"The scale of the fire changed," she said. "To combat it, we will receive extremely significant national reinforcements. Reinforcements in firefighters, of course, reinforcements in military personnel, reinforcements in healthcare workers, reinforcements in experts. So, we are going to form a much larger team to face this extraordinary fire."

People covered by the evacuation orders were being sent special alerts to their mobile phones, giving them instructions to leave.

"We want everyone to be quickly brought to safety. We must act quickly together," Brocas said.

The Gironde blaze broke out Wednesday near the Cap Ferret peninsula on France's Atlantic coast, located 60 kilometers (37 miles) from Bordeaux. French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez described it Friday as "a large, self-sustaining fire that is extremely difficult to bring under control."

"It's quite impressive and even frightening," said Laurent Moretti, a resident in the town of Arès. "An

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evacuation on this scale has never happened before. All we really hope is that the firefighters can quickly get it under control.”

More health workers strike as Ebola cases in Congo near 3,000, including over 1,300 deaths

By PROSPER HERI NGORORA and CONSTANT SAME BAGALWA Associated Press

BUNIA, Congo (AP) — Health workers at an Ebola treatment center in eastern Congo went on strike Saturday over payment issues, disrupting care for patients in the epicenter of the country’s rapidly growing outbreak.

The number of confirmed cases of Ebola in Congo has reached 2,973, including 1,309 deaths, according to government data released Friday in what authorities say is the fastest-growing outbreak on record.

Activities at the Elikya Ebola Treatment Center in Bunia, Ituri province, were largely paralyzed after doctors, nurses and security staff stopped work.

About a hundred health workers protested outside the treatment center on Saturday. They said the unpaid bonuses were undermining morale and disrupting patient care, and called on Congolese authorities to settle the arrears so they could resume their work.

In a statement issued Friday, staff said they had unanimously voted to strike from Saturday until “concrete solutions” were found to resolve “two months of unpaid performance bonuses.”

Last week, health workers at Bunia General Hospital, the region’s largest medical center, went on strike over unpaid salaries. Some had told The Associated Press they have not received any payment since they started work at the onset of the outbreak.

The World Health Organization says more than 100 healthcare workers have been infected since the beginning of the outbreak.

The Central African nation has been battling the Ebola outbreak caused by the rare Bundibugyo virus since May 15. A total of 766 patients remain in isolation or in hospitals, while 540 have recovered so far, according to data from Congo’s Ministry of Health.

The eastern province of Ituri accounts for nearly 90% of confirmed cases.

The outbreak continues to spread faster than health officials can track despite an expanding response.

A key challenge is that health authorities have yet to identify the outbreak’s patient zero, while displacement from armed conflict and mining-related movements have made it difficult to trace thousands who have come in contact with infected individuals.

The response is being hampered by a funding gap, attacks on health centers, an ongoing conflict in eastern Congo and mistrust among local communities.

Response efforts have also been challenged by the lack of approved vaccines or treatments for the Bundibugyo virus, unlike the more common Zaire virus for which there is a vaccine and which was responsible for most of Congo’s past 16 outbreaks of the disease.

Enrollment in a highly anticipated study of two possible Ebola treatments recently started in Ituri.

The WHO says the global risk of the outbreak spreading outside Central Africa is low, noting Ebola spreads through direct contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person rather than through the air, making it much harder to spread than respiratory viruses.

Americans rewire their grocery shopping routines while digesting the biggest price jump in 50 years

By DEE-ANN DURBIN, TERRY TANG, MAGGIE SCALES, SANDY GUATIBONZA and HIKARI MAE HIDA Associated Press and The Lexington Observer, La Esquina and Honolulu Civil Beat

What’s for dinner? Lately, at April Jack’s house, it’s whatever is on sale.

Jack scouts an app for deals at her local supermarket before she buys groceries. When she reaches the store, she grabs the weekly circular to look for coupons she might have missed. If the shelf prices look

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too high, she scratches items off her list or tries to find lower prices someplace else.

"The apples went up here, the ones I eat, so now I'm not going to get them here. I'll go to Market Basket, where I can get them cheaper," Jack, 50, said as she pushed a cart into a Stop & Shop near her home in Lexington, Massachusetts.

Couponing, comparison shopping and cutting back on favorite foods are new habits for her and millions of other Americans as they absorb the biggest jump in grocery prices in a half-century. Buying food to eat at home has gotten 33% more expensive in U.S. cities since the beginning of 2019, according to government figures. In the 7 1/2 years before that, prices rose 6.4%.

The historic increase happened for numerous reasons. The coronavirus pandemic snarled supply chains and raised labor and transportation costs. Droughts, hurricanes and diseases like bird flu drove down production. Tariffs raised prices on foreign products like coffee, tomatoes and chocolate. Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine disrupted oil and fertilizer supplies.

With a fresh conflict in the Middle East accelerating food price inflation again this year, the cost of filling their refrigerators, freezers and pantries has become a frustration for Americans and made affordability a central issue in the fall midterm elections.

By some measures, Americans are better equipped to handle the higher prices, if only slightly. The average weekly earnings of people with full-time jobs have gone up a bit faster than the cost of groceries since 2019, according to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

But consumers have long memories when it comes to food shopping, and they know their dollars aren't going as far as they used to, said Jared Bernstein, a senior policy fellow at the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy.

Wages grew much more quickly than grocery prices before the pandemic, Bernstein said. Even if a typical worker's paycheck still outpaces supermarket receipts by a small margin, consumers may feel stressed and aggrieved because other costs, like housing and electricity, have climbed significantly as well, he said.

"People have a well-honed sense of those prices, just as much as gas and maybe more so," Bernstein, who served as chair of the Council of Economic Advisers under former President Joe Biden, said. "You need groceries to live."

An economic indicator like median wages does not capture the capacity of family budgets to accommodate additional price hikes. Americans spent an average of 12.9% of their pretax incomes on eating out and at home in 2024, but the share was 33% for the one-fifth of U.S. households with the lowest earnings, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Prices also can vary substantially by region. In St. Louis, food for home use cost 2% more in June compared to a year earlier; in San Francisco, it was 6%, the consumer price index showed.

In interviews, residents of four urban areas where food price inflation has exceeded the national average shared how steadily rising prices are changing the way they shop. They described hunting for discounts, switching brands and feeling grateful for food banks. Some are more cautious about buying nonessentials like takeout coffee. Others are buying less meat or less food overall.

"It's almost like a strategy, a household strategy, where financial pressure just hasn't disappeared, so consumers are really developing their own playbook on how to navigate it," said Sally Lyons Wyatt, a global executive vice president at market research company Circana.

Meat has become a luxury for a family in Texas, the nation's top beef producer

Beef epitomizes out-of-control grocery prices for many Americans. The price of a pound of ground beef reached \$6.82 in June, which is 79% more than at the beginning of 2019, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data. Contributing factors include a shrinking U.S. cattle herd, drought in the West, and the costs of feed and fuel.

Demand for ground beef is falling as a result, according to market research company NielsenIQ. Ada Torres, 60, is one of the people no longer buying it: with five pounds of ground beef costing almost \$20, meat has become a luxury for her family of five, she said.

Torres lives 45 miles northeast of Houston in Cleveland, Texas, where she shares a home with her

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36-year-old daughter and three grandchildren. Her daughter, who works for a mobile car-washing service, is the family's main provider. Torres does the grocery shopping and cooking.

"Prices are sky-high. One hundred dollars' worth of groceries these days is nothing. Maybe you can bring home seven family-size items, if you manage to find a good deal," she said.

Swapping Goya canned beans and Hunt's tomato sauce for products from Walmart's Great Value range is one way Torres tries to cut costs. Chicken and cold cuts are now the family's main source of animal protein, she said.

Torres worries that too much deli meat will be bad for the health of her grandchildren, ages 12, 15 and 16. They miss beef dishes that were once staples on their table, like lasagna with ground beef, beef fajitas and steak with plantain chips, she said.

Torres' daughter's work dwindles during the rainy season in Texas, and the family only can afford one complete meal a day. Breakfast and dinner consist of simple fare like eggs and generic cereals.

Shopping outside Boston takes research, multiple stores and chicken recipes

Apral Jack's grocery-shopping trips included going to Whole Foods until recently. She liked the selection and has fewer mouths to feed now that her three daughters are adults.

"I don't have to worry about buying for them anymore," Jack said with a smile, noting that her days of loading up a cart at Costco and BJ's Wholesale Club are in the past.

But she spends more cautiously than she once did. She buys steak only if she can get it at a discount. Her weekly menu planning starts at home with an app that displays special offers and digital coupons. She builds her shopping list around what's on sale.

"Typically, I'll try to pick the meals based on that. So like chicken fajitas: there was a three-day sale on chicken. I'll sauté chicken with vegetables and rice," Jack said.

Her list includes fewer canned goods. Nabisco's Ginger Snaps and Nilla Wafers are off it completely because she thinks they cost too much. She doesn't buy store-brand replacements; to Jack, they don't taste the same.

Matt Hamory, who leads the global grocery practice at the consulting company AlixPartners, said consumers generally have an amount they're comfortable spending on food each week. They will go to a more expensive store or splurge on a treat if prices fall below that. But if prices seem unreasonable or the economic outlook is uncertain, they'll look for cheaper alternatives or cut back.

"I'm going to spend \$250 a week, so if I'm shopping at Stop & Shop and they're getting more expensive, then I'll start splitting my trips with cheaper places and eventually maybe I'll lose Stop & Shop entirely," Hamory said.

Three generations stretch their dollars and share canned food, eggs and produce to get by in San Francisco. San Francisco has a reputation as a great city for foodies. Food preoccupies 33-year-old Jack Chang for other reasons. The self-employed barber has three young children and a partner who is unemployed. The money he makes cutting hair five or six days a week sometimes doesn't go far enough.

"Since I have five mouths I have to feed, basically — and then sometimes my mom, too — it's a lot on me financially," Chang said.

They are not a family that goes out for boba milk teas or artisanal ice cream, both of which abound in San Francisco. They visit Round 1 Bowling & Arcade, a Japanese entertainment center with \$1 ice cream cones.

Like a lot of Bay Area residents, Chang has felt surrounded by rising costs in the last year. The rent for his barbershop increased 10% as he was losing clients laid off from their tech jobs, he said. He bought a used minivan, so now he has a monthly car payment.

"I look at my credit card every month and I'm like, 'Wow, how am I going to pay this?' So I'm a little behind on bills, honestly," Chang said.

Chang and his partner, Tina Chhous, try to economize by buying generic brands of food and medicine. They buy organic milk but otherwise stick to conventional products.

When their 4-year-old daughter's preschool has leftover lunch items like meat or bread, Chhous offers to take it. She also receives monthly food assistance through the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

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Program, or SNAP.

"Without that, I don't know what I would do," Chang said.

Fewer people have the same buffer after the Trump administration tightened SNAP eligibility requirements last year. As of April, 37 million Americans were enrolled in the program, a 12% decline from a year earlier, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Chang's 77-year-old mother, Lien, receives SNAP aid, too, and visits two different food banks each week. She shares the canned food, eggs and produce she gets with the rest of the family.

Chang loves doting on his children, and acknowledges that money would be less worrisome if he were single.

"But I try to be optimistic and do what I have to do in order to support my family," he said. "Failure is not an option for me."

Prices in the Honolulu area keep a pastry chef from shopping and eating local

High grocery bills come with living in Hawaii. The state gets nearly all its food from cargo ships that have traveled thousands of miles, making prices and the selection at stores vulnerable to oil market spikes.

Prices for local products also took an upswing this year. The cost of shipping goods between the Hawaiian Islands has skyrocketed amid rising fuel prices tied to the Iran conflict and financial instability within the company that has a near-monopoly on interisland shipping.

Amanda Tabadero, 28, a pastry chef from Kāne'ohe, a community on the Hawaiian island of Oahu, remembers buying Maui-grown strawberries and blueberries for \$7.99 per pound in 2024. Now that they cost \$11, she buys berries grown in California or Mexico at Costco for \$5 when she needs a bulk supply for baking.

Tabadero also doubts she will buy lychee fruit again anytime soon. Kaimana lychee, the variety grown in Hawaii, mostly comes from the Big Island. Tabadero said an iced coffee and a bag of lychee she recently bought in the Chinatown section of Honolulu came to \$30.

"It makes me sad," Tabadero said. "I want to use local stuff."

One of her favorite sweets is butter mochi, a chewy dessert made from rice flour. But even that simple recipe has gotten harder to make. One essential ingredient, milk, now costs \$9 a gallon at a locally owned supermarket chain, Tabadero said.

"Foodland is not affordable" for locals, she said, referring to the chain known for its poke and which has a central Honolulu location that is popular with tourists. Tabadero has switched to shopping at Target or Times Supermarket, another Hawaii-based chain.

At home, where she lives with her parents and younger sister, three cats and a dog, making dinner has required adjustments. Chuck roast for Hawaii-style beef stew, a local staple, crept up last year to roughly \$10 a pound from \$7.99 or less before the pandemic. Unless she snags a \$5 Friday deal at Safeway, "we do have to find substitutes, even if we're craving it," Tabadero said.

Trump returns to correspondents' dinner for a rambling, insult-filled speech 3 months after shooting

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

President Donald Trump returned to the rescheduled White House Correspondents' Association dinner Friday night, delivering a rambling, hour-long speech that praised some journalists, took potshots at others, made jokes about public figures' weight and intellect, and quipped about a third presidential term.

He assured the crowd of journalists, though, that he'd scrapped the most biting parts of his remarks.

"That was going to be a doozy," Trump said about the speech he'd been prepared to give in April, before a gunman upended the original dinner and forced its postponement.

"As I said three months ago, the show must go on," the president said to begin his remarks, hailing the decision to reschedule the dinner. He referred to "the attempted mass murder" that could have happened that night in April, but then moved largely to humor — and insults.

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Trump's return to the correspondents' dinner — and his promise to come back next year as well — represented a notable moment in his relationship with the news media, which he has attacked, sued and taken administrative action against since he began his second term early last year. Among the audience members were reporters he had denounced and barred from events.

Trump's sometimes off-color speech, which lasted just over an hour, was full of vague potshots directed at individuals he doesn't like — from Jane Fonda to Bruce Springsteen to "Barack Hussein Obama." The audience, reacting at first with some friendly laughs, slowly quieted to scattered titters as the insults piled up.

Among other targets of Trump's humor: Late-night hosts Jimmy Fallon and Jimmy Kimmel; Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn.; California Gov. Gavin Newsom; former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie; and Trump's own speechwriters, whose jokes he sometimes criticized even as he delivered them. Some of the comments flirted with racism.

The president also spent some time expressing pride in the ballroom at the Waldorf Astoria hotel, formerly the Trump International Hotel. "It's great to be back at a place that I know very well, because I built it," Trump said.

He also made reference to the journalism awards that had been handed out earlier in the evening, most of them for stories challenging him and his administration. "Do I have a say in those awards?" he asked with a grimace.

He made a brief mention of the Iran war and several remarks about the ballroom he is building at the White House. He also used the occasion to joke about the possibility he would serve a third term — something barred by the U.S. Constitution's 22nd Amendment.

"Just like my presidency, the second time is always better," the president quipped. "And the third time will be better yet."

He added: "I'm only kidding." Then, at the end, he donned a red cap that said "Trump 2028" and delivered the "scoop" that he was running again.

It was a very different dinner than the previous one

Earlier, Trump had entered the ballroom to polite applause, and was thanked for his support by outgoing White House Correspondents' Association president Weijia Jiang of CBS News. After dinner, he then sat through more than an hour of awards presentations.

One of the winners, Tyler Pager of the New York Times, was in fact one of the reporters who had been subpoenaed by Trump's Justice Department over his reporting about Trump's Qatari-gifted Air Force One jet. Those subpoenas were withdrawn on Thursday in a New York courtroom — just one of the arenas where the president, in his second term, has been seeking to control media coverage that displeases him.

The rescheduled dinner was taking place at a smaller venue this time that held only about 700 people. Security was markedly tighter. Guests entered via a single entrance, through two ID checks and past a detection dog, armed officers and security guards. There was no red carpet and no separate cocktail receptions preceding the dinner.

"Let's try this again," Jiang quipped, welcoming the crowd. The White House press corps, she noted, "always have a follow-up." Turning serious, she referred back to the trauma and confusion of the original dinner in April.

"Tonight our message is this: We are back," she said. "We will not be intimidated. We refuse to let an act of violence have the final word."

Early in his speech, Trump signaled that he had decided to tone it down. But he kept some zingers. Like this one, to the media-heavy audience: "This is really the largest group of 'Trump Derangement Syndrome' people put together at one time."

People received awards for bravery during April shooting

Besides the pared-down approach, there was another change at Friday's dinner: two additional awards. One was presented to Victor Gonzales, the Secret Service agent who was staffing a security checkpoint in April and was struck in his protective vest.

Gonzales "placed himself directly in harm's way and engaged the armed suspect," Jiang said. "He stayed in the fight and the attacker was stopped."

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A second award was presented to the staff of the Washington Hilton hotel, site of the first dinner, hailed for professionalism under pressure.

The dress code this time was a looser “black tie optional,” and dinner included grilled peach and burrata salad, lobster and beef Wellington. The evening, as in April, featured entertainment by mentalist Oz Pearlman — who this time got the chance to do his act..

Jiang and her fellow board members had worked hard to bring about this WHCA dinner 2.0, not wanting to let a violent act — or the image of colleagues hiding under tables — remain the final thought. Announcing the rescheduling, she emphasized the dinner’s stated purpose: “A celebration of a free press and the vital role of journalism in our democracy for over a century.”

There’s still lots of criticism of the event

But it’s also clear that some people felt the dinner should not be rescheduled at all.

Many never thought it was much of a good look in the first place, with the sight of journalists in formal wear cozing up to their sources, or the objects of their reporting.

“It undermines the public faith in how the press does its work, and it makes it look like we are pals with the people we cover,” Kelly McBride, an ethics expert at the Poynter Institute, a journalism think tank, said when the deliberations were taking place.

The new dinner came at a time of fast-increasing tension between the media and a president who, in his second term, has tried to exert pressure on media outlets he is unhappy with in a variety of ways. That pressure has ranged from sanctions against members of the White House press corps to regulatory actions through the Federal Communications Commission to outright lawsuits. Those tensions have only escalated since April.

Trump, though, ended with an attempt to mend fences to a point. “I have a lot of respect for your profession,” he told the assembled journalists. He also touted his own success, and declared: “When I’m not around, you’re all gonna be broke.”

And he concluded about the evening: “I didn’t know what to expect. It’s far worse than I originally thought.”

India’s ‘Cockroach’ protests take on Modi with unlikely weapons: Sharp, irreverent humor and memes

By SHEIKH SAALIQ and VERDA SUBZWARI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India’s young protesters are mocking their government. And the jokes are landing. As thousands of demonstrators take to the streets in the Indian capital, they are waging a parallel campaign online, flooding social media with memes, parody videos and self-deprecating jokes.

In doing so, they are also beating Narendra Modi — the powerful but image-conscious prime minister — at his own game.

Modi built his political brand through social media. Now protesters are using that same platform to mock his administration, ridicule pro-government television news coverage, transform confrontation with police into viral content and seize control of the online narrative.

The campaign has taken the protests demanding accountability and education reforms beyond the streets, broadening its reach and intensifying pressure on a government wary of appearing to yield to a rapidly growing youth movement.

Humor has become a form of protest

The “Cockroach” movement’s digital campaign has been largely powered by humor.

Clashes with police have become viral content. Videos showed protesters joking about keeping their Strava streaks alive — a reference to the fitness tracking app used by runners — as they ran from police baton charges. Others edited footage of themselves dodging police barricades to mimic the popular endless runner mobile game Subway Surfers.

Some women have borrowed influencer culture, posting “get ready with me” videos before marches and

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"fit check" posts featuring helmets, goggles and other homemade protest gear. Other protesters have created spoof videos mocking pro-government television anchors and their dramatic style of broadcasts that have labeled the protesters "anti-national" and "foreign-funded conspirators."

The Associated Press interviewed several protesters, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals from authorities.

One 25-year-old protester said the memes are more than comic relief; they're a way of coping. She sees them as a generational trait.

Unlike older generations, who learned to endure hardship, hers has little patience for "simply putting up with it," she said.

"If our phone data runs out, we can't even bear that. So we're definitely not going to tolerate this," she said, referring to Monday's police crackdown on protesters in the capital.

Protesters lean on meme culture

The street protests erupted a month ago, fueled by anger over a string of exam scandals, including the illegal sharing of entrance exams for the national medical program. Young people say the scandals have jeopardized their futures and eroded trust in the education system. Protesters blame Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and demand his resignation, but the demonstrations have since expanded into a wider anger over government accountability, spreading to other cities.

Much of that expansion has been driven by the Cockroach Janta Party, a satirical group that started the movement two months ago. Through memes, humor and satire, it has given younger Indians a new way to express their frustration with the government and helped turn a single-issue campaign into a broader youth movement.

At the main protest site in New Delhi, that influence is hard to miss.

Some protesters march in Spider-Man masks and Batman costumes, carrying tongue-in-cheek placards. Other protest signs echo the irreverent tone of social media, with memes and pop culture references woven into the demonstrations.

One poster featuring the education minister asked: "When will AI take his job?" Another captured the movement's spirit with the slogan: "Every joke is a (tiny) revolution."

Some slogans and posters have taken on an overtly profane and risqué tone.

A 23-year-old student said the protesters were simply speaking the language of their generation.

"We find speeches boring, we are the summary generation. We have a habit of consuming things in a short span of time, so we are using the same ways to put our message across," she said.

The jokes now target the prime minister

For Modi, who is entering his 13th year in office, the protests present an unusual challenge. His image is built on strength and decisiveness, but he risks alienating young people if he responds too forcefully. Nearly half India's population is under 25, making young voters one of the country's most influential electoral groups.

But the protests have broken a long-standing taboo: mocking Modi himself.

Jokes about Modi were rare during earlier protests, when his government was criticized for suppressing dissent. But now, even he has become a target of taunts.

Modi's gestures, pauses and mannerisms have been turned into viral edits that turn his own words into political jokes.

When Modi released a late-night, selfie-style video Thursday addressing the protesters, he promised swift legal action against those responsible for leaking academic or job exams. But many internet users edited the clip with parody voice-overs and references to his past promises they said had gone unfulfilled.

One video went particularly viral. Modi's original address began with him referring to the protesters as "friends." A parody video kept that opening, and abruptly cut to three young girls staring into the camera and responding: "No, we are not."

A 21-year-old student said there is no better way to challenge Modi than by using social media that helped build his political brand.

"We're just answering him in his language," he said.

Berlin's first drag march brings protest, pride and flamboyant celebration to the streets

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER and FANNY BRODERSEN Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Drag queen Sister Daphne OSPI pushed aside her pink veil, fluttered her long purple eyelashes and raised her hands to bless the crowd at Berlin's first drag march.

She was among the organizers of Friday afternoon's event, which served as the opening act for one of Europe's largest LGBTQ+ celebrations. Hundreds of thousands of people are expected Saturday to join Berlin's pride parade, known in Germany as Christopher Street Day.

"Every step is a declaration, every kiss an act of revolution, every wig is a war cry," she said as some 500 drag queens, drag kings and LGBTQ+ supporters cheered before marching and dancing through the city to the music of the Transophonix brass band.

The band played "Das lila Lied," or "The Lavender Song," an anthem of the gay rights movement from the 1920s, as performers in high heels, glittering dresses and flamboyant makeup passed the Reichstag parliament building and continued to the Brandenburg Gate.

"We're combining protest and resistance with joy and celebration," Sister Daphne said. "That's what makes us so unique and that's also what makes our demonstrations so popular."

Berlin's annual Pride celebration commemorates the 1969 Stonewall rebellion in New York, which began after police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village.

Sister Daphne belongs to the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, an LGBTQ+ group made up mostly of people who dress flamboyantly as nuns. She said she was delighted that hundreds attended the march and that more and more joined as it moved through Berlin.

The organization was founded in San Francisco in 1979, and its German branch was established in 1991.

"Usually, we sisters are out and about in the nightlife scene, handing out safer-sex materials and collecting donations for people affected by HIV and AIDS, as well as for queer projects," Sister Daphne said. "Or we're out at Pride parades, all over the country — across Germany, and sometimes even throughout Europe."

On Friday, Sister Daphne had a wide smile on her face, which was painted white, as she raised her left fist in a gesture of protest and pride.

"It brings me incredible joy to get ready, put on my makeup and get into the right mindset," she said. "I really enjoy being out and about the way I am."

Ukraine is still fortifying its border with Belarus years after Russia invaded from there

By HANNA ARHIROVA, DMYTRO ZHYHINAS and EFREM LUKATSKY Associated Press

ALONG THE UKRAINE-BELARUS BORDER (AP) — More than four years after Russia launched its assault on Kyiv from Belarus, Ukraine is still fortifying the border it shares with Moscow's ally. What was once a busy crossing between the two countries is now a quiet, mine-laden stretch of land closed off to civilians.

Roads near the 1,084-kilometer-long (673-mile-long) border are covered for long distances by anti-drone netting. The surrounding landscape is dominated by rows of razor wire and concrete anti-tank barriers known as "dragon's teeth."

The Associated Press visited parts of the border in northern Ukraine earlier this month, following a rise in tensions between the two countries; Ukraine demanded that Belarus shut down communications relay stations Russia had installed to boost the range of its drones attacking Ukrainian cities.

Belarus obliged, according to Ukraine, and rhetoric between the two governments has eased since then. While Ukrainian officials say they see no signs of a Russian troop buildup in Belarus, they are determined to strengthen their border against any possible threat.

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Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has repeatedly said he has no plans for his troops to enter the war unless his country is attacked. Still, people living near the border say the possibility of Belarus becoming more involved in Russia's war remains a source of anxiety.

For many residents, the extensive defenses are both a reminder of the early days of the war and a source of reassurance that Ukraine is preparing for any future scenarios.

Ukrainian border guards patrol the area around the clock using armored vehicles, drones and other surveillance systems. Ukrainian officials say the addition of more defenses will remain a priority well into the future because Belarus is Russia's closest military ally.

Maine Democrats are meeting to pick a new Senate nominee to face Republican Sen. Susan Collins

By PATRICK WHITTLE and KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

BANGOR, Maine (AP) — Maine Democrats on Saturday will choose a new U.S. Senate nominee to face longtime Republican Sen. Susan Collins in a contest that could decide control of the Senate, after Graham Platner dropped out of the race following an allegation of sexual assault.

Support has coalesced around former state Senate President Troy Jackson, a fifth-generation logger from rural northern Maine who campaigned alongside Platner during a failed bid for governor and was a favorite among progressives to replace him.

The Maine Democratic Party has been scrambling to choose a new nominee after Platner, who sailed to victory in the Democratic primary in June, was accused by a former girlfriend of sexually assaulting her in 2021. Platner denies the allegation, but quit the race after key supporters called on him to withdraw.

Democrats have seen Maine as the party's best opportunity to flip a Senate seat this year because it is a competitive Senate race in a state that President Donald Trump lost in 2024. But defeating Collins won't be easy. The five-term incumbent holds a fundraising advantage, while the new nominee will have less than four months to sell themselves to voters.

Maine law gave the state party authority to choose a replacement and required a new nominee to be named by Monday — 99 days before the Nov. 3 election.

Maine Democrats' never-before-used process of voting on a new nominee will involve more than 600 Democratic delegates gathering in Bangor, about 130 miles (209.21 kilometers) north of Portland. The delegates were elected at county party meetings last weekend.

"We have worked hard to create a fair process that is inclusive of varying viewpoints and diverse backgrounds of Democrats across the state of Maine, as we all come together in service of our ultimate goal: defeat Susan Collins and win this Senate seat," the party said in a statement.

Other top candidates dropped out after Jackson scooped up support

Once Platner dropped out on July 10, a flood of former governor candidates — including Jackson — and others jumped to try to take Platner's place. But by July 19, most had abandoned their bids, with Jackson emerging as the clear favorite.

Jackson received early support from progressives who had backed Platner before he dropped out. Our Revolution, the political organization founded nearly a decade ago by Sen. Bernie Sanders, initially backed Jackson for governor and Platner for Senate. When Platner left the race, the group rallied behind Jackson.

Jackson previously ran Maine operations for Sanders' 2016 presidential bid. This election cycle, Sanders endorsed Jackson for governor and Platner for Senate, though the independent senator from Vermont withdrew his support for Platner after the sexual assault allegation. He said he didn't plan to weigh in on which Democrat should replace Platner.

Just one other candidate has remained in the race for the Senate nomination — women's health company CEO Sandra Pelletier. She faces long odds against Jackson, who has been a fixture in Maine politics for more than a decade.

Jackson's campaign says more than 480 of the 601 delegates who will be voting at Saturday's convention are committed to supporting him.

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Jackson has supported progressive positions such as Medicare for All. He also has called for the abolition of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, whose presence in Maine has been hotly debated since an agent killed a driver in the state earlier this month.

Maine is an important piece of Democrats' effort to win the Senate

Democrats have a narrow path to take back the Senate in November and it's highly unlikely they can do it without a win in Maine. In addition, they need victories in competitive races in North Carolina, Alaska and Ohio, and they need to hang on to the seats they already have. That includes open Senate seats in Michigan and Minnesota, where Democratic incumbents are retiring.

Maine's Democratic primary was one of the early contests where progressives took on establishment-backed Democrats. While Platner faced several controversies during his campaign, he easily outlasted Gov. Janet Mills, who was backed by Democratic Senate leader Chuck Schumer but dropped out before the June 9 primary.

Platner had backing from Sanders as well as Arizona Sen. Ruben Gallego and Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren. That support disintegrated after the sexual assault allegation early this month.

Collins has described Jackson as a 'Bernie Bro'

If he becomes the nominee, Jackson will need to convince the state's large independent voting bloc that it's time to replace Collins. Republicans have called Jackson too extreme for Maine voters, and Collins said earlier this week that she knows Jackson well and that his positions are "clearly" in line with socialism.

She noted Jackson ran Sanders' first presidential campaign in Maine, adding "He's a Bernie Bro."

Jackson would also need to scramble to make up a fundraising gulf against Collins, who has been raising money for months.

Federal filings show she has raised more than \$16 million so far. Jackson's campaign this week said he raised more than \$1 million since jumping into the Senate race.

Jackson believes his team is up to the task.

"We are building a movement in every corner of this state to defeat Susan Collins and elect a senator who will fight like hell for working people," Jackson said last week.

Oregon firefighters brace for windy and hot weather as they battle dozens of blazes

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ and NOAH BERGER Associated Press

BEND, Ore. (AP) — Firefighters battling two of the largest blazes burning in Oregon were bracing for windy and dry conditions forecast to arrive in some areas of the state Friday and into Saturday.

Crews have been able to build some containment lines around the Akawa Butte Fire, which is burning near Sisters, a town about 22 miles (35 kilometers) northwest of Bend. Started by lightning on July 16, the fire has scorched 42 square miles (109 square kilometers) and destroyed two homes.

It has been designated as the nation's top priority wildfire because of its proximity to people. The designation will allow officials to tap into resources from other states and other countries, Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek said Friday.

Strong winds and low humidity were expected later Friday and Saturday and could lead to increased fire activity, officials warned. They urged residents to be prepared to evacuate if necessary.

The National Weather Service issued a red-flag warning in central Oregon through Saturday, which means conditions such as low humidity, warm temperatures and strong winds can create an extreme wildfire risk.

The most critical period for Sisters, a town of 3,800 people about 3 miles (5 kilometers) south of the fire, will be the next 24 to 48 hours, said Sisters Mayor Jennifer Letz. She said about half of the town's population has been told to be ready to leave if needed.

"If we can get through this weekend, we will probably be in a good position moving forward. But right now, we do have the north half of the city under orders to be prepared, to have a plan, to get their things together," she said.

There are more than 1,000 firefighters battling the blaze and more are expected to join them to help

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strengthen and expand containment lines. The blaze has shown extreme fire behavior, including 200-foot (61-meter) flame heights and a pyrocumulus cloud that generated its own lightning, Kotek said.

"This is all-hands-on-deck here in Oregon," she said.

It's not Oregon's only significant wildfire, making this an especially challenging period for emergency responders, she said.

There are dozens more fires burning across the state, choking the air in Oregon and sending smoke across the country. Kotek said every available firefighter and firefighting resource is being used in the field.

The biggest blaze is the Rowe Creek Complex which has destroyed 300 square miles (777 square kilometers) since being sparked by lightning on July 15. It was nearly 30% contained on Friday.

Firefighters have made progress on the northern portion of the blaze, where they have built containment lines, but strong winds fueled the fire and it expanded on its southern end after spot fires jumped containment lines, said Thadd Niebel, an operations chief with the U.S. Forest Service.

Crews were being reassigned to the southern portion of the blaze to strengthen containment lines and protect homes and other buildings ahead of winds forecast to reach 20 mph (32 kph), Niebel said.

More than 200,000 people flee raging wildfires in France and Spain, some escaping by boat

By CAROLINE BLUMBERG, SAMUEL PETREQUIN and JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

ARCACHON, France (AP) — Massive forest fires forced the evacuation of some 200,000 people in southwestern France and central Spain on Friday, with residents fleeing towns near Madrid and Bordeaux as the flames raged out of control.

Firefighters and authorities in both European countries were caught off guard by the virulence of the fires, which were fueled by high temperatures and the long-term effects of climate change. Firefighters in Spain admitted the fires were so fast and violent that they could not be tackled head on. Some people even fled by boat when flames swept through the touristic area on France's Atlantic coast.

Some 141,000 fled homes in the Gironde and Landes departments in France, the French interior ministry said. In central Spain, 60,000 were forced from their homes, according to the Spanish interior ministry.

Dozens of French firefighters were injured, authorities said, but no deaths were reported in either country despite the scenes of panic as townsfolk fled by car and police went door to door to tell people to leave as large plumes of smoke rose from the neighboring woodlands.

Wildfire headed toward Bordeaux

France's Interior minister Laurent Nunez said that the large wildfire that ravaged large swaths of land in southwestern France is heading toward the city of Bordeaux.

Speaking to French TV channel Tf1, Nunez said the wildfire that earlier in the day forced the evacuation of the Cap Ferret peninsula has swept across 140 square kilometers, with 110,000 people fleeing their homes in the Gironde region.

"We learned in the middle of the afternoon that, following the wind shift, it had become a large, self-sustaining fire that is extremely difficult to bring under control," Nunez said. "It is now moving east, toward the Bordeaux metropolitan area. We are going to reorganize our response so we can fight it from the ground and prevent it from advancing toward Bordeaux."

Meanwhile, French President Emmanuel Macron has asked the Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu to activate the government's crisis response unit, and has instructed the armed forces to mobilize in order to provide the maximum possible reinforcement to the civilian emergency services.

"This fire that we have been living with and fighting against here in Gironde for three days has reached an unprecedented magnitude," Sophie Brocas, the Nouvelle Aquitaine Prefect, said. "To combat it, we will receive extremely significant national reinforcements."

The blaze started on Wednesday near Cap Ferret peninsula on France's Atlantic coast, located 60 kilometers (37 miles) from Bordeaux. Local authorities in the Gironde department said 53 homes and a campsite were destroyed, adding that 42 firefighters were injured. Around 1,500 people who fled the peninsula

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arrived by sea in the city of Arcachon, some aboard small water taxis and others on larger boats.

"It's quite impressive and even frightening," said Laurent Moretti, a resident in the town of Arès. "An evacuation on this scale has never happened before. All we really hope is that the firefighters can quickly get it under control."

A separate wildfire broke out in Landes, causing 31,000 evacuations. Authorities believe the causes of both fires in France were accidental.

More than 20,000 people had already been evacuated from towns and vacation resorts on Thursday, but that number exploded on Friday as both France and Spain asked fellow European Union members for help.

Macron said France will receive EU reinforcements including two Croatian Canadair firefighting aircraft, two Portuguese Air Tractor aircraft, and two heavy-lift Black Hawk helicopters from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Spanish Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska said that Italy and Greece are each sending two Canadair water-dumping airplanes, while a thousand Spanish soldiers helped firefighting efforts.

Spain struggles to tackle multiple fires amid a heatwave

In Spain, the government declared a national emergency for wildfires for the first time as the blazes in Madrid and the nearby province of Ávila prompted the evacuation of some 60,000 people from towns west of the capital.

"I want to send a message of support to the thousands of families who face a difficult night ahead," Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, who will visit the fire-ravaged area on Saturday, wrote on X.

The fires are being fanned by a heat wave with temperatures expected to top 39 degrees Celsius (102 Fahrenheit).

Two major fires near Madrid merged into one single blaze that had quickly charred 30 square kilometers (11.5 square miles) by Friday afternoon. Regional President Isabel Díaz-Ayuso called it the worst in Madrid's history.

Francisco Martín, the central government representative for the region of Madrid, said that another 20,000 people had been ordered to shelter at home. Martín said more evacuations could be coming and that the priority now was to protect the town of San Lorenzo, the home of the Escorial, Philip II's 16th-century royal palace and monastery.

Meanwhile, a blaze in Ávila, less than two hours northwest of Madrid, consumed 90 square kilometers (34 square miles). Spain's Civil Guard arrested one man and is investigating another for allegedly having used heavy machinery in an area where it was prohibited for fire risk. Police believe a spark ignited the fire on Thursday.

"All around the town was smoke and fire, I was scared. Everything was fire and smoke, people were nervous," 33-year-old Joaquin Espinosa said before he and his neighbors were evacuated from the village of Chapinería.

Devastating summer for fires in Spain

In one week, Spain has had the worst fires on record for both the regions of Castilla La Mancha and Madrid.

Firefighters were still trying to extinguish Spain's second-largest ever fire in the Guadalajara province of Castilla La Mancha after it had destroyed some 320 square kilometers (120 square miles) over the last week. Thirteen people were also killed in a fire in southern Spain earlier this month, the deadliest fire in recent memory for Spain.

Spanish Minister for the Ecological Transition Sara Aagesen said that Spain has seen 1,140 square kilometers (440 square miles) already burned this year, more than five times the burned terrain it had through the first half of 2025.

Spain has experienced record temperatures in recent summers and forest fires of increasing violence.

Wildfire analyst Raúl Quílez said that besides the impact of climate change, Spain's rural areas have become more exposed to fires with the abandonment of farmlands that traditionally provided buffer zones around villages. Now, he said, trees and undergrowth often reach right to homes, putting them in harm's way.

"That makes a perfect cocktail for this type of fires," Quílez told The Associated Press by phone from

Valencia, where he works as an analyst for regional firefighters.

LeBron James is heading to the Philadelphia 76ers, saying it will be his 'last decision'

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — LeBron James' first final decision was that he would retire. Weeks of deep reflection led him to change his mind, however, with all the familiar options in front of him to extend his career; a third trip with Cleveland, a second stop in Miami, maybe even stay in California for a high-profile union in Golden State.

Nope — to all of those teams.

The blaring headline in bold letters still seemed like a feverish dream to the bulk of a fan base that wasn't even alive the last time the franchise won a title, but it's true:

LeBron James is heading to the Philadelphia 76ers.

The NBA's career scoring leader made the announcement on social media Friday, saying it will be his "last decision" and that it comes after he strongly considered retirement.

"I believe I can help make the Philadelphia 76ers a championship team and I am so excited to energize a new fan base and start this incredible journey one last time," James said.

A four-time NBA champion, James wrote he was "done" when his 23rd NBA season ended and that it was his last with the Los Angeles Lakers.

"I was pretty sure I played my last game. I was honest at that last press conference when I said I needed to look at myself and decide if I still love this game," James wrote. "I still truly love this game, and I have more to give."

The 41-year-old James is set to sign a modest \$8 million, two-year contract on the veterans' minimum with the Sixers, according to ESPN. He made nearly \$53 million last season.

"I'm not going for money. I'm not going for family," James wrote. "What am I really playing for at this point? I still want to sacrifice. I still want to work. I still want to grind. I still want to compete, to win and to have a chance at the feeling of winning."

James celebrated his decision on Instagram with a career highlight reel set to Philadelphia rapper Meek Mill's "Dreams and Nightmares," the adopted sports anthem of city teams.

The video ends with the lyric, "hold up, wait a minute. Y'all thought I was finished?" and cuts to a 76ers' logo.

Fanatics already had his No. 23 jersey on sale for \$125 with delivery not expected until the end of August. The company sold out within hours of the announcement.

Much as James did for Cleveland when he ended a 56-year championship drought for the city by leading the Cavaliers to the title in 2016, he can snap a lengthy title drought for the Sixers.

The Sixers went 45-37 last season and were swept in the second round by the NBA champion New York Knicks.

Most betting sites had the Sixers as 9-1 favorites to win the championship behind the Oklahoma City Thunder, the San Antonio Spurs and the New York Knicks, as of Friday afternoon.

James joins a 76ers team that has not won an NBA championship since 1983 and has not advanced out of the second round of the Eastern Conference playoffs since 2001.

He's the biggest elite free-agent star to sign with a Philadelphia sports team since Bryce Harper signed a 13-year, \$330 million deal with the Phillies ahead of the 2019 season. Like James, Harper was a teenager on the cover of Sports Illustrated and has long had to live up to lofty expectations at every single turn.

"He's going to have a great couple of years here, and obviously everyone's going to expect him to win a championship here like everywhere else," Harper said. "So nothing new for him. He's had all the pressure since he was in high school or younger than that."

The 76ers should boast one of the top starting fives in the NBA with second-year standout VJ Edgecombe,

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fellow All-Stars Joel Embiid, Tyrese Maxey and Jaylen Brown — the 2024 NBA Finals MVP, a five-time All-Star and the league's fourth-leading scorer this past season acquired in a stunning offseason deal with the Celtics.

Maxey posted an Instagram story of him celebrating in a gym and yelling "what!? what?!" over the news while Brown wrote on X "#throwtheballup." Brown wrote the same phrase in his introductory note to Philadelphia, and it has already been branded on billboards throughout the city.

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro even proclaimed Friday as LeBron James Day in the state.

Turned out with the Brown deal, new 76ers team president Mike Gansey — an Ohio prep basketball star with James — was just getting started with his summer of surprises.

No move, of course, hits like James' arrival.

Playing with his home team in Cleveland to the bright lights of Los Angeles and with the talent he took to Miami, James won an NBA championship everywhere he played. James left the Lakers after an eight-season run highlighted by the 2020 NBA title.

James is the NBA's oldest active player at 41 and the only player in league history to have a career spanning 23 seasons; this coming season will be his 24th. Speculation has been rampant for more than two months about his future, officially starting in May when the Lakers were eliminated from the NBA playoffs.

James' resume is beyond compare in NBA history. He's a 22-time All-Star, a 21-time All-NBA selection, a four-time Most Valuable Player, a four-time NBA Finals MVP, a three-time All-Star Game MVP, and was a member of the NBA's 75th anniversary team.

He's also coming off a season where he averaged 20.9 points, 6.1 rebounds and 7.2 assists per game. For his career, he's averaged 26.8 points, 7.5 rebounds and 7.4 assists in more than 1,600 games.

James started his career in Cleveland in 2003 and spent seven seasons with the Cavaliers before heading to Miami for four seasons — where he won his first two NBA titles. He then returned to Cleveland for four more seasons, including that title run in 2016, and left in 2018 for the Lakers.

Cleveland and Miami were believed to be on James' radar again as he weighed this decision.

"Thank you LA. Miami I'll forever love and Northeast Ohio will always home!" James wrote.

He eighty-sixed them all for a shot to win a title with the 76ers, a franchise with a career lineup that includes Wilt Chamberlain, Allen Iverson, Julius Erving, Charles Barkley and, for the next two seasons, LeBron James.

Texts reveal teen who singer D4vd is accused of killing was pregnant, had abortion year before death

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Text messages between singer D4vd and Celeste Rivas Hernandez shown in court Friday indicate she had gotten pregnant at age 13 and had an abortion more than a year before she was killed.

In one exchange in early January 2024, D4vd, whose legal name is David Burke, apologizes for "putting her through this."

"It's okay," she said in a text, "neither of us are capable of watching and taking care of the baby. it's for the best no?"

He later apologizes again before asking if it's his, and she replies, "of course it's yours David."

The testimony came during a preliminary hearing where a judge will decide if Burke should go on trial in Rivas Hernandez's killing. Prosecutors are seeking to prove Burke began sexually abusing Rivas Hernandez when she was 13 and he was 18, then stabbed her to death when she threatened to reveal their long sexual history and crater a career that had earned him millions.

They allege he dismembered the body in his garage, and a police analyst testified in the preliminary hearing that samples pulled from apparent blood stains there matched Rivas Hernandez's DNA. Her body was discovered in the trunk of a Tesla that had been towed from the Hollywood Hills in September, nearly five months after authorities said she was killed. The Tesla was registered to Burke.

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Burke has pleaded not guilty to murder, sexual abuse of a child and mutilation of a body, and his lawyers have said he is innocent.

Prosecution gives evidence of sexual abuse

Prosecutors spent Friday afternoon detailing the nature of the relationship between Burke and Rivas Hernandez. Photos of the two of them kissing and lying in bed were shown in court. The pictures showed that she had "David" tattooed in red ink on a finger — one of two that had been cut off when her body was found.

Then Los Angeles police detective Corey Farrell described one-by-one more than three dozen photos of the two of them that could not be shown in court because they depicted explicit sexual abuse. Rivas Hernandez was 13 and 14 in the photos.

Rivas Hernandez's mother began crying and her father looked down as the detective began describing the images.

Deputy District Attorney Beth Silverman came over to comfort the mother, Mercedes Martinez, and the couple got up and left the courtroom.

The images were recovered from his iPhone that was seized during a search of his home. The text message conversations taken from his iCloud account often discussed contraception and pregnancy, and in early January 2024, they discuss the abortion.

Tension rises between Burke and Rivas Hernandez

In a text conversation months later, she says she regretted that she "took a innocent life of a literal baby."

She asks Burke if anyone knows they have sex, and he replied "nope and i want to keep it that way until we married."

Rivas Hernandez turned 14 in September 2024 and soon after traveled with Burke to London and to Texas to meet his family.

Messages after that show tension growing between them.

In one text in November 2024, she says: "i literally had sex with you for almost a year straight." He tells her she's acting like it's their first breakup when it's their eighth.

The detective returns to the stand Monday for the fifth and likely final day of the preliminary hearing.

Autopsy doctor details results of exam

Earlier in the day, the doctor who performed the autopsy on Rivas Hernandez gave the difficult details of her death.

Much of what Dr. Grant Ho of the Los Angeles County Department of Medical Examiner said on the stand was already known: She had been killed by two sharp force wounds to her upper body.

But the details he shared of what the autopsy showed — and tellingly, what it was unable to determine because of how degraded her body was when it was found — were part of what made Friday's proceedings perhaps the most difficult so far.

Ho testified that he could not say when the death occurred — one of many challenges brought on by the body's degradation.

"It's extremely difficult to tell," Ho said.

He said she had been dead for "at least weeks," later adding that it also could have been months.

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

Her body was found in the front trunk of the Tesla registered to Burke on Sept. 8, 2025 — the day after she would have turned 15.

"She didn't make it to her 15th birthday, correct?" Silverman asked. "Correct," Ho replied.

Ho said there were many "skin defects" that could have been postmortem, but the two he identified as potential stab wounds had related internal trauma. One wound on the abdomen penetrated her liver. Another, on the left chest, damaged her ribs.

Defense seizes on inconclusive drug test

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He testified that toxicology tests, done only on her liver because no blood was available, initially showed positives for benzodiazepines — medications typically used for anxiety — and methamphetamine. He said with further testing the benzodiazepine was negative. The methamphetamine was inconclusive, and as a result Ho said "I cannot say that it played any role in the death."

Burke's attorney, Marilyn Bednarski, asked if decomposition could affect the accuracy of drug test results, and Ho agreed it could.

"In the toxicology report there is not enough information to support an overdose death, correct?" Bednarski asked. Ho said she was correct.

Bednarski asked if it helps in an autopsy examination to talk to the friends and family of the deceased about their life — if they had a mental health issue, were suicidal, were a frequent drug user or were violent.

Ho answered "potentially" to each of those but said there were no such conversations in this case.

Burke's music career was on the rise

Under the name D4vd (pronounced "David"), became an online musical phenomenon as a teen with a blend of indie rock, R&B and lo-fi pop. He had huge followings on TikTok, Soundcloud and Spotify, where his top songs, including his 2022 breakthrough "Romantic Homicide," have more than a billion plays.

He opened for SZA on tour in 2023 and in 2024 he played the Coachella music festival and released his first full-length album, "Withered," two days after when authorities say Rivas Hernandez was killed.

US military says it fired on another merchant vessel trying to breach its blockade of Iranian ports

By JULIA FRANKEL, STELLA MARTANY and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

IRBIL, Iraq (AP) — The U.S. military said Friday that it fired on another merchant vessel that was trying to breach its blockade of Iran's ports, while the Islamic Republic targeted American strongholds around the Persian Gulf.

The U.S. and Iran showed no sign of backing away from their conflict after a 13th straight night of strikes. With fighting flaring again and diplomacy uncertain, both sides made moves suggesting an escalation was possible. U.S. embassies in the Middle East began alerting Americans in the region that options to leave could become more limited, while Iran's Revolutionary Guard advised residents of neighboring countries to stay away from bases with U.S. troops.

Saudi Arabia struck the port city of Hodeida in Yemen in response to Iranian-backed Houthi rebel attacks on Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea, the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen said early Saturday. The Houthis said they would escalate after tensions have been brewing for weeks, breaking a yearslong calm.

American forces disabled the M/T Lavine in the Gulf of Oman after the ship attempted to run the blockade at least four times, Capt. Tim Hawkins, U.S. Central Command spokesman, told The Associated Press. Hawkins stressed that the ship's crew was warned and didn't comply with commands. The military then fired into its engine room. It's the second commercial ship to be disabled since the military reimposed its blockade.

Earlier on Friday, U.S. President Donald Trump met with top national security aides to discuss the situation with Iran and whether the administration should maintain the current course or escalate military attacks, according to a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations. It was not immediately clear if any decisions were made at the meeting, which was earlier reported by The New York Times. The White House didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

In an event in the Oval Office on Friday, Trump described negotiations with Iran as "by far the most serious that we've seen," even as the U.S. has launched daily strikes. Trump added that he's "not in a hurry" to end the war.

Vowing that Iran "will not bow to U.S." bullying, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi noted ongoing discussions with two global powers often at odds with Americans — China and Russia — and warned in an interview with the semiofficial news outlet Tasnim that the Islamic Republic is "neither intimidated by threats nor will we yield to pressure."

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At the center of the fight is the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial passage for world energy supplies that has been effectively shut down by Iranian attacks, sending fuel prices soaring and causing widespread economic turmoil.

US strikes sites across Iran and countries in the region are targeted

In the northern Iraqi city of Irbil, which is home to a contingent of American military advisers, security officials said Friday that U.S.-led forces had shot down five explosives-laden drones. Repeated blasts echoed in Irbil, the capital of Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region, and plumes of black smoke were seen near its airport, where U.S. forces are based. U.S. military officials did not respond to a request for comment on the apparent attacks.

Meanwhile, Iran's Revolutionary Guard said it had targeted the U.S. base in Udairi, Kuwait, destroying three ammunition and storage sheds. It also claimed to have struck a watchtower for the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, based in Bahrain.

U.S. Central Command did not respond to inquiries about the claims.

Both Bahrain and Jordan said they had intercepted aerial attacks by Iran on Friday.

As a barrage of assaults was aimed at bases of the U.S. and its allies, the U.S. hit a Revolutionary Guard naval base in northern Iran, according to the semiofficial news outlets Fars and ISNA. Blasts from U.S. bombardment were also reported on Iran's Qeshm Island, a base for naval assets including drone boats that Iran can use to attack vessels in the strait, as well as in Isfahan province, home to a major Iranian air base and one of Iran's nuclear sites.

Additional strikes reportedly hit Iran's southwest Khuzestan province and southern Fars province.

U.S. Central Command said the latest barrage was designed to "further degrade Iran's ability to threaten civilian mariners and commercial vessels transiting regional waters" as the Americans push to reopen the strait, through which one-fifth of the world's oil and gas transited in peacetime.

Houthi attacks give Iran more leverage in potential negotiations

A diplomatic delegation from Oman, which has been involved in mediation efforts between the U.S. and Iran, was in Tehran on Friday to discuss managing shipping traffic in the strait, according to Iran's state news agency.

Iran's ability to effectively close the strait — and cause economic chaos far beyond the Middle East — gives it tremendous leverage in negotiations. Its Houthi allies increased that leverage when they targeted two Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea on Thursday — increasing the risks of shipping through another vital route for Middle Eastern oil. The attacks made good on the Houthis' threat to close the Bab el-Mandeb Strait to Saudi-linked shipping.

An official at the Transport General Authority also said a Saudi vessel was targeted Friday while sailing in the Red Sea, resulting in minor damage to its hull, according to the Saudi Press Agency.

Houthi-run Al Masirah television said early Saturday that Saudi strikes hit facilities belonging to the state telecommunications corporation and also targeted Kamaran island, off Yemen's western coast. The broadcaster said one employee was injured and a woman was also wounded in Kamaran Island.

Saudi Arabia said it would do everything necessary to protect its ships and warned the Houthis if they continued "hostile acts then there will be no hesitation in responding."

Trump also has threatened "major military punishment" against the Houthis if their attacks on ships continue.

The strait at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden, and around 12% of the world's trade, including one-fourth of global container traffic, passes through there. The passage has become more crucial for Saudi Arabia, which has been forced to divert millions of barrels of oil a day to bypass the Strait of Hormuz.

The price of Brent crude oil, the international standard, dipped slightly Friday to about \$96, but it's still up substantially from before the war, when it was trading around \$72 a barrel. Motorists in the U.S. saw gas prices tick up to an average of \$4.11 a gallon, AAA said.

No signs of diplomatic breakthrough as war's human toll expands

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Beyond the economic impact, the human toll was also apparent, with the Iranian Health Ministry reporting that 3,434 people have been killed since the war began.

In other developments, the International Maritime Organization said at least 6,000 mariners were stranded on about 400 vessels around the Strait of Hormuz. U.N. human rights chief Volker Türk's office said some seafarers have been abandoned by their ships' owners, leaving them to "fend for themselves without food, water, fuel, medical care, electricity or means to communicate with their families."

There have been no public signs of progress in negotiation efforts.

Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar of Pakistan, which has played a significant role in previous negotiations, met his Iranian counterpart, Araghchi, on Friday. Before the meeting, Araghchi appeared to brush off any attempts at mediation, saying he did not think the conflict needed more mediators, instead insisting the U.S. must change its position.

The U.S. and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28 and have offered shifting goals for the war, including toppling Tehran's government and eliminating its nuclear program.

Israel signaled its willingness to rejoin the conflict in recent days. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said he would travel to the U.S. next week and meet with Trump.

Trump administration admits grants for clean energy were canceled based on politics

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration has acknowledged in court documents that it canceled \$7.6 billion in grants for hundreds of clean energy projects "based solely on the political identity of the grant recipient's state" — in this case, 16 states that voted for Democrat Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential election.

The statement contradicts repeated assertions by Energy Secretary Chris Wright and other officials that the projects were canceled because they did not adequately advance the nation's energy needs or had other problems that made them a poor investment of taxpayer dollars.

Democrats and environmental groups seized on the court filing Friday, saying the administration had "weaponized" the federal government to kill good jobs and punish working families because of their political views.

Democrats say what was 'obvious' has now been acknowledged

"This administration has now admitted in court what has long been obvious: it terminated nearly 300 cost-cutting energy projects for no reason other than the fact that the states they were in did not vote for the president in the 2024 election," said Rep. Marcy Kaptur of Ohio and Sen. Patty Murray of Washington state. Both are high-ranking Democrats on the House and Senate Appropriations committees, respectively.

"Weaponizing the federal government like this is outright un-American, and it's hardworking families already struggling with sky-high costs who are suffering the consequences of this corrupt abuse of power," Kaptur and Murray said.

They called on congressional Republicans to join them in holding the Trump administration "accountable for the President's failure to look out for all Americans."

The Energy Department announced last October that 321 funding awards across 223 projects were terminated, saying that after review, they "did not adequately advance the nation's energy needs or were not economically viable."

The cuts, part of broader attacks from President Donald Trump on climate programs and clean energy funding, slashed federal support for projects to build battery plants, develop hydrogen technology, upgrade the electric grid and capture carbon dioxide emissions.

Russell Vought, the White House budget director, highlighted the cutbacks in a social media post, saying money "to fuel the Left's climate agenda is being cancelled."

The Energy Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Projects from many states were cut

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Projects that were cut were located in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Vermont and Washington state. All 16 targeted states supported Harris, but Wright said the cuts were "business decisions" based on whether the projects were a good use of taxpayer money or not.

The cuts were immediately challenged in court, and more than two dozen Democratic members of Congress, led by California Sens. Adam Schiff and Alex Padilla and Rep. Zoe Lofgren, wrote a letter to the Energy Department's acting inspector general requesting a formal investigation. The department's internal watchdog launched an investigation in December.

Government lawyers had previously confirmed in a court filing late last year that the selection of grants in fact "was influenced by whether a grantee's address was located in a State that tends to elect ... Democratic candidates in state and national elections (so-called "Blue States")."

That filing came in a separate suit filed by clean energy groups and the city of St. Paul, Minnesota, over the canceled funding. The most recent admission came in a case called *Thakur v. Trump* that's been ongoing since last spring. Federal lawyers acknowledged that they used keywords related to diversity, gender, vaccine hesitancy and COVID-19 to screen for projects that ran afoul of the Trump administration's priorities.

Holly Bender, chief program officer for the Sierra Club, said the latest court filing shows "the Trump administration is brazenly admitting to a vindictive approach to cancelling much-needed energy infrastructure that ignores the job losses, air pollution and increasing bills that people are experiencing everywhere."

Instead of "building the energy projects we desperately need," billions of American taxpayer dollars are "going to line the pockets of a small handful of fossil fuel company CEOs," Bender said, citing nearly \$3 billion pledged by the Trump administration to cancel offshore wind projects in favor of fossil fuel projects such as natural gas and coal.

Paramount delays closing Warner buyout while judge considers states' challenge

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Paramount and Warner Bros. Discovery have agreed to delay closing their \$81 billion merger well into next year, a stunning move that arrives as a judge continues to consider a challenge from 12 states seeking to block the deal altogether.

Paramount said in a filing Friday that it won't close its Warner buyout until either a court ruling is made on the states' claims or June 1, 2027. The agreement comes just days after U.S. District Judge Araceli Martínez-Olguín granted a temporary restraining order to freeze the transaction for weeks, noting that the states had raised some "serious questions" and made a strong case about the merger's potential to "substantially lessen competition."

Paramount and the states have also agreed to cancel an preliminary injunction hearing that was set for Aug. 3. The states' case is now headed down the path toward a larger antitrust trial.

Both sides touted the delay as a victory.

The result was "exactly what we have sought from the outset: a direct path to a trial based on the evidence," Paramount said in a statement. The company, which was bought by Skydance just last year, added that it looked forward to proving its transaction is "good for competition, good for consumers, and good for creators."

Meanwhile, California Attorney General Rob Bonta — who is leading the states' case — called the delay great news for audiences, movie theaters and entertainment and media workers nationwide.

"Our argument against this illegal merger is straightforward: When too few corporations have too much power in markets central to American life, it makes things more expensive, and it makes things worse," Bonta said in a statement. He added that the states were eager to see their challenge through court and ensure the Paramount-Warner combo "never sees the light of day."

The Writers Guild of America has also filed a lawsuit seeking to block the merger, arguing that the deal would cause specific harm to movie and TV writers. The delay will give more time for that case to make

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its way through court, too.

States argue merger would harm Hollywood competition

A Warner-Paramount tie-up would bring together two of the last five legacy studios in Hollywood and a host of TV networks that include CNN. Warner's HBO Max streaming service and fan favorite titles like "Harry Potter" would come under the same roof as Paramount-owned CBS and the Paramount+ streaming service, which includes titles like "Top Gun."

Last week, the 12 states — which, beyond California, also include entertainment heavyweights like New York — sued to block the buyout, alleging that such a combination would "extinguish competition" in Hollywood and lead to fewer choices for consumers, particularly moviegoers and cable customers.

Paramount has repeatedly called the states' claims meritless and not reflective of the current industry. The company points to tech and streaming giants' growing reach across the entertainment industry and argues the merger would help it compete with bigger rivals like Netflix (which once wanted to buy much of Warner's business itself) and others "who have harmed the market for theatrical exhibition."

The states' complaint doesn't focus specifically on streaming. It alleges that the merger violates the Clayton Act — a key federal antitrust law — due to anticipated reach across three markets: theatrical movie distribution, theater releases of bigger blockbusters and the licensing of basic cable channels.

Trump administration says deal would benefit consumers

The challenge by the states — all of which have Democratic attorneys general — notably contrasts with the Trump administration's effective greenlight of the deal. The U.S. Justice Department announced in June that it wouldn't challenge the merger, and instead released an unusually long statement ruling that a Paramount-Warner tie up would bring "benefits for American consumers and workers."

The Justice Department maintained that its review wasn't political. But critics have raised their eyebrows — and pointed to Republican President Donald Trump's close relationship with the billionaire family of Paramount CEO David Ellison. Many eyes are also on Warner assets like CNN, a network that has long attracted ire from Trump and members of his administration, particularly in light of editorial turmoil at Paramount-owned CBS following Skydance's takeover.

Friday's delay "materially reduces the near-term concern that a politicized Paramount would control CNN during the 2026 midterms," noted Mike Proulx, vice president and research director at Forrester.

Still, there is uncertainty farther down the road.

"I've said from the start that anyone who thinks they know how this deal ends should think again," Proulx wrote. "What we know is that the path to either outcome just got longer, messier, and likely more expensive."

The now monthslong delay could become very costly for Paramount. The company previously pledged to start paying Warner shareholders added "ticking fee" compensation amounting to about \$7 million per day if the deal wasn't closed by Sept. 30.

Including billions of dollars in debt, Paramount's proposed purchase of Warner is currently valued at nearly \$111 billion based on outstanding shares.

Beyond the U.S., Paramount has also touted regulatory clearances in countries like Canada, China and Australia. The European Union also gave the deal its blessing, conditional on company commitments to adjust film distribution partnerships there. Meanwhile, ongoing reviews continue in the U.K., which has separately suggested it may intervene.

Attorney for family of man killed by Madison police says the officer should be criminally charged

By SCOTT BAUER and REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — The Madison police officer who shot and killed Corey Ruiz should face criminal charges, civil rights attorney Ben Crump said Friday, after protests erupted in anger over videos of their struggle.

"They not only tackled him, not only tased him, not only kicked him, but you saw they shot him three

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times in his head and other parts of his body," Crump said.

He spoke at an emotional news conference with Ruiz's mother, siblings and 13-year-old daughter, Kah'liyah Aliomar.

Ruiz, 38, was killed on a busy city street Wednesday, just a couple of blocks away from his daughter's home and along the route she walks to school. Police say Ruiz pulled a knife during a struggle with four officers, injuring one of them. That officer then fired the shots, according to police. All four officers have been placed on administrative leave pending a state investigation, and the officer who fired the shots has not yet been identified.

Aliomar cried as she described learning of her father's death.

"My heart was broken and hurt so much knowing I can't see my father anymore," she said.

His mother Elsa Ruiz said she never imagined she would have to bury her son.

"He was my love. He loved his daughter, he loved his family. He did not deserve to be taken out like that. They took my baby from me," she said, sobbing.

The family promised to seek justice for Ruiz's death, which Crump called an unjustified "execution."

"Anytime there is excessive use of force, there should be accountability," Crump said. He said it was "shocking on every level."

The shooting was captured on cellphone video that was widely shared online, though Madison Police Chief John Patterson cautioned Thursday that the video did not show the altercation from the police officers' perspective.

But unlike nearly every other similarly sized city, Madison doesn't require its police to use body-worn cameras, so there is no footage from the officers' perspective. Over the last decade city officials have repeatedly debated adopting the cameras — at times creating subcommittees and doing studies on the idea — but local officials have primarily blamed budget concerns and political inertia for the ongoing stalemate.

Another common source of opposition, identified in a 2021 feasibility study, came from community groups worried the cameras would be used to surveil and criminalize marginalized groups. Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway said Thursday that she expects the new budget that takes effect in January to include funding for body-worn cameras.

"Thank God there was video," Crump said. "If there wasn't video, imagine what the narrative would have been."

Wisconsin court records show Ruiz had been in and out of jail over the past decade for mostly misdemeanor offenses including disorderly conduct, drug possession, auto theft, battery and invasion of privacy. He was also convicted of felonies including possession of cocaine and marijuana, robbery, strangulation, resisting an officer and causing bodily harm.

"People are saying he's a criminal. So what? He had a family, he had me," Aliomar said, breaking down into tears.

Police said they were at the street to investigate reports that someone was trying to enter parked cars, something Crump said amounted to only the suspicion of a low-level property crime.

"I need somebody to help me understand why they felt it was OK to execute my brother based on no facts at all," Veronica Ruiz said. "I hope everyone continues to support and come together and find justice for him."

The police chief has released few details about the shooting. Patterson said Thursday that a Wisconsin Division of Criminal Investigation probe must run its course. A separate investigation by the city's independent police monitor is also underway.

"The situation was clearly dangerous," Patterson said, and that he did not know the extent of the knife injuries sustained by the officer. He also said he wanted transparency and accountability in the investigation.

The killing sparked protests, calls for justice from elected officials and anger from a community where police have killed three people in the same neighborhood since 2012.

ICC chief prosecutor removed from post over sexual misconduct allegations

By MOLLY QUELL, EDITH M. LEDERER and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court was removed from office on Friday, nearly two years after sexual misconduct allegations against him first emerged.

The ouster of Karim Khan comes at a time when the court is already facing daunting challenges, including a campaign by the United States to “dismantle” the ICC, which was established to prosecute people responsible for humanity’s worst crimes.

By a large majority, the ICC’s 125-member states voted to remove Khan, a British barrister, for “serious misconduct and serious breach of duty,” the court’s oversight body, the Assembly of States Parties, said in a statement.

“The ICC should hold itself to the highest standards. This includes ensuring a safe workplace with effective and credible mechanisms available to staff or others who experience abuse, including sexual violence or harassment,” Liz Evenson, international justice director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement to The Associated Press.

The 56-year-old Khan was accused of sexual misconduct with a female aide, as outlined by the AP in a series of stories, allegations he has steadfastly denied. According to documents seen by the AP, Khan engaged in a sexual relationship with the woman and tried to prevent her from pursuing her allegations.

The oversight body will now need to hold elections for a new prosecutor, someone who is likely to face sanctions by the Trump administration, which has already brought the force of financial penalties and travel bans on 13 members of staff, including Khan.

Khan’s lawyers criticized the process leading to his ouster, complaining that he was blocked from addressing the session Friday and arguing the regulations had been rewritten to disadvantage him.

Khan’s “removal was determined by a process in which he was never given a fair opportunity to be heard, and in defiance of the conclusions of the independent judges who examined the full evidential record,” attorney Tayab Ali said in a statement. He said Khan’s legal team would challenge the decision “through all available legal mechanisms.”

The decision comes at a time when the global tribunal is under enormous pressure.

In a statement last week, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the U.S. was launching a “sweeping campaign to dismantle the threat posed by the International Criminal Court to U.S. sovereignty.”

Rubio said he will pressure member states to withdraw from the institution, sanction organizations that work with the court and ban staff from traveling to the United States. Countries that “enjoy the benefits of the U.S. security umbrella” will be called upon to reject the court’s jurisdiction over U.S. citizens, Rubio said.

Hours after Friday’s vote, Venezuela announced it would withdraw from the court. “Venezuela considers that the Court’s actions reflect a demonstrated geographical bias, which has disproportionately concentrated its work on African and Latin American countries, to the detriment of the Global South,” Félix Plasencia, the country’s foreign affairs minister announced in a statement.

Earlier this year, prosecutors at the court announced they were dropping an investigation into whether U.S. sanctions against Venezuela qualified as crimes against humanity, citing a lack of evidence. A separate investigation into possible crimes committed by Venezuelan security forces under former Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro will continue.

Trump’s administration already has brought sanctions against Khan and a dozen other ICC staff in retaliation for warrants the court has issued for top Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, over the war in Gaza and investigations into U.S. personnel in Afghanistan.

The allegations against Khan have become entwined with the court’s investigation into the war in Gaza, experts said.

“Political considerations have been folded into this, especially as it is the first time a prosecutor has pursued warrants against a Western ally,” Iva Vukusic, a researcher at Utrecht University who has been following the process, told the AP.

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Khan's removal will have no immediate impact on the arrest warrants in 2024 for Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for crimes against humanity, which can only be withdrawn by ICC judges.

Before ending the closed session, Kaukoranta called for the international community to respect "the dignity and privacy of all those involved" in the case regarding Khan.

"I expressed my deep appreciation to the assembly of states parties for the diligent consideration of this difficult matter, and for the spirit of unity shown in upholding the integrity of the court," she said.

Outbreak of diarrhea-causing parasite linked to 4 more states

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal health officials on Friday expanded the scope of their investigation into an outbreak of a diarrhea-causing parasite to four additional states, broadening the size of the largest U.S. outbreak of cyclospora.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the outbreak first tied to shredded lettuce served at Taco Bell restaurants now includes Illinois, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania. Previously the agency's investigation included five states: Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio and West Virginia.

The CDC, Food and Drug Administration and state health officials have been tracing the supply of the lettuce and interviewing people across the nation about the foods they ate two weeks before getting sick.

The number of cases linked to the lettuce is now 1,947, including at least 98 people who had to be hospitalized. There have been no deaths, the agency reported on its website.

The total number of people sickened by the outbreak is likely higher than the official tally, given that not all cases are reported, the agency noted.

FDA officials earlier this week said they remain focused on lettuce from Taylor Farms as the source of the multistate outbreak. The company last week announced it was recalling iceberg lettuce grown in central Mexico.

Asked when it would be safe to eat lettuce again, Trump said Friday that his government is "going to put a major tariff on tax on Mexico because of the lettuce."

On Thursday, the FDA announced it was investigating a separate outbreak of cyclospora reported in 72 people. Regulators had not yet identified the products linked to the illnesses.

Overall, cyclospora cases have set a U.S. record. Since May 1, CDC has received reports of more than 4,100 laboratory-confirmed cases and is investigating more than 7,400 other likely cases across 41 states. Federal health officials have said that other "brands, restaurants, retailers, or distribution channels" could be tied to the outbreak as the investigation continues.

Cyclospora is a microscopic parasite that infects food that has come into contact with human feces, most commonly when produce is irrigated or washed with contaminated water. When ingested, the parasite causes intestinal illness marked by "frequent and sometimes explosive bowel movements," according to the CDC.

Mexican health officials announced Thursday that the parasite was not detected in the lettuce or water at the Taylor Farms plant in the Mexican state of Guanajuato.

The results were announced following a visit by Mexican health authorities to the Taylor Farms plant between July 18 and 20, during which 10 samples of iceberg lettuce were collected. Four water samples also were collected for analysis, authorities stated.

502 students lose spots at Howard University over tuition payments just weeks before classes start

By COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A'Zariah Miles' dream of attending Howard University was a few weeks from being realized. Then it all came crashing down.

Miles, 17, of Knoxville, Tennessee, is one of more than 500 incoming first-year students at Howard who

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learned this week that they have been unenrolled from the prestigious, historically Black Washington, D.C., university and no longer have spots for the upcoming fall semester that begins Aug. 17.

Many have taken to social media — some in tears — to share their stories. Some posts have gone viral.

After Miles learned she had been unenrolled, her mother, Kendra Miles, said the school's automated system would not allow the family to enroll in a payment plan because the amount that was owed made them ineligible to sign up.

"I've reached out since we got the email (Wednesday). I've emailed, literally, everybody," Kendra Miles said. "I emailed her adviser. He responded and said it wasn't a mistake and there was nothing they could do."

On Friday, Howard confirmed in an email that the school sent notifications to "502 first-time-in-college students whose accounts did not reflect the required enrollment and financial obligations by the previously communicated deadlines."

Starting in March, the unenrolled students began receiving specific communications about enrollment requirements, payment expectations and deadlines via email and orientation sessions, the school said.

"The university recognizes that timing differences may have occurred between when financial aid was reflected and when charges were finalized," Howard said in the email. "Students who believe their account did not accurately reflect their financial standing at the deadline should contact the Bursar's Office. Each case will be reviewed individually to determine whether adjustments or reinstatement are appropriate."

Howard, one of about 100 historically Black colleges and universities in the United States, had an undergraduate enrollment last fall of about 11,000. The average annual tuition for undergraduate students living on campus is about \$38,000. Housing costs are about \$13,600.

Colleges try to walk a fine line

Robert Kelchen, a professor of higher education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, said colleges generally try to walk a fine line in making sure students can enroll, but also making sure students pay their bills.

Howard "either had students who owed a lot of money and they didn't think a lot of students would pay, or potentially, they have a really big incoming class and they can replace those students," Kelchen said.

Laverne Mickens coaches students and their families on how to apply for college scholarships. Mickens said that she answered more than 400 emails Wednesday and Thursday from students and families impacted by the enrollment situation at Howard. She said most of them were strangers and they were "frantic and crying."

Students and parents are upset

"People are devastated," said Mickens who runs The Scholarship College Mama LLC, which is not affiliated with Howard. "Parents are saying: 'Can you help us? Howard unenrolled us.'"

A'Zariah Miles, who plans to major in biology, chose Howard over other schools that accepted her. Now, she is worried that it is too deep into the summer to enroll elsewhere.

"Everybody's housing is booked, or I can't enroll because it's too late or I missed orientation," she said. "I've been trying to continue to have hope with Howard, but I don't really have that much time before school starts and I don't really want to have a gap year."

Like Miles and others, Saniah Collins learned Wednesday that she no longer was enrolled at Howard.

"My mom is part of a parent group chat," said Collins, 17, of Atlanta. "That day we learned that a lot of students were getting unenrolled."

Collins received an email from the school Wednesday afternoon that said a July 10 deadline to pay her tuition balance or make payment arrangements had passed and the school no longer could hold her place.

But Collins said she was also told by an adviser that most of her balance for the fall semester was paid. She's not giving up.

"I worked like crazy to get into this school," Collins said. "Howard has been my everything. My whole senior year, my whole summer I worked consistently on scholarships. We tried to make ourselves 10 steps ahead to make sure we were on the right page."

Given that HBCUs are seen as caring and nurturing places for Black students, the mass removal of students from Howard's fall enrollment is a bad look for the school, said Marybeth Gasman, an expert in

higher education at Rutgers University.

"If it were me and it was over 500 students, I wouldn't have done it in one day," Gasman said. "I would have also done the due diligence of going through each one. Now, they are going to have to go back and do that."

Democrats select South Carolina to kick off presidential nominating contest in 2028, leave Iowa out

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — South Carolina was selected Friday to once again lead off the Democratic Party's 2028 presidential nominating schedule, cementing a dramatic break from decades of tradition by leaving Iowa out of the early-state lineup altogether and elevating more racially diverse states.

The decision by the Democratic National Committee's Rules and Bylaws Committee will need to be approved by the full organization, which is scheduled to meet in August.

Nevada is expected to follow South Carolina, with New Hampshire, New Mexico, Michigan and Virginia rounding out the early-state calendar. Those states will wield outsized influence in the nominating contest before Super Tuesday, when voters across a large group of states cast presidential primary ballots.

"This calendar will battle test our candidates, ensure our nominee can appeal to broad swaths of the electorate and this calendar will allow voters, not money, but voters to be the ultimate decider," DNC Chair Ken Martin said after the vote.

The overhaul reflects Democrats' effort to give greater influence to states that better mirror the party's diverse coalition, particularly Black and Latino voters, after years of a calendar led by Iowa and New Hampshire, two states with overwhelmingly white electorates.

But hopes of emerging from Friday's meeting with a party unified around one map were dashed by anger from states that had previously led the process. Rita Hart, chair of the Iowa Democratic Party, said she was disappointed but not surprised by Friday's calendar vote, which she called "very messy" and a sign that the national party is "out of touch with voters."

There was more angst in New Hampshire, where the secretary of state is required by law to schedule its presidential primary at least seven days before any other state holds a similar contest, setting up a potential conflict with the DNC calendar.

"The Democratic National Committee's decision today is wrong for Democrats, wrong for New Hampshire, and wrong for the country," said a group of congressional leaders in New Hampshire, including Sens. Jeanne Shaheen and Maggie Hassan.

Democrats elevate more diverse states

Democrats opted to lead with South Carolina after President Joe Biden successfully pushed to move the state to the front of Democrats' 2024 calendar after the state revived his struggling 2020 presidential campaign. South Carolina has long been the first Southern contest and has served as a key test of candidates' support among Black voters.

Jaime Harrison, a former DNC chair in attendance Friday, told The Associated Press after the vote that keeping his home state first on Democrats' nominating calendar signaled to Black voters the value they bring to the party, especially after a Supreme Court decision aimed at weakening their voting power.

"I think we needed a strong statement to say to the most loyal members of our party, which are Black voters, that we're going to stand up with you," said Harrison, who also chaired South Carolina's Democratic Party. "It was just really important for us to stand up and say, 'We see you, we hear you, but most importantly, we're gonna fight like hell for you. And your voices are important.'"

Much of Friday's debate stood as a contrast on several fronts. South Carolina proponents argued they had the experience to stand up a lead-off primary, and served as a showcase for the Black voters whose support has become vital for Democrats.

"Black voters didn't just show up for this party in 2020. They saved us," Nebraska Democratic Party

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Chair Jane Kleeb said, in making her argument for South Carolina. "They saved our entire country from Donald Trump."

Nevada's supporters, meanwhile, portrayed their state as the party's future, in which they argued Latino voters play a larger and larger role.

"We are the battleground state," said Artie Blanco of Nevada, a DNC vice chair. "We win elections because we leave no voter untouched."

Republicans still need to do their calendar. They're expected to stick with their traditional early-state lineup led off by Iowa and New Hampshire.

Anger emerges from states that are not selected

Iowa has long led both parties' calendars with caucuses. Hart declined to say whether Iowa Democrats will defy the national party in 2028. She said they will wait until after the state's midterm races when Democrats hope to make recently unattainable gains in the increasingly conservative state.

"We're going to win elections here, and then we're going to tell them what we're going to do," said Scott Brennan, who formerly represented Iowa on the DNC's Rules and Bylaws Committee.

New Hampshire Democrats similarly would not commit Friday to following the new calendar.

"This committee's vote does not change the realities governing New Hampshire's primary, which are beyond the control of both this committee and our state party," said New Hampshire Democratic Party Chair Ray Buckley.

Asked about some states not committing to the new calendar, Martin said the party will "have to cross that bridge when we get there."

"We got some time, and the calendar was just set here," said Martin.

The new map will shape the opening stage of what is expected to be a crowded Democratic presidential primary. Without an incumbent or clear front-runner, the states that vote first could once again play an outsized role in determining which candidates gain momentum, attract donors and emerge as viable contenders.

The calendar decision is one of the first milestones in what's expected to be a tumultuous two-year sprint to the Democratic nomination.

There has not been a truly open Democratic presidential primary — without an incumbent president or a dominant front-runner — in almost two decades.

Stocks waver on Wall Street while crude oil prices fall for the first time in a week

By DAMIAN J. TROISE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks drifted to a mixed finish on Wall Street Friday as oil prices slipped for the first time in a week.

Every major index lost ground overall for the week amid increasing pressure from a sharp escalation in the U.S. war with Iran. Investors are also contending with new tariffs from the Trump administration and worries about the economy suffering under the weight of stubborn inflation.

The S&P 500 barely budged in a day of uneventful trading. It rose 3.68 points, or less than 0.1%, to 7,411.98. The index notched its second consecutive losing week, which hasn't happened since March.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 235.60 points, or 0.5%, to 51,947.25.

The Nasdaq fell 161.87 points, or 0.6%, to 24,975.82. It was weighed down by sharp losses from several big tech stocks.

Micron Technology fell 7% and Broadcom fell 2.7%. Both companies have large market values that tend to weigh more heavily on the market. They were big reasons for the technology-heavy Nasdaq lagging the market, and also why the market's gains were kept in check despite more stocks rising than falling within the S&P 500.

Heavy fighting in the Middle East throughout the week again threatened to slow the global flow of oil and

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gas. It has been an ongoing concern for Wall Street, and now many of the buffers in the energy market from earlier in the year, including strategic reserves in the U.S., have been weakened.

"If escalation continues and the Strait of Hormuz remains closed, the impact will land on an energy market with far less resilience than in the spring," wrote Theodore Bunzel, head of geopolitical advisory at Lazard Asset Management, in a report.

Brent crude, the international standard, fell 3.9% to \$96.78. It rose the first four days of the week and moved back above \$100 on Thursday. Before the Iran war began in late February it was trading around \$72 per barrel.

Bond yields also eased and relieved some of the pressure on stocks. The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.68% from 4.71% late Thursday.

Markets in Europe gained ground, while Asian markets closed lower.

The U.S. is also ramping up its global trade war with a fresh round of tariffs on dozens of nations. The new round of tariffs impacts nearly all U.S. imports and they are paid by companies importing those goods, who then typically pass the added costs along to consumers. That move came just as the clock was running out Friday on stopgap levies the president imposed after a stinging defeat for other tariffs at the Supreme Court.

Rising energy prices and fresh tariffs could result in hotter inflation, which has been squeezing consumers and looming over the Federal Reserve's interest rate policy.

The Fed meets next week and has been closely monitoring prices and their impact. Rising inflation dashed hopes earlier this year for an interest rate cut. Wall Street has since leaned more toward a potential rate increase, which the central bank can use to help cool inflation.

Wall Street is anticipating at least one rate hike by the end of the year, with a nearly 38% chance that could happen at the upcoming meeting next week, according to CME FedWatch.

Higher energy costs threaten to take a bigger chunk out of household budgets, which means a shift in spending toward more basic needs, like gasoline. Nationally, a gallon of gasoline costs \$4.10 per gallon, according to AAA. That's still lower than this spring as the conflict in Iran expanded, but it's almost a dollar higher than last year at this time.

Investors are worried about the impact to companies profits. Those profits and expectations for more growth are what typically justifies a stock's value. The latest round of corporate earnings showed that companies are still notching growth, but concerns are growing.

American Express fell 4.3% despite reporting a jump in profit during its most recent quarter. AmEx maintained its profit forecast for the year and has been spending more heavily to keep wealthy individuals amid more competition.

Worries about the sustainability of broader profits are on top of lingering concerns about AI-focused tech companies. Companies like Alphabet and Nvidia have been spending heavily on AI technology. Investors are increasingly questioning whether those investments will produce profits to justify the large stock values that have been steering the broader market higher throughout the year.

Teen pleads guilty to murder in a 2024 shooting that left 4 dead at Georgia's Apalachee High School

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

WINDER, Ga. (AP) — A teenager has pleaded guilty to all 55 counts, including murder, in a shooting nearly two years ago at Apalachee High School in Georgia that killed two students and two teachers.

Colt Gray, 16, entered the plea Friday without having reached a deal with prosecutors. The Sept. 4, 2024, shooting also left several others wounded at the school of 1,900 students about 45 miles (73 kilometers) northeast of Atlanta.

Gray, who was 14 at the time, was charged as an adult. His trial had been scheduled to start in mid-October.

A jury in March convicted his father, Colin Gray, on charges including second-degree murder and invol-

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untary manslaughter. He is scheduled to be sentenced next week. Prosecutors said he gave his son the assault-style rifle used to open fire at the school.

Teachers Richard "Ricky" Aspinwall, 39, and Cristina Irimie, 53, and students Mason Schermerhorn and Christian Angulo, both 14, died in the shooting. Another teacher and eight more students were wounded, seven of them hit by gunfire.

Teen faces life in prison

Barrow County Superior Court Judge Nicholas Primm questioned Gray to ensure he understood the consequences of his plea and was entering it voluntarily. Gray responded, "Yes, your honor," each time.

Murder carries a minimum sentence of life in prison. The judge must decide whether Gray should be eligible for parole after hearing victim statements, evidence and each side's summary of the case.

Victim: 'Those decisions were his and his alone'

Family members of those killed and students who were shot gave statements, expressing anger and grief, with most asking the judge to sentence Gray to life without parole.

Breanna Schermerhorn, whose son Mason was killed, said she doesn't forgive Gray. While adults around him missed warning signs, she said, he brought the gun and pulled the trigger.

"Those decisions were his and his alone," she said.

Shayna Aspinwall, Richard Aspinwall's wife, lamented that the lives of their daughters, who were 2 and 5 when their father died, will be "forever marked by his absence."

"It is a life sentence of grief and trauma for those left behind," she said.

A teenage student who was shot told the judge she remembered feeling "really scared and confused because I saw Colt standing in the door with a gun." The Associated Press is not identifying the girl, who is a minor.

She said she realized she had been shot and asked a friend to hold her hand. She asked other friends to call her brother to let him know she'd been shot and didn't know if she'd make it. She had multiple surgeries and wasn't able to walk for about a year.

"After the shooting, I struggled with so much anxiety, and I felt like my life was over," she said.

Apalachee High School Principal Jessica Rehberg said Colt Gray's "cruel actions" deserve "the harshest consequences."

The hearing is set to resume Monday, and Gray's defense attorney wrote in a court filing that he plans testimony from a psychologist, a juvenile detention center counselor and Gray's grandmother.

Investigator says Colt Gray carefully plotted the shooting

Barrow County Sheriff's Office Investigator Jason Smith testified about the timeline. Gray told his second period teacher just before 10 a.m. that he needed to see a crisis counselor but instead went to a bathroom to prepare for the shooting, Smith said.

He emerged from the bathroom at 10:21 a.m., and when he was unable to reenter his classroom, he went down the hall to another classroom, where he opened fire and then shot other people in the hallway. He ultimately surrendered to law enforcement officers.

Smith said he interviewed Gray at the school and again at the sheriff's office.

Prosecutors played a recording of the interview at the school. Gray sobbed hysterically during questioning. He repeatedly apologized, said he wasn't trying to justify his actions and said what happened was "horrible" and "the worst nightmare for everyone involved."

He talked about having uncontrollable urges and hearing people tell him to do things and said he was supposed to see a doctor soon: "I was so close to getting the help I need and the medication I need."

Gray told Smith that right before the shooting he felt things were getting really bad and he feared he was going to be attacked. He repeatedly mentioned believing teachers, and possibly students, were plotting against him.

The teenager was much calmer several hours later during the second interview. He said he didn't target anyone specifically and didn't know how many people he'd killed.

"Colt indicated that it was spontaneous, that it was a last minute thing," that he heard voices and on the

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way to the crisis counselor and "decided to do the shooting," Smith testified. But the investigation showed that the shooting had been planned in detail for some time, he said.

The investigator described a notebook Gray had that included a detailed step-by-step plan to get himself ready in the bathroom that included notations like, "Don't shoot anyone in the bathroom. You will alert people."

On one page he wrote, "I'm not a killer," and "I'm scared." On multiple pages, he wrote "why" dozens of times. He also estimated the number of people he would kill and injure. On one page, he wrote, "Surprised if I make it."

Sheriff's deputies had previously interviewed Colt and Colin Gray in May 2023 about an online threat linked to the son. Colt Gray denied making the threat.

Investigators found a shrine in Colt Gray's bedroom to Nikolas Cruz, the shooter in the 2018 massacre at Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, prosecutors have said. Gray told Smith he "became obsessed with him on an emotional level," referring to Cruz.

An investigator testified during Colin Gray's trial that he had sought help for his son from a counseling service weeks before the shooting but then failed to follow through.

Colt Gray's mother, Marcee Gray, who was separated from Colin Gray, told investigators she had urged him weeks before the shooting to secure his guns and restrict their son's access to them. Instead, over time, Colin Gray bought the teenager ammunition, a gun sight and other shooting accessories, records show.

New US tariffs linked to claims of foreign forced labor dismay and anger trading partners

By ELAINE KURTENBACH and CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writers

BANGKOK (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump's latest set of tariffs drew immediate objections from America's trading partners including China and Japan, with Australia's trade minister slamming them as "completely unjustified" on Friday.

The administration announced tariffs of 10% to 12.5% on 60 economies late Thursday, saying the countries had failed to adequately enforce a ban on goods made with forced labor.

The new tariffs took effect just as stopgap levies Trump imposed after a stinging defeat at the Supreme Court expired at 12:01 a.m. Friday.

Countries object to what they call unfounded labor claims

Australian Trade Minister Don Farrell rejected claims linking Australia, a major exporter of beef, gold and copper, to modern slavery and raising the tariff on its exports to the U.S. to 12.5% from the 10% level imposed after Trump's "Liberation Day" hikes last year.

"We believe that amongst all of the countries in the world Australia does take the issue of slavery, modern slavery, seriously, and will continue to do that," Farrell told reporters in Adelaide.

Australia believes the higher tariffs are "completely unjustified and we will continue to lobby the United States Trade Representative to remove all tariffs on Australian goods," Farrell said.

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said the tariffs on his country, also subject to a 12.5% import duty, were "extremely disappointing," unjustified and harmful to trade.

A U.S. investigation serving as the basis for the tariffs did not provide meaningful evidence to support allegations of forced labor.

"Tariffs are not the way — they drive up costs and uncertainty for businesses," he wrote on X.

European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas questioned the U.S. stance in comments on Channel News Asia.

"If you compare our labor laws to the ones of the United States, I mean we have, people have paid vacations, we have very good conditions, labor conditions for our employees, so it's not really grounded," Kallas said.

Also facing a 12.5% tariff, Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry said it would "continue to engage the USTR (United States Trade Representative) to explore options."

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Some hope to forestall the new tariffs

Japan likewise protested the 12.5% tariff imposed on its exports, noting Tokyo had been reassured by the Trump administration that there would be no more tariffs on top of an earlier agreement on a 10% U.S. import duty.

"Our understanding is both sides are still committed to that," Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara said.

"It is regrettable that the measure imposes tariffs on the grounds of non-existence of measures banning imports of goods made by forced labor, even though Japan's industry and trade are in line with international rules," Kihara said.

South Korea's trade ministry said the announcement eased some uncertainty over U.S. trade policy, but noted that a Section 301 investigation into alleged Korean excess production continues.

The combined duties on South Korean exports should not exceed 15%, the ministry said in a statement.

Thailand noted it is subject to the new 12.5% tariff by the U.S. under the forced labor provision, but the measure exempts around 2,120 items, representing more than half the value of Thai goods exported to the U.S.

China opposes unilateral tariffs in 'all forms'

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it "opposes all forms of unilateral tariffs" in response to the new 12.5% tariffs.

"Tariff wars and trade wars do not serve any parties' interests," ministry spokesman Lin Jian said at a press conference.

Trade tensions have clouded relations between China and the U.S., two of the world's biggest economies, as Trump's hefty "Liberation Day" tariffs resulted in a sharp drop in Chinese exports to the U.S.

Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping, who agreed to set up new boards of trade and investment at their mid-May meeting in Beijing, are expected to meet again in September.

Some Chinese exporters say, however, the impacts are limited as the latest U.S. tariffs on China remain at lower levels than last year's rates, which were initially 34%.

"Of course it'd be best if they (the tariffs) are not there," said Richard Chan, manager of Golden Arts Gifts & Decor, which manufactures Christmas trees and decorations in the southern Chinese city of Dongguan and supplies globally to those including Walmart.

Golden Arts' share of sales to the U.S., however, already have fallen as U.S. tariffs added more uncertainty. They have pivoted more to Europe, which now accounts for roughly 70% of their sales, Chan said.

The latest import duties might stick

Wendy Cutler, a former senior U.S. trade official, said the latest round of tariffs involved "few surprises" since they range just between 10% and 12.5%.

The U.S. Trade Representative's office spent four months investigating the basis for those tariffs to meet legal requirements under Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974.

"Time will tell whether the third attempt to impose tariffs is the charm and this action stands up to legal challenges," said Cutler, senior vice president of the Asia Society Policy Institute.

These duties are less likely than earlier ones to be overruled by U.S. courts, she said.

Further tariffs may be coming in the fall related to alleged structural excess capacity of trading partners, she noted.

Experts say these tariffs may be less disruptive

Washington has generally tended to engage in increased trade friction, William Bratton of BNP Paribas said in a research note Friday.

"On the positive side, however, these tariffs are lower than the earlier (Emergency Powers Act) 'reciprocal' tariffs and appear to exempt a substantial proportion of Asia's current trade flows with the U.S.," he said.

The Trump administration has made tariff exceptions, however, including imported goods that the U.S. does not produce, Cutler noted.

"This should reduce the impact of these duties. Nevertheless, they will contribute to higher prices both for end consumers and businesses importing inputs and machinery," she said.

Immediate pushback, legal and political

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There was immediate pushback, both legally, and politically.

The Liberty Justice Center, a libertarian advocacy group that successfully challenged earlier Trump tariffs, filed a lawsuit in the U.S. Court of International Trade in New York, challenging the double-digit import taxes that Trump imposed Friday.

The group called the new tariffs a pretext to allow Trump to maintain a wall of tariffs around the U.S. economy after the Supreme Court struck down big global taxes he'd imposed last year.

"The administration allowed one global tariff to expire and immediately replaced it with another under a different statute," said Sara Albrecht, chair of the center. "Changing the statute doesn't change the law. Every tariff authority has limits, and every administration must respect them."

Her group represented businesses that successfully challenged Trump's 2025 global tariffs.

Rep. Linda Sanchez, a California Democrat questioned the reasons for the latest slew of tariffs.

"If he was serious, he would not be applying the same tariff rate to China, one of the worst forced labor abusers in the world, as he does to countries like Australia," she said. "Then again, unlike China, Australia doesn't manufacture any Trump corporation products."

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., said Americans will be the ones paying for the new tariffs.

"Instead of continuing his disastrous tariff scheme, the president must put the American people first and revoke these harmful policies that are making everyday Americans' lives flat-out unaffordable," Gillibrand said. "At home in New York and across the country, people are struggling, and they need relief."

Trump says the US will investigate EU trade practices, claiming the bloc unfairly fined tech giants

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE and COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States will open a formal investigation into the European Union's trade practices, President Donald Trump said on Friday, claiming the bloc has unfairly levied billions of dollars of fines against Google, Apple and other U.S. tech giants.

The Republican president made the announcement a day after the EU hit Google with a fine of 890 million euros, or \$1 billion, after it said the technology behemoth broke digital antitrust regulations by setting up Google Play and its ubiquitous search engine to corral consumers toward its own services and apps to the detriment of competitors.

In a lengthy post on social media, Trump said he has warned the EU about its practice of fining U.S. tech companies. He named Google, Apple, Meta, Amazon and others.

"The United States of America is not a 'PIGGYBANK' for Europe, nor will we allow it to be!" Trump said, adding that his post should serve as notice of an immediate trade investigation "into the practice of 'ROB-BING' American Companies and, in turn, the American Taxpayer."

"The European Union will pay a very big price for this illegal and highly unethical conduct, which I have consistently warned them about," he said.

In the post, Trump asserted that the penalties against the companies "will be entirely reversed" and predicted "a substantial TARIFF" would be placed on the EU "at the earliest possible moment."

"Stay tuned!" he said.

Investigation follows new Trump tariffs

Trump's move comes a day after the White House announced double-digit tariffs on imports from more than 60 countries, accusing them of inadequately enforcing bans on goods produced by forced labor. The new tariffs replace temporary 10% worldwide import taxes that Trump imposed after the Supreme Court struck down his biggest tariffs.

The new tariffs are being implemented using Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, which permits the president to impose import taxes and other sanctions against countries found to engage in "unjustifiable," "unreasonable" or "discriminatory" trade practices.

José Castañeda, a spokesperson for Google, said the company has worked hard to comply with the EU's Digital Markets Act and has expressed its concerns about the effects of recent decisions by the European

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Commission.

"We appreciate the engagement by the administration and U.S. government," he said.

Representatives of Amazon, Apple, Meta, and Microsoft did not immediately respond to requests for comment. There also was no immediate comment from the Brussels-based European Commission.

Trump had threatened retaliation over EU fines

The EU's billion-dollar fine against Google was the latest major crackdown on Big Tech by Brussels, which has led the world in reining in some of the world's largest companies from Silicon Valley to Beijing.

It has done so despite the risk of incurring the wrath of Trump, who has lashed out at the 27-nation bloc's digital regulations in a broader campaign against Europe: imposing high tariffs, making threats to seize Greenland from Denmark by force, and rattling trust within the NATO military alliance.

Trump had threatened retaliation if American tech companies are penalized.

Google had recently lost its appeal of a \$4.5 billion antitrust fine imposed by the EU for throttling competition and reducing consumer choice through the dominance of its mobile Android operating system.

The European Commission, the bloc's executive branch and highest antitrust enforcer, said it was acting in the interest of consumers after an investigation of Google.

"The best products should succeed because they're better, not because they're owned by the company running the search engine. And European consumers have a right to be told by app developers where to sign up to the best offers, even when the app store owner does not get a cut," said Teresa Ribera, the commission's executive vice president for clean, just and competitive transition.

Google's president of global affairs, Kent Walker, assailed the fine as "product degradation driven by a small group of self-serving complainants" that will hurt European businesses and consumers.

He said the EU's Digital Markets Act forces Google "to strip away real-time search features Europeans love — like instant pricing and direct availability for hotels, flights, and restaurants — and dismantle safety protections on Google Play."

The EU describes some of the world's leading tech giants — Amazon, Apple, Google parent Alphabet, Meta, Microsoft and TikTok owner ByteDance — as "gatekeepers" that control access for consumers.

"In the EU, businesses have the right to compete fairly. Gatekeepers have the obligation to ensure a level playing field and consumers the right to choose for cheaper alternative offers," European Commission spokesperson Thomas Regnier said. Alphabet reported \$403 billion in revenue last year.

White House wants veterans to replace immigrant truckers who lost their licenses in crackdown

By JOSH FUNK AP Transportation Writer

The Trump administration wants soldiers to consider becoming truck drivers when they leave the military to help replace the tens of thousands of immigrant drivers who lost their licenses in a crackdown this year.

A new campaign launched Friday will promote programs that let veterans who recently drove large military vehicles skip the required skills test for a commercial driver's license. Other soldiers can attend a commercial driving school during their last six months of active duty. The GI Bill will also pay for 100% of commercial driver's license training and for some people even pay a housing allowance while they are in school.

The campaign will be part of a broader interagency effort to help veterans find good civilian jobs that the White House plans to announce on Monday.

The Transportation Department began enforcing existing English language requirements for truckers last summer. Concerns about truck driver qualifications then took on more urgency after an August crash in Florida, when a truck driver performed an illegal U-turn that killed three people. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said that driver, who is from India, should never have been licensed in the first place.

Audits conducted in every state uncovered numerous non-domiciled commercial driver's licenses that remained valid long after an immigrant's work permits had expired or were issued without properly verifying their citizenship status.

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Since then, about 26,000 drivers have been pulled off the road for failing to demonstrate English proficiency, and the Transportation Department said 30,000 commercial licenses were canceled because they were issued illegally. The federal government has tried to withhold millions of dollars of highway funds from California and New York for failing to comply and revoke thousands more licenses, but that has wound up in court. Several other states — including Pennsylvania, Minnesota and North Carolina — have been warned they are at risk of losing funding.

"We are removing more and more dangerous foreign drivers off our roads every day and restoring the integrity of America's trucking industry," Duffy said. "Our new Freedom Haulers campaign will help build on these successes and get the word out that there's never been a better time for America's former service members to get behind the wheel of a big rig."

The federal government has been actively enforcing CDL rules

The trucking industry has applauded the administration's effort to get unqualified drivers off the road and close down sham CDL schools, and companies praised this new effort to get more veterans behind the wheel.

"Veterans make up 15% of our workforce and bring the highest levels of leadership, discipline and technical skills that are essential to our success. We are dedicated to providing them with meaningful careers and a supportive environment where they can thrive," said Derek Leathers, who is chairman and CEO of Werner Enterprises.

Cole Stevens, who is chief strategy officer at the trucking company that bears his last name, said veterans' backgrounds make them great drivers.

"Some of the best drivers and industry leaders I've had the privilege of working with are military veterans," Stevens said. "Their integrity, accountability, and mission-first mindset make them an incredible asset."

In addition to enforcing existing restrictions, the government announced plans to restrict which immigrants can qualify for a non-domiciled commercial driver's license and require them to take the test in English, but those rules are being challenged in court.

The only immigrant drivers who can get a license under the new rules are holders of an H-2A, H-2B or E-2 visa. H-2A is for temporary agricultural workers while H-2B is for temporary nonagricultural workers, and E-2 is for people who make substantial investments in a U.S. business.

Immigrants account for about 20% of all truck drivers, but all of these non-domiciled licenses for immigrants represent only about 5% of all commercial driver's licenses, or about 200,000 drivers.

Some immigrant groups have said they believe that many drivers are being unfairly targeted. The spotlight has been on Sikh truckers because the driver in the Florida crash and the driver in another fatal crash in California in October are both Sikh.

Truck driving may appeal to veterans

The Transportation Department plans to work with the Pentagon and Departments of Veterans Affairs and Labor to promote the career field as a good job that offers independence to veterans who don't want a desk job in civilian life.

Veterans still have to study the rules and pass the written test for a commercial driver's license, but soldiers who recently drove big military vehicles over 2.5 tons (2.25 metric tons) can skip the skills test. The government said more than 40,000 veterans have already used that program, which can enable them to get on the road within a few weeks.

The Transportation Department said that truck drivers currently make an average of \$70,000 a year, as the truck market has tightened up and rates have increased.

Veterans who served for at least three years can also use the money from the GI Bill program to pay for CDL training, and they might even qualify for a housing stipend.

There are already more US measles cases this year than in all of 2025

By DEVI SHASTRI AP Health Writer

The number of measles cases in the U.S. has surpassed the record-breaking tally for all of 2025, with five more months of 2026 still to come.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention logged 2,318 cases of measles as of Thursday, according to an agency update on Friday.

The nation had 2,289 cases in 2025, the worst year for measles in more than three decades. Now, 2026 has easily become the U.S.'s worst year for measles since 1991, as major outbreaks in South Carolina, Utah and Arizona have sickened hundreds and smaller clusters of cases sparked in other states.

In November, international health officials will meet to determine if the U.S. and Mexico have lost their measles-free status. The U.S. eliminated local measles spread in 2000 by maintaining high vaccination rates, which have fallen in recent years to below the 95% coverage needed to prevent outbreaks.

Measles cases are undercounted

While measles cases in the U.S. are climbing, it may be impossible to say exactly how far-reaching the spread is. Public health departments and disease researchers have long acknowledged that official counts are incomplete, because some people get sick and don't seek out treatment — something not unique to measles.

Furthermore, experts say the spread might be greater than what's known because the virus is one of the most contagious known to medicine and vaccination rates nationwide have declined. National vaccination rates for measles, mumps and rubella — which dropped to 92.5% among kindergartners in the 2024-25 school year, from 95.2% in 2019-20 — obscure even lower rates in certain communities.

In Utah, where public health officials have fought measles for more than a year, the virus has sickened more than 700 people during that time, according to the state health department. Experts relying on mathematical modeling and genetic analyses indicate that a large outbreak on the Utah-Arizona border could be around three to four times bigger than what's currently known, state epidemiologist Dr. Leisha Nolen said.

The picture is muddier in South Carolina, which had the nation's largest outbreak in 35 years. There, the 997 total is likely an undercount, the state health department has said, but it doesn't know by how much.

Dr. Brannon Traxler, acting director of the state department of health, said the undercount is "impossible to know and may vary during the course of an outbreak."

Data gaps can make it hard to reliably estimate an outbreak's true scope. Experts say hospitalization rates can be a good barometer, but measles hospitalizations are not required to be reported in every state.

"If we really had some kind of solid gold standard for the percentage of all cases that have hospitalization or some measure of severity, then that would be another way of estimating the outbreak size that we could see if it's consistent with these other methods," said Damon Toth, an applied mathematician at the University of Utah's medical school who is working on one of the Utah outbreak analyses.

Researchers are still analyzing the 2025 Texas outbreak

In Texas, researchers are still working to estimate the size of the state's 2025 outbreak and early findings show it might have been nearly twice the size of the 762 known cases.

Rémy Pasco, a mathematical epidemiologist at the University of Colorado Boulder who is working on the analysis, said the undercounts were unsurprising. In the absence of an adequate community vaccination rate — 95% according to health experts — "there's just not much you can do about measles once you have it," he said.

The CDC defines an outbreak as three or more linked cases. But by the time three such cases are identified in communities with low vaccination rates and less disease surveillance, "either you missed the previous ones or you're going to have a lot more," he added.

Dr. Varun Shetty, Texas' chief state epidemiologist, said there were instances where people tested positive for measles but health officials couldn't confirm who else was in the person's household or if they were sick.

"What we're able to count and report is almost always an underestimate of what actually occurred,

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because it relies on people being willing to be able to get tested, to share information with healthcare providers and with public health," Shetty said. "Sometimes that just doesn't happen."

The state health department previously reported that 182 probable measles cases went unconfirmed in March 2025 among minors in Gaines County — the epicenter of the outbreak — due to a lack of information. The confirmed case count for the western Texas county for the whole outbreak is 414.

Shetty expects to keep seeing measles cases and even outbreaks because so many people are unprotected.

"It's really critical, not only for individual people, but for communities, to have high vaccination coverage," he said.

Vaccination is about protecting others, physician says

Dr. Mark Roberts, retired director of the Public Health Dynamics Lab at the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health, worries most for the people he calls "innocent bystanders."

Research and measles modeling by his team shows those who cannot get vaccinated — young babies, people with weak immune systems and those who rarely don't get robust immunity from the vaccine — bear the brunt of outbreaks early on.

Some people see skipping vaccination as like deciding not to wear a seat belt in a car, Roberts said.

"Not vaccinating your kid is like saying, 'I don't want my car to have brakes,'" he said. "Because it's other people that you can hit. It's not just you in your car. It's other people."

Northern West Bank in lockdown as clashes rock villages and Israel deploys troops in Nablus

By MAJDI MOHAMMED, AREF TUFABA, ERIN CUNNINGHAM and SAM McNEIL Associated Press NABLUS, West Bank (AP) — Israel widely deployed troops in the West Bank after clashes broke out Friday across the occupied territory following the killing of an Israeli settler triggered violence that left two Israeli soldiers and four Palestinian villagers dead.

Palestinians in the West Bank have been facing a wave of violence as Israel's hard-line government, dominated by settler leaders and supporters, has overseen a surge in settlement construction over the past four years. The international community overwhelmingly considers Israeli settlement construction in these areas to be illegal and an obstacle to peace.

4 Palestinians and 2 Israelis killed as fear of violence escalates

The Palestinian Health Ministry said Israeli soldiers shot and killed four Palestinians in the village of Tell in the northern West Bank while the military reported the deaths of two soldiers, one of whom was a settler in a local defense squad.

Two other Israelis and four more Palestinians were wounded, health officials said, and the Israeli military announced it was preparing for an "extensive" counterterrorism operation in the West Bank. It said it conducting a manhunt for Palestinians suspected of attacking Israelis and that it had apprehended two during a raid in Nablus.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a joint statement with Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz, called Friday for more troops to the West Bank and the razing of the homes of the accused in Tell, as well as collecting weapons and revoking work permits in the village.

"The security forces must be allowed to act freely and with full force against terrorism," they said.

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich went farther, saying that the villages of Tell, Iraq Burin and Beit Furik "need to look exactly like the refugee camps in Nablus and Tulkarm," referring to the mass demolition campaign that displaced tens of thousands in the West Bank towns last year.

"It is necessary to evacuate the population there for their protection and to clear these villages of terrorist infrastructure," Smotrich said. "A sharp, determined, and unequivocal military action is required here and now."

Human rights group B'Tselem warned the violence could spin out of control as Israeli settlers and soldiers amass near multiple Palestinian cities.

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"Israeli violence is spreading across the West Bank, fueled by Israeli politicians openly calling for revenge," said Yuli Novak, the group's executive director. "We know where this leads. Millions of Palestinians are now completely exposed to further attacks, with no one protecting them."

An unclear confrontation at the center of the tension

The exact circumstances of Friday's incident remained unclear, but Israeli media reports and interviews with local Palestinian officials suggested a group of settlers entered Tell and were confronted by residents who were fearful of an attack.

The village is off-limits to Israelis as part of Area B under the 1993 Oslo Accords struck after the first Palestinian Intifada.

According to the Israeli military, one of the villagers took one of the settlers' weapons and fired on the group, killing Benayahu Mellet, 32, a security guard in a settlement nearby.

In a video of the incident, confirmed by the Israeli military and circulated online by the military correspondent for Israel's Army Radio, two armed men in civilian clothing, as well as at least one Israeli soldier, are shown pointing their weapons at a group of Palestinians who had gathered in a field.

At one point, the two armed men rushed toward several Palestinian residents with their guns drawn. In the footage, the residents try to push them back and appear to disarm one of the men before opening fire.

In a statement, the Israeli military said it killed the man who took the settler's weapon and that he was armed when soldiers shot him. But a separate video, published by Israeli media outlets and confirmed by the military, showed Israeli forces firing on a group of Palestinians in the same field who were already on the ground.

More than a dozen gunshots can be heard in the footage, which is less than a minute long. The military said the suspect was one of the people killed in the field. It did not respond to questions about why soldiers killed the other men — all of whom were related — or how long after the original altercation the killings took place.

Later, army chief Eyal Zamir said he was sending more troops to the occupied West Bank.

Yossi Dagan, head of the Samaria Regional Council, a settler group in the northern West Bank, posted a video online in the wake of the Tell confrontation demanding the government crack down hard on Palestinians.

"We demand an iron fist and for the government to carry out a wide military operation against the Palestinian Authority and against Hamas," he said.

Settlers have long targeted villages in the northern West Bank

Five Palestinian villages surrounding Nablus were attacked by Israeli settlers on Friday, according to the Palestinian news agency WAFA.

The towns and villages surrounding Nablus sit in one of the most violent parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. In addition to newly approved settlements, at least nine farming outposts dot the area and attacks by Israeli settlers, army incursions and confrontations have become frequent.

Palestinians and human rights groups have increasingly documented armed settlers entering villages in the area. Livestock theft, arson and the defacement of mosques are routinely reported.

According to the Palestinian Health Ministry, since the beginning of this year, 87 Palestinians have been killed in the occupied West Bank governorates, including 21 by Israeli settlers.

Israeli deaths have repeatedly been followed by revenge against nearby Palestinian communities called "price tag" attacks.

That pattern followed the March 21 death of 18-year-old Yehuda Sherman, who was killed when a Palestinian vehicle struck his ATV near Beit Imrin. Senior politicians, including Smotrich, attended Sherman's funeral and called for vengeance.

At the time, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs documented 32 settler attacks affecting 30 Palestinian villages and communities across the West Bank, about a third near Nablus governorate over the following two days. Settlers torched homes and vehicles, vandalized property and assaulted residents, injuring at least 32 Palestinians, according to OCHA.

More than 700,000 Israelis live in the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem, territories captured by

Israel in 1967 and sought by the Palestinians for an independent state along with the Gaza Strip.

By the Numbers: This year's Ebola outbreak has spread faster than the worst on record

By CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — The Ebola outbreak in Congo has killed over 1,000 people, reaching the grim milestone nearly three times faster than the 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic that is considered the worst on record.

Data from Congo's Ministry of Health shows that as of Tuesday, the current outbreak, declared on May 15, has recorded 2,536 confirmed cases, including 1,033 deaths.

During the 2014-2016 outbreak, which recorded more than 28,000 cases, including over 11,000 deaths, it took eight months to reach 1,000 deaths from the first recorded case. This year's outbreak has reached that toll in just over two months, making it the fastest outbreak of the disease ever.

The ongoing outbreak has also recorded 2,500 cases almost three times quicker than that of 2014-2016.

Different viruses are behind the two outbreaks

According to the World Health Organization, Ebola is caused by a group of viruses, of which three are known to cause large outbreaks: Ebola virus, Sudan virus and Bundibugyo virus.

This year's outbreak is caused by Bundibugyo virus, a rare variant which has no approved vaccines or treatments.

Meanwhile, the Ebola virus, which is the most common out of the three, induced the 2014-2016 outbreak, considered the deadliest in Congo's history.

The current outbreak is mostly confined to Congo

The Bundibugyo outbreak is largely restricted to Congo except for a few countries, including Uganda. And in Congo, it's limited to five provinces in the eastern region, which is close to the border with Uganda.

The 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak had spread widely in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and spilled over into nearby nations. A small number of cases were also reported in the United States and Europe, linked to West Africa.

The case fatality rate of the two outbreaks

This year's outbreak has so far had a case fatality rate of 40%, and officials blame most of the deaths on patients reporting symptoms late.

The 2014-2016 outbreak had a fatality rate of 39.6% and overwhelmed health systems across multiple countries.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the Ebola virus is the deadliest of the viruses known to have caused large Ebola outbreaks and up to 90% of cases caused by it are fatal if they receive no treatment.

Officials say the peak of the current outbreak could still be ahead because the patient zero has not been confirmed and the majority of new cases are coming from outside the contacts being monitored, as well as delays in identifying the variant behind the virus when cases started being reported.

The 2014-2016 outbreak lasted about three years. The first case was recorded in December 2013, but it was not until March 2014 that the outbreak was detected, and it was officially declared over in June 2016.

Indian activist Wangchuk ends 26-day hunger strike as 'Cockroach' protesters vow to press on

By SHEIKH SAALIQ and SHONAL GANGULY Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Indian activist Sonam Wangchuk ended a 26-day hunger strike on Friday that helped galvanize a youth movement that's become one of India's largest protests in recent years, as demonstrators took to the streets, vowing to continue protesting until the education minister resigns.

Wangchuk's fast became a rallying point for India's "Cockroach" protests, which began more than a month ago demanding education reforms after alleged leaks in some of the country's most competitive entrance

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exams. Since then, the movement has tapped into broader public anger over unemployment, government accountability and economic opportunity, drawing professionals, families and activists to demonstrations in New Delhi and cities across the country.

The demonstrations have become one of the most sustained waves of public dissent against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government in recent years, with thousands joining after police used tear gas and batons to disperse marchers trying to reach Parliament on Monday.

The call for nationwide protests on Friday was issued in solidarity with students who were beaten by police during a march to Parliament,

In a post on X, Wangchuk said he ended his fast in the presence of two federal ministers after appeals from dozens of members of parliament and following "a long negotiation on various conditions and in view of possible violence in the country." He did not elaborate on his talks with the ministers.

Protest organizers said demonstrations would continue until Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned, insisting on comprehensive examination reforms, and compensation for the families of students who died by suicide after exam paper leaks.

After separate talks with two ministers on Friday, the organizers said the government had asked until Saturday afternoon to respond to their demands. Government minister J.P. Nadda confirmed that the two sides would meet again on Saturday.

"We won't let Sonam sir's sacrifice go in vain," said Abhijeet Dipke, the founder of Cockroach Janta Party, using the nickname protesters have given the renowned activist. Dipke's party is the satirical group that has spearheaded the movement, named after a remark by the country's chief justice of the supreme court comparing some unemployed young people to cockroaches.

Modi publicly addressed the protests for the first time on Thursday, announcing fast-track courts to prosecute cases involving examination paper leaks. In a separate video message, Modi also said his government would introduce legislation in Parliament to crack down on exam paper leaks.

The announcements did little to calm the movement, as protesters said they failed to address their demands for government accountability.

Fabeha Sayyed, 23, said Modi's video message showed he was finally paying attention to the issue, but she questioned why he had not asked the education minister to resign.

"If he were so concerned about the protests, about the students and the families of students who committed suicide, then it is not hard for him to get a person to resign," she said.

Today in History: July 25, Tuskegee Syphilis Study exposed

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, July 25, the 206th day of 2026. There are 159 days left in the year.

Today in History:

On July 25, 1972, the notorious Tuskegee syphilis experiment came to light as The Associated Press reported that for the previous four decades, the U.S. Public Health Service, in conjunction with the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, had been allowing poor, rural Black male patients with syphilis to go without treatment, even allowing more than 100 of them to die, as a way of studying the disease.

Also on this date:

In 1866, Ulysses S. Grant was named General of the Army of the United States, the first officer to hold the rank.

In 1898, U.S. military forces landed in Guánica, Puerto Rico, during the Spanish-American War; Puerto Rico would become a self-governing U.S. commonwealth with the adoption of a constitution.

In 1943, Benito Mussolini was dismissed as premier of Italy by King Victor Emmanuel III, and placed under arrest. (He was later rescued by the Nazis and reasserted his authority.)

In 1946, the United States detonated an atomic bomb near Bikini Atoll in the Pacific in the first underwater test of the device.

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In 1956, the Italian liner SS Andrea Doria collided with the Swedish passenger ship Stockholm off the New England coast late at night and began sinking; 51 people — 46 from the Andrea Doria, five from the Stockholm — were killed. (The Andrea Doria capsized and sank the following morning.)

In 1960, a Woolworth's store in Greensboro, North Carolina, that had been the scene of nearly six months of sit-in protests against its whites-only lunch counter, dropped its segregation policy.

In 1978, Louise Joy Brown, the first "test tube baby," was born in Oldham, England; she'd been conceived through the technique of in vitro fertilization.

In 1994, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Jordan's King Hussein signed a declaration at the White House ending their countries' 46-year-old formal state of war.

In 2000, a New York-bound Air France Concorde crashed outside Paris shortly after takeoff, killing all 109 people on board and four people on the ground; it was the first-ever crash of the supersonic jet.

In 2010, the online whistleblower WikiLeaks posted some 90,000 leaked U.S. military records that amounted to a blow-by-blow account of the Afghanistan War, including unreported incidents of Afghan civilian killings as well as covert operations against Taliban figures.

In 2019, President Donald Trump had a second phone call with the new Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, during which he solicited Zelenskyy's help in gathering potentially damaging information about former Vice President Joe Biden; that night, a staff member at the White House Office of Management and Budget signed a document that officially put military aid for Ukraine on hold.

In 2022, on a visit to Canada, Pope Francis issued a historic apology for the Catholic Church's cooperation with the country's "catastrophic" policy of Indigenous residential schools, saying the forced assimilation of Native peoples into Christian society destroyed their cultures, severed families and marginalized generations.

In 2024, Mexican drug cartel leader Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, who eluded authorities for decades, was duped into flying into the U.S., where he was arrested alongside a son of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán. Zambada was sought under U.S. efforts to dismantle the Sinaloa cartel responsible for large-scale drug trafficking across the Mexico-U.S. border.

Today's Birthdays: Folk-pop singer-musician Bruce Woodley (The Seekers) is 84. Rock musician Jim McCarty (The Yardbirds) is 83. Reggae singer Rita Marley is 80. Musician Verdine White (Earth, Wind & Fire) is 75. Model-actor Iman is 71. Rock musician Thurston Moore (Sonic Youth) is 68. Celebrity chef/TV personality Geoffrey Zakarian is 67. Actor Matt LeBlanc is 59. Actor Wendy Raquel Robinson is 59. Actor David Denman is 53. Actor Jay R. Ferguson is 52. Actor James Lafferty (TV: "One Tree Hill") is 41. Actor Meg Donnelly (TV: "American Housewife") is 26. Actor Mason Cook is 26.