

Groton Daily Independent

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Community Calendar

Thursday, July 30

Senior Menu: Tater tot hot dish, corn, fruit, whole wheat bread.

1st-3rd Grade BB Camp, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., GHS Arena

Friday, July 31

Senior Menu: Baked fish, oven roasted potatoes, peas, fruit, whole wheat bread.

1st-3rd Grade BB Camp, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., GHS Arena

State B Legion Tournament in Madison through August 4th.

**Groton Daily
Independent**
PO Box 34, Groton SD
57445
Paul's Cell/Text:
605-397-7460



AREA IV SENIOR NUTRITION

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SENIOR MEALS
will be served at the
GROTON COMMUNITY CENTER

STARTING MONDAY, AUG. 3

Nutritious Meals • Good Company • All Are Welcome!

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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.

Fauci Invokes the Fifth

Dr. Anthony Fauci declined to answer over 100 questions during a Senate committee hearing yesterday on COVID-19's origins, citing concerns that Republicans could use his testimony against him.

Fauci, who served as the nation's infectious disease expert during the pandemic, maintains the virus likely spilled naturally from animals to humans. This view aligns with a 3.5-year independent assessment that says COVID-19 likely emerged from animal-to-human transmission but could not conclusively determine its origins. Homeland Security Chairman Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) aligns with the theory that COVID-19 emerged from a US-funded lab in China. Ahead of yesterday's hearing, Paul released 1,141 pages of Fauci's personal diary, which show the doctor expressing some doubts about a natural origin.

Paul said he will schedule a vote next week on whether to hold Fauci in contempt for invoking the Fifth Amendment. The senator said the move was unwarranted since a Biden-era preemptive pardon shields Fauci from some criminal liability.

Saudi Arabia Steps In

Saudi Arabia confirmed yesterday it publicly joined the US' military campaign against Iran. The kingdom participated in a joint strike on Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, reportedly killing at least 20 combatants.

In announcing the strikes, the kingdom's Ministry of Defense cited Iranian attacks on its oil industry: Saudi Arabia blames Iraqi militias for up to half of the nearly 1,000 drone strikes it has weathered since February. Earlier this week, drones and missiles struck Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq oil facility. Although Riyadh had not openly participated in military offensive action until this week, US officials say the kingdom has secretly participated in US-led attacks in the past.

Iraq's prime minister has not commented on this week's attacks but has given the country's Iranian-backed militias until September to disarm. Learn about the country's delicate balancing act.

Blood Pressure Boom

High blood pressure among pregnant women in the US rose 73% between 2016 and 2024, according to government data released yesterday. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported one in 10 pregnant women had high blood pressure in 2024, up from one in 17 in 2016.

Hypertensive disorders—including gestational hypertension and preeclampsia—are among the leading causes of pregnancy-related death and illness in the US. They can increase the risk of preterm birth, low birth weight, stillbirth, placental complications, and organ failure in mothers. Women who develop high blood pressure during pregnancy also face a greater lifetime risk of heart disease.

The new report is based on hospital-collected birth certificate data and includes only high blood pressure that develops during pregnancy. Blood pressure measures the force of blood pushing against artery walls. It rises when the heart pumps harder, blood vessels narrow or stiffen, or the body retains more fluid.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

K-Pop group BTS will not submit its recent chart-topping album "Arirang" for Grammy consideration, a move that appears to protest the new Asian pop music performance category.

Irish singer Glen Hansard dies at age 56.

Jared Leto is accused of sexual misconduct by 10 women in a new BBC documentary.

Ye, formerly Kanye West, settles 2024 sexual misconduct lawsuit filed by a former assistant.

LIV Golf to cancel team championship slated for August as the league struggles to find investors after losing backing from Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund.

Science & Technology

DoorDash begins building its own drones for commercial deliveries after securing key Federal Aviation Administration approval.

Researchers build tool to dissect how shape-shifting proteins work, potentially paving the way for new drugs to treat cancer, neurodegeneration, and other conditions.

Cargo recovered from 17th-century shipwreck off Australia's coast includes stone from multiple quarries in Europe, suggesting more extensive and complex trade than previously believed. Only one-third of the 340 passengers lived.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -1.5%, Dow -2.2%, Nasdaq -1.7%).

Federal Reserve votes 9-3 to hold interest rates steady for seventh consecutive month, underscoring inflation concerns.

Starbucks raises full-year guidance after same-store sales rise 7.9%.

Microsoft beats expectations as full-year revenue for Azure cloud tops \$100B.

BMW to cut up to 8,000 jobs by end of 2027 amid declining sales in China.

Politics & World Affairs

xAI sues Minnesota over first-in-the-nation law barring "nudification" technology; the law is set to go into effect on Saturday.

Lindsay Clancy's ex-husband testifies in ongoing trial of woman who admits she killed her three children, cites postpartum psychosis.

Reported cyclosporiasis cases exceed 18,000, with 6,707 confirmed in lab testing and 423 people hospitalized, latest data reveals.

BROWN COUNTY FAIR

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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
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Email your order to
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Blizzard® Treat coupons
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**THANK YOU FOR HELPING DQ® BRING SMILES TO
LOCAL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES RECEIVING CARE!**

See you on July 30!



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Photos by John Aldrich

Buck Moon

The Buck Moon is the traditional name for the full moon that occurs in July. The name comes from the time of year when male deer (bucks) begin growing their new antlers.

Here's why it has that name:

Every spring, bucks shed their old antlers.

By July, a new set of antlers is growing rapidly and is covered in a soft, fuzzy skin called velvet, which supplies blood and nutrients.

Native American tribes and early European settlers noticed this annual cycle and associated the July full moon with the bucks' growing antlers, giving rise to the name Buck Moon.

The Buck Moon is one of many traditional full moon names that were used to track the seasons before modern calendars. Other July names include:

Thunder Moon – because July often brings frequent thunderstorms.

Hay Moon – marking the hay harvest in many farming communities.

Salmon Moon – used by some Indigenous peoples in areas where salmon runs occurred in July.

The term "Buck Moon" doesn't make the moon appear any different from other full moons. It's simply the traditional seasonal name for July's full moon.

July is indeed when you'll often see whitetail bucks with their antlers well developed in velvet, making the name especially fitting. By late August and September, the velvet is shed, revealing the hard antlers they'll use during the fall rut.

Bon Homme County Fatal Crash

What: Two-vehicle fatal crash

Where: S.D. Highway 37 and S.D. Highway 52, 8 miles south of Tyndall, South Dakota

When: 8:00 a.m., Monday, July 27, 2026

Driver 1: 32-year-old male from Colman, South Dakota, minor injuries

Vehicle 1: 2020 Ford F-250

Seat Belt Used: No

Driver 2: 49-year-old male from Omaha, Nebraska, fatal injuries

Vehicle 2: 2025 Honda Pilot

Seat Belt Used: Yes

Passenger 1: 47-year-old female from Omaha, Nebraska, life-threatening injuries

Seat Belt Used: Yes

Bon Homme County, S.D.- An Omaha, Nebraska man died Monday in a two-vehicle crash near Tyndall, South Dakota.

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

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2020 Ford F-250 was traveling northbound on S.D. Highway 37 near the intersection of S.D. Highway 52. At the same time, the driver of a 2025 Honda Pilot stopped in the westbound lane on S.D. Highway 52 before proceeding into the intersection. The Honda was struck by the Ford. All three people were taken to a Tyndall hospital. The driver of the Honda died from his injuries. His passenger was taken to a Sioux Falls hospital via Life Flight with life-threatening injuries. The driver of the Ford sustained minor injuries.

The investigation is ongoing. All information released is preliminary.

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

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SOUTH DAKOTA AMERICAN LEGION "B" JUNIOR BASEBALL

REGION 1B

SISSETON LEGION POST 50

JULY 27TH - JULY 29TH, 2026



Groton's championship run ends with second-place finish at Region 1B Junior Legion Tournament

SISSETON — Groton battled its way through the consolation bracket and forced a winner-take-all championship game Wednesday night before settling for a second-place finish at the Region 1B Junior Legion Baseball Tournament.

After handing previously unbeaten Sisseton its first loss of the tournament with a 12-8 victory in the opening championship game, Groton needed one more win to claim the regional title. Instead, Sisseton answered in the nightcap, defeating Post 39, 7-4, to capture the championship and earn the state tournament berth.

Groton showed plenty of resilience in the opener, overcoming an 8-8 tie with four runs in the sixth inning to extend the tournament another game.

T.C. Schuster led the offensive attack, driving in four runs. He delivered the game's biggest hit with a bases-clearing double in the sixth inning and also added a sacrifice fly earlier in the contest.

Groton grabbed a 1-0 lead in the first inning when Braden Fliehs singled home a run before extending the advantage to 4-1 in the second. Jordan Schwan drew a bases-loaded walk, Schuster added his sacrifice fly and Fliehs followed with an RBI single.

Sisseton stormed back with six runs in the fourth inning to take an 8-4 lead, highlighted by Bryson Hanson's two-run double and J.J. Hamm's two-run single.

Post 39 responded to tie the game before Schuster's clutch double in the sixth put Groton back in front for good. An error later in the inning allowed one more run to score as Groton completed the 12-8 victory.

Groton pounded out 16 hits in the win. Braden Fliehs and Zach Fliehs each collected three hits, while John Bisbee, Ryder Schelle and Alex Abeln added two hits apiece. Kason Oswald reached base three times on walks as Groton also showed patience at the plate with seven free passes.

Schuster started on the mound before Braden Fliehs and Wesley Borg combined in relief to secure the victory.

With the regional championship on the line in the deciding game, Sisseton wasted little time taking control.

Bryson Hanson drove in the first run of the game with a single before Karter Deutsch added a two-run double as Sisseton built a 3-0 first-inning advantage. Sisseton added three more runs in the second inning to stretch the lead to 6-0 behind a bases-loaded walk and a two-run single by J.J. Hamm.

Groton continued to battle, drawing eight walks and playing error-free defense, but could not overcome the early deficit.

Jordan Schwan provided a strong relief outing, striking out seven over 5 1/3 innings while allowing three runs on three hits. Ryder Schelle started the game for Groton.

Braden Fliehs, T.C. Schuster, Schelle, Alex Abeln and Lincoln Shilhanek each recorded a hit for Post 39. Zach Fliehs and Shilhanek each drove in a run, while Bisbee reached base twice on walks.

Despite falling one game short of a regional championship, Groton completed an impressive run through the loser's bracket, winning four consecutive elimination games before handing Sisseton its only loss of the tournament. Sisseton responded in the decisive second game to claim the Region 1B title and advance to the state tournament.

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Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion 12 - 8 Sisseton Post 50 Jr. Legion

📍 Away 📅 Wednesday July 29, 2026

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
GRTN	1	3	0	4	0	4	0	12	16	4
SSST	1	0	0	6	1	0	0	8	12	6

BATTING

Groton Post 39...	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
A Abeln #5 (SS)	6	3	2	0	0	1
J Schwan #11 (CF)	4	1	0	1	2	3
T Schuster #3 (P)	3	2	2	4	1	0
B Fliehs #19 (3B)	5	1	3	1	0	1
R Schelle #6 (2B)	5	1	2	1	0	0
L Shilhan... #17 (1B)	3	1	1	0	0	1
W Borg #1 (P)	1	0	0	0	0	0
Trayce... #16 (2B)	1	0	1	0	0	0
Z Fliehs #23 (RF)	5	1	3	1	0	1
K Oswald #12 (C)	2	1	0	0	3	2
J Bisbee #15 (LF)	4	1	2	1	1	0
CR: Asher Zim... #9	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	39	12	16	9	7	9

2B: T Schuster, **TB:** J Bisbee 2, Trayce Schelle, L Shilhanek, A Abeln 2, B Fliehs 3, Z Fliehs 3, R Schelle 2, T Schuster 3, **SF:** T Schuster, **LOB:** 13

PITCHING

Groton Pos...	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
T Schust... #3	3.1	2	3	2	1	4	0
W Borg #1	0.2	3	4	4	2	1	0
B Fliehs #19	3.0	7	1	1	0	2	0
Totals	7.0	12	8	7	3	7	0

W: B Fliehs, **P-S:** B Fliehs 56-37, W Borg 32-15, T Schuster 60-38, **WP:** T Schuster, **HBP:** T Schuster 2, **BF:** B Fliehs 16, W Borg 8, T Schuster 17, **E:** J Bisbee, J Schwan, R Schelle, T Schuster

Sisseton Post 5...	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Nelson #22 (SS)	5	1	2	1	0	2
H Hanson #1 (1B)	4	1	1	1	0	1
R Anderson #10 (C)	3	0	2	1	1	1
B Hanson #11 (P)	5	1	2	2	0	0
J Hamm #5 (LF)	4	0	2	2	0	0
I Deutsch #27 (2B)	3	1	1	0	0	1
A Stickl... #3 (3B)	1	1	0	0	0	0
K Deutsch #18 (RF)	4	1	1	0	0	1
O Ander... #13 (CF)	3	1	0	0	1	1
J Stickland #2 (3B)	3	1	1	0	1	0
Totals	35	8	12	7	3	7

2B: B Hanson, **TB:** J Hamm 2, J Stickland, I Deutsch, R Anderson 2, B Hanson 3, H Hanson, L Nelson 2, K Deutsch, **HBP:** R Anderson, H Hanson, **SB:** B Hanson, K Deutsch, **LOB:** 11

Sisseton P...	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
B Hanson #11	3.2	11	8	7	4	6	0
H Hanson #1	3.1	5	4	3	3	3	0
Totals	7.0	16	12	10	7	9	0

L: H Hanson, **P-S:** B Hanson 105-57, H Hanson 60-36, **WP:** B Hanson, **BF:** B Hanson 28, H Hanson 19, **E:** J Hamm, I Deutsch 3, O Anderson, A Stickland

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Sisseton Post 50 Jr
Legion

7 - 4

Groton Post 39 Jr.
Legion

📍 Home 📅 Wednesday July 29, 2026

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
SSST	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	7	7	2
GRTN	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	4	5	0

BATTING

Sisseton Post 5...	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Nielsen #22 (SS)	3	1	1	0	0	2
H Hanson #1 (3B)	3	1	1	0	1	1
R Anderson #10 (C)	2	0	0	0	2	1
B Hanson #11 (1B)	3	1	1	1	1	0
J Hamm #5 (LF)	3	1	1	2	1	0
K Deutsch #18	3	0	1	2	1	2
O Ander... #13 (CF)	3	0	0	0	1	2
A Chanku #6 (RF)	3	1	1	0	1	0
J Stickland #2 (2B)	4	1	1	0	0	0
CR: A Stick... #3 (P)	0	1	0	0	0	0
Totals	27	7	7	5	8	8

2B: K Deutsch, L Nielsen, **TB:** H Hanson, J Stickland, A Chanku, K Deutsch 2, B Hanson, J Hamm, L Nielsen 2, **SAC:** L Nielsen, **SB:** H Hanson, J Stickland, B Hanson, A Stickland, **LOB:** 7

PITCHING

Sisseton P...	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
I Deutsch #27	4.0	1	2	0	7	2	0
A Stickla... #3	3.0	4	2	2	1	4	0
Totals	7.0	5	4	2	8	6	0

P-S: I Deutsch 76-31, A Stickland 58-36, **WP:** I Deutsch, **HBP:** A Stickland, **BF:** I Deutsch 20, A Stickland 15, **E:** J Stickland, L Nielsen

Groton Post 39...	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
A Abeln #5 (3B)	2	0	1	0	0	0
Trayce... #16 (3B)	1	1	0	0	1	1
J Schwan #11 (CF)	3	0	0	0	1	0
T Schuster #3 (SS)	4	1	1	0	0	0
B Fliehs #19 (2B)	3	1	1	0	1	1
R Schelle #6 (P)	3	1	1	0	1	1
L Shilhan... #17 (1B)	4	0	1	1	0	0
Z Fliehs #23 (RF)	2	0	0	1	1	1
K Oswald #12 (C)	2	0	0	0	1	1
Asher Zimme... #9	1	0	0	0	0	1
J Bisbee #15 (LF)	1	0	0	0	2	0
Totals	26	4	5	2	8	6

TB: R Schelle, B Fliehs, T Schuster, A Abeln, L Shilhanek, **HBP:** Z Fliehs, **SB:** J Schwan, **LOB:** 10

Groton Pos...	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
R Schelle #6	1.0	3	4	3	2	0	0
J Schwan #11	5.1	3	3	3	6	7	0
Trayce... #16	0.2	1	0	0	0	1	0
Totals	7.0	7	7	6	8	8	0

P-S: R Schelle 31-15, Trayce Schelle 9-7, J Schwan 107-55, **WP:** J Schwan, **BF:** R Schelle 8, Trayce Schelle 3, J Schwan 25

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August Community Calendar

Saturday, Aug. 1

Third Annual Celebration in the Park/Rib Cook-Off at the City Park, 1 p.m. to 9 p.m.
State B Legion Tournament in Madison

Sunday, Aug. 2

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m., at Zion, 11 a.m.
United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.
Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.
State B Legion Tournament in Madison

Monday, Aug. 3

Senior Menu: Salisbury Steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans, fruit, whole wheat bread.
First day of soccer practice
Wrestling Camp, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., GHS Gym and Arena
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.
State B Legion Tournament in Madison

Tuesday, Aug. 4

Senior Menu: Scalloped potatoes with ham, carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.
Wrestling Camp, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., GHS Gym and Arena
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.
City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.
State B Legion Tournament in Madison

Wednesday, Aug. 5

Senior Menu: Swedish meatballs, mashed potatoes with gravy, winter blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.
Wrestling Camp, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., GHS Gym and

Arena

Emmanuel Lutheran: Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.
Groton Chamber meeting, noon, City Hall

Thursday, Aug. 6

Senior Menu: Tuna noodle casserole, peas, fruit, whole wheat bread.
First day of football practice
Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.
Family Fun Fest, 5:30-7:30 p.m., downtown Groton
Summer Smash, 7:30 p.m., GHS Parking Lot

Friday, Aug. 7

Senior Menu: Taco bake with ground beef, Mexican rice with beans, Catalina blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.
Storybook Land Theatre Presentation, 10 a.m., GHS Gym
State Jr. Legion Baseball Tournament at Redfield

Saturday, Aug. 8

State Jr. Legion Baseball Tournament at Redfield

Sunday, Aug. 9

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m., at Zion, 11 a.m.
United Methodist: Worship with communion at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.
Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.
State Jr. Legion Baseball Tournament at Redfield

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Monday, Aug. 10

Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, green beans, fruit, whole wheat bread.

First day of boys golf practice

First day of cross country practice

School Board meeting, 6 p.m.

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

Senior Citizens meet at the Community Center, 1 p.m.

School Board Meeting, 6 p.m.

Tuesday, Aug. 11

Senior Menu: Beef and bean burrito, Spanish rice, corn, fruit.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Council, 6 p.m.

Wednesday, Aug. 12

Senior Menu: Chicken bacon ranch pasta, broccoli, fruit, whole wheat bread.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Groton Area Staff Development Day at NSU, 8 a.m.

Thursday, Aug. 13

Senior Menu: Meatloaf, au gratin potatoes, peas and carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.

First day of volleyball practice.

Friday, Aug. 14

Senior Menu: Grilled chicken sandwich, roasted sweet potatoes, California blend, fruit.

Girls Soccer at NSU vs. Dakota Valley, 3 p.m.

Boys Soccer at NSU vs. Custer, 5 p.m.

Saturday, Aug. 15

Boys Soccer hosts Hot Springs, 11 a.m.

Girls Soccer hosts Sioux Falls Christian, 1 p.m.

Sunday, Aug. 16

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.

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

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

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

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

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

Monday, Aug. 17

Senior Menu: Chef salad with deli ham, tomatoes and cucumbers, fruited Jell-o, fruit.

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

Groton Area Staff Development Day

Boys Golf at Sioux Valley Invitational, 10 a.m.

Back-to-School Open House, 4-6 p.m.

Senior Citizens meet at the Community Center, 1 p.m.

Tuesday, Aug. 18

Senior Menu: Sloppy joe on a bun, baked potato, baked beans, fruit.

St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Groton Area Staff Development Day

Girls Soccer at Lennox, 4 p.m.

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Aug. 19

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

Senior Menu: Chicken alfredo, tossed salad, broccoli, fruit, breadstick.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Nominations Committee Meeting, 6 p.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.

Thursday, Aug. 20

Senior Menu: BBQ pulled pork with Mac n cheese, cucumber salad, fruit, whole wheat bread.

Emmanuel Lutheran: WELCA "Do Day", 1:30 p.m.

Friday, Aug. 21

Senior Menu: Hot turkey combo, mashed potatoes with gravy, carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.

Soccer at Belle Fourche (Girls at 5 p.m., boys at 7 p.m. MT)

Football at Miller/Highmore-Harrold, 7 p.m.

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Saturday, Aug. 22

Soccer at St. Thomas More/Rapid City Christian (girls at 11 a.m., boys at 1 p.m. MT)

Sunday, Aug. 23

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion and baptism, 9 a.m.

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

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

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

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

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

Monday, Aug. 24

Senior Menu: Ground beef stroganoff with noodles, peas, fruit, whole wheat bread.

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

Senior Citizens meet at the Community Center, with potluck at noon

Tuesday, Aug. 25

Senior Menu: Egg salad sandwich, tomato spoon salad, fruit, cookie.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

NEC Boys Golf Meet, 10 a.m., Olive Grove Golf Course

Volleyball at Hamlin (C match at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity)

Wednesday, Aug. 26

Senior Menu: Roasted chicken breast, roasted potatoes, California blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Thursday, Aug. 27

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

Boys Soccer at Freeman/Marion/Parker/Viborg-Hurley, 4 p.m.

Girls Soccer at Garretson, 4:30 p.m.

Cross Country at Whetstone Creek Golf Course, Milbank, 5 p.m.

Friday, Aug. 28

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

Football hosts Beresford, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Aug. 29

Volleyball: C Match at Matchbox, Aberdeen, 9 a.m.

Volleyball: at Huron Aren (vs. Brandon Valley at 10 a.m.; vs. Brookings at noon; vs. Huron at 1 p.m., vs. Sturgis, 4 p.m.)

Boys Soccer hosts Dakota Valley, 1 p.m.

Airport Fly-In/Drive In at Groton Airport

Sunday, Aug. 30

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.

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

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

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

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

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

Airport Fly-In/Drive In at Groton Airport

Monday, Aug. 31

Senior Menu: Cheeseburger on bun, tator tots, carrots, fruit.

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

JH Football vs. Ellendale at Kulm, 4:30 p.m.

JV Football at Kulm, 5:30 p.m.

JH Volleyball hosts Redfield (7th and 8th at 6 p.m. on 2 courts in the Arena)

Ben Althoff's Big Day Propels Groton Locke Electric Past Merchants; Amateurs head to state with region win

By GameChanger Media

Ben Althoff collected three hits in four at bats, as Groton Locke Electric defeated Merchants 8-7 on Wednesday at Northville. Althoff doubled in the seventh inning, singled in the third inning, and singled in the fifth inning.

Groton Locke Electric were the first to get on the board in the first when Ty Sieber singled, scoring two runs.

Merchants took the lead in the top of the third. Niko Pezonella homered to right field, scoring three runs, to give Merchants the edge, 3-2.

Althoff singled down the left field line, which helped Groton Locke Electric tie the game at three in the bottom of the third.

A double by Korbin Kucker gave Groton Locke Electric the lead, 4-3, in the bottom of the fourth.

Merchants took the lead in the top of the fifth. Greg Heyne singled, scoring two runs, to give Merchants the advantage, 5-4.

Groton Locke Electric jumped into the lead in the bottom of the seventh when Althoff doubled, scoring two runs, Brian Hansen hit a sacrifice fly, scoring one run, and Jonah Schmidt singled, scoring one run.

Ashton Remily hit a solo home run to right field in the top of the ninth for the Merchants.

Ryan Groeblichhoff opened the game for Groton Locke Electric. The starter surrendered 12 hits and seven runs (six earned) over nine innings, striking out six and walking two. Remily stepped on the mound first for Merchants. The starter allowed eight hits and seven runs (four earned) over six innings, striking out two and walking one.

Groton Locke Electric tallied nine hits in the game.

Merchants collected 12 hits in the game. Pezonella drove the middle of the lineup, leading Merchants with three runs batted in. The shortstop went 2-for-5 on the day. Beau Kirsch and Heyne each collected three hits for Merchants. Devin Fischbach collected two hits for Merchants in five at bats. Fischbach stole two bases. Merchants ran wild on the base paths, tallying six stolen bases for the game. Merchants turned two double plays in the game.

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Merchants 7 - 8 Groton Locke Electric

📍 Home 📅 Wednesday July 29, 2026

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	R	H	E
MRCH	0	0	3	0	2	0	1	0	1	7	12	5
GRTN	2	0	1	1	0	0	4	0	X	8	9	4

BATTING

Merchants	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
C Simes #1 (CF)	3	2	1	0	2	0
D Fischba... #1 (3B)	5	2	2	0	0	1
A Remily #22 (P)	5	1	1	1	0	1
N Pezon... #28 (SS)	5	2	2	3	0	1
G Heyne #11 (1B)	5	0	3	2	0	0
K Stahl #2 (C)	4	0	0	0	0	1
M Sangster #7 (LF)	4	0	0	0	0	1
B Kirsch #14 (RF)	4	0	3	0	0	0
D Bakeburg #2 (2B)	4	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	39	7	12	6	2	6

HR: N Pezonella, A Remily, **TB:** N Pezonella 5, B Kirsch 3, A Remily 4, C Simes, G Heyne 3, D Fischbach 2, **CS:** M Sangster, **SB:** N Pezonella, B Kirsch, C Simes, D Fischbach 2, K Stahl, **LOB:** 7

PITCHING

Merchants	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
A Remily #22	6.0	8	7	4	1	2	0
N Pez... #28	2.0	1	1	1	1	4	0
Totals	8.0	9	8	4	2	6	0

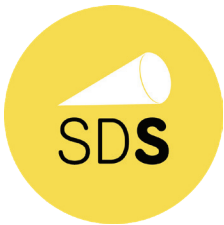
L: A Remily, **P-S:** N Pezonella 40-25, A Remily 95-57, **WP:** N Pezonella, **BF:** N Pezonella 8, A Remily 29, **E:** N Pezonella, D Bakeburg 4

Groton Locke El...	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
B Fliehs #1 (LF)	5	3	1	0	0	2
B Althoff #4 (SS)	4	1	3	3	0	0
B Althoff #27 (RF)	3	2	1	0	1	0
T Sieber #24 (3B)	4	0	1	2	0	1
B Hansen #11 (1B)	3	0	0	1	0	0
J Schmidt #21 (CF)	4	0	1	1	0	0
P Boyd #7 (DH)	3	0	0	0	0	1
B Suther V... (DH)	1	0	0	0	0	1
C Camacho #5 (C)	4	1	1	0	0	0
K Kucker #9 (2B)	3	1	1	1	1	1
Totals	34	8	9	8	2	6

2B: K Kucker, B Fliehs, B Althoff, C Camacho, **TB:** T Sieber, K Kucker 2, B Althoff, J Schmidt, B Fliehs 2, B Althoff 4, C Camacho 2, **SF:** B Hansen, **SB:** B Althoff, **LOB:** 5

Groton Loc...	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
R Groebl... #0	9.0	12	7	6	2	6	2
Totals	9.0	12	7	6	2	6	2

W: R Groeblinghoff, **P-S:** R Groeblinghoff 139-93, **BF:** R Groeblinghoff 41, **E:** T Sieber, R Groeblinghoff, B Hansen, B Althoff



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Runoff turnout affected by motivation, polling, lack of 'second choice' enthusiasm, professor says

BY MAKENZIE HUBER

Turnout among Republicans in Tuesday's runoff election fell by about 20,000 voters compared to the June primary — a drop that a University of South Dakota political science professor said was predictable.

Participation fell from 43% in June to 36% Tuesday, driven by low motivation, polling that made the race look like a foregone conclusion and other factors, according to Julia Hellwege.

"It's about what I'd expect," she said.

Toby Doeden and Gov. Larry Rhoden made it into the runoff for the Republican nomination for governor by finishing first and second in a four-way June 2 primary election. Nobody in that race reached 35%, which triggered the first use of a 1985 state law requiring a runoff when no candidate meets that threshold in a statewide primary. Rhoden won in the runoff.

Runoff elections typically draw fewer voters than the elections preceding them. Unlike South Dakota primaries (held the first Tuesday in June) or the general election (the first Tuesday in November), runoffs have no well-known date for voters to plan around.

Voters less engaged with politics are more likely to miss runoffs, Hellwege said, both because of limited awareness and because voting itself demands time and effort: researching candidates, finding polling locations and making time to show up.

Turnout among registered Republican voters in the runoff ranged from a low of 9.31% in Oglala Lakota County, which is part of the Pine Ridge Reservation, to a high of 54.58% in Sully County in central South Dakota.

Doeden received 7,282 fewer votes in the runoff than in the June primary. Some of those voters may have backed Rhoden instead, but the majority likely stayed home, Hellwege said.

Motivation also played a role. With Doeden finishing the June primary at 31% and Rhoden at 25%, most voters heading into the runoff were choosing between candidates who weren't their first pick.

"It's not quite as motivating to go out and vote for your second choice," Hellwege said.

Competitive races drive the most engagement, Hellwege said — and June's four-way primary was the second-highest Republican primary turnout in the past decade. The runoff turned out to be far less competitive.

Pre-runoff polling from Emerson College, commissioned by KELO-TV, showed Rhoden with a wide lead, which may have further dampened turnout.

"When things are unpredictable, it can draw people out," Hellwege said. "If they see a poll that says it's skewed they might think, 'It doesn't look that competitive so I don't need to put as much effort into this and vote.'"

Alfred Slaathaug, of rural Brandon, said he voted for Rhoden on Election Day but debated whether he needed to participate because of the poll results.

"But on principle, I decided not to skip it," Slaathaug said.

Slaathaug was one of thousands of South Dakotans who registered or switched party affiliations ahead of the runoff specifically to participate in it. Slaathaug switched from the Democratic Party and plans to switch back.

Slaathaug's and other new Republican votes had little effect on the final margin given Rhoden's wide win — garnering 71% of the vote — but they may have nudged turnout upward, Hellwege noted.

Advance voting — mail-in and in-person ballots cast before Election Day — made up 22% of total runoff turnout, up slightly from the 18% to 19% typical of recent Republican primaries.

Auditors attributed the uptick to party switchers voting immediately after changing their registration. Hellwege said the shift wasn't dramatic but made sense: Voters registering specifically to support a candidate are more likely to vote early, as are committed partisans who had already made up their minds in June.

"More than likely, early voters were folks who had a clear idea of who they were going to vote for, which makes it easier to submit their ballot ahead of time," Hellwege said.

The next election will be Nov. 3, when voters will choose between Rhoden and Democratic challenger Dan Ahlers in the race for governor. The general election ballot will also include other statewide and local races and ballot questions.

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

What the Freedom Trucks don't say about American history speaks volumes

by Rick Snedeker

Some red flags had already popped up in my mind when I visited the Freedom Truck on July 11 in Huron during its three-day stop in that typical, small, welcoming South Dakota city.

But after I experienced it, despite its beautiful, engaging, and by-and-large historically accurate and straightforward design, I soon realized how subtly insidious the mostly federally funded mobile History Truck initiative is, as it aims to airbrush all the most appalling and shameful episodes in American history.

There are six of the massive double-wide semitruck trailers, whose displays and narratives cater to children, visiting hamlets, small cities and metros in all the lower 48 states and Washington, D.C., by the end of this year, the nation's 250th (semiquincentennial, or sestercentennial, which is one syllable shorter) year.

But all the trucks, including the one in Huron, provide only America's laudable, uber-positive and heroically exceptional history. As was evident in the Huron Freedom Truck's narrative, the bad stuff is simply left out.

Like it never happened.

One of the main display themes is that the Declaration of Independence codified the then-radical principle that "all men are created equal," and that the nation, once formed, "conquered" slavery. Incongruously, though, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, among other Founding Fathers, themselves owned slaves at the time. In fact, Jefferson didn't free his slaves even when he died; Washington, however, freed his. Of course, none of this would be evident to children and adults alike even if they closely read the Freedom Truck display texts.

But who freed whom or when is beside the point. That Founders owned human beings at all is the point and should be clear in the Freedom Truck displays. This fact is irreducibly critical to fully understanding the epic American story, spotlighting an ignoble reality that the fawning hyperbole of the Freedom Trucks ignores or deceitfully understates.

I wasn't particularly surprised at the Trump administration's spendy, baroque effort, employing omission, to pull such historical wool over the eyes of children (and adults). My initial wariness stemmed from who wrote the Freedom Truck script and who created its audio-visual extravaganza.

The script for the trucks was written by arch-conservative Matthew Spalding, head of the Washington program at Michigan's ultra-conservative Christian Hillsdale College, who directed a similar project, the anti-diversity 1776 Commission, at the end of Donald Trump's first term. Creator of all the trucks' audio-video displays was Dennis Prager, a conservative talk-show host and writer who in 2009 co-founded PragerU, which

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is not an accredited university but a nonprofit that produces videos and materials promoting a conservative, right-wing, Christian nationalist, Judeo-Christian-aligned agenda. The platform is highly controversial, particularly for its educational programs criticized as politically slanted that are sold to public schools.

The Southern Poverty Law Center has accused PragerU of pushing historically inaccurate propaganda and ideological indoctrination. The center wrote that PragerU claims it "promotes the American values of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" but in fact "perpetrates far-right ideology vilifying the LGBTQ+ community, immigrants and people of color."

Many critics of the Freedom Truck agenda focus on its lack of full candor about the nation's unavoidably checkered past, by avoiding upfront discussion of past horrors and continuing negative effects of slavery, the brutal mistreatment of Native Americans and theft of enormous swaths of their land, and violent persecution of various waves of immigrants, among other shameful periods of our history.

"Notably, America is depicted [in the Freedom Trucks] as a white Christian nation," wrote The Guardian newspaper. "Several Black luminaries are mentioned: among the 50 American heroes are Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. But the prevailing wind blowing through the truck is towards the white men who led the charge to nationhood, with minor roles granted to their women dutifully holding the fort back home, and on God as the source of the country's greatness."

There's no mention of how Founders were greatly influenced by a focus on reason, science and religious skepticism during the European Enlightenment, which was still ongoing when the Declaration was penned, and which led to the first American government being set up as a secular project with no official religion dominating, in contrast to the war-mongering governments they emigrated from.

A Freedom Truck was parked on July 18 at the wonderful, enthusiastically patriotic Sioux Falls Air Show, with thousands of people milling about. The throngs entering the truck for an honest, inspiring history lesson were artfully, even dazzlingly, misled. For a hot minute, even I was.

Rick Snedeker, a retired journalist living in Mitchell, is the author of a 2020 memoir about growing up in a Saudi oil camp in the 1950s, "3,001 Arabian Days," and a 2022 historical overview of Christianity's coercive evolution in America, "Holy Smoke."

Fauci pleads the Fifth to COVID questions by US Sen. Rand Paul at intense hearing

BY JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — Dr. Anthony Fauci, one of the nation's most visible public health officials during the coronavirus pandemic, declined to answer questions from a U.S. Senate committee in a tense and confrontational hearing Wednesday, citing his Fifth Amendment rights.

Fauci said during a brief opening statement he believed Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Rand Paul, R-Ky., was trying to get him to make statements under oath that would lead to criminal charges.

"Given Senator Paul's obvious obsession with calling for my prosecution, his repeated slanderous comments about me, and recently his publicly releasing my unredacted personal diary aimed at embarrassing and intimidating me, the only conclusion I can reach is that the sole reason he is calling me before this committee is to get me to say something, anything that could vindicate his repeated public pledges that I end up, in his words, 'behind bars,'" he said.

Fauci added that "any reasonable person who has followed his unhinged obsession with me would readily come to the same conclusion."

"Therefore, although it pains me to do so, because of the respect I have for the legislative branch of government and my decades-long record of cooperating with Congress, under the advice of my attorneys, I will invoke my right under the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution, to refrain from answering your questions," he said.

Fauci was a member of the coronavirus task force during President Donald Trump's first administration

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and a chief medical adviser on COVID-19 during President Joe Biden's term.

Repeated testimony

Fauci has testified publicly 13 times before Senate committees and 11 times before House committees since January 2020. This was the first time he declined to answer any questions from lawmakers.

Paul noted that former President Joe Biden pardoned Fauci for any actions he might have taken from Jan. 1, 2014 through Jan. 20, 2025. But he said that doesn't cover any actions since then, including any statements to Congress that may not have been entirely accurate.

"A pardon may protect a person from criminal prosecution. It doesn't rewrite history," Paul said. "It does not erase documents. It does not convert a misleading statement into a truthful one."

Paul said the committee will hold a vote next week to hold Fauci in contempt for declining to answer questions under a subpoena.

"There will be repercussions to your refusal to testify today," he said.

A member of Fauci's legal team, seated beside him at the witness table, tried to speak several times but Paul refused to recognize him before having U.S. Capitol Police remove that lawyer from the room.

Paul then said for the record that Fauci would "still have the advice of the other half a dozen attorneys that he brought along today."

Origins of COVID-19

Paul alleged during his opening statement that Fauci, who was the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases when the pandemic began, didn't give enough credit to theories the COVID-19 virus may have been created in a laboratory in China.

He asked Fauci a series of questions about the pandemic and the types of research the federal government funded leading up to the outbreak. Each time, Fauci responded, "On the advice of counsel, I respectfully decline to answer, based upon my rights under the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution."

Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee ranking member Gary Peters, D-Mich., sought to remind his Republican colleagues that when he ran the panel, there was a bipartisan effort to look into the origins of the pandemic.

"Rather than building on that work to strengthen our preparedness against future disasters, we are instead relitigating the past," he said.

Peters raised concerns that the country would likely face another pandemic at some point and that lawmakers should focus their efforts on the future, making sure public health agencies have the staff and funding they need.

"COVID-19 exposed serious deficiencies in our nation's public health infrastructure. We know that. More than one million Americans lost their lives and this committee should absolutely continue to examine how we can better prepare our nation against future biological threats," he said. "Those are the kinds of forward-looking, life-saving questions that will help our nation be better prepared to protect the health and the safety of Americans when the next emergency occurs."

Peters then sharply criticized the Trump administration, saying officials' decisions on funding and staff have eroded the country's safety net, including at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"The administration has hollowed out the public health workforce," he said. "They have fired, pushed out and cut funding for public health personnel, shrinking the CDC workforce by a quarter."

Fauci's decision not to answer questions didn't stop Republicans and Democrats on the committee from asking him questions and making lengthy statements throughout the three-hour hearing.

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

Number of unauthorized immigrants hit new high of nearly 16 million in 2024, report says

BY ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — The unauthorized U.S. immigrant population grew to its highest level ever by mid-2024, increasing to 15.8 million after hovering at about 11 million since 2010, according to data released Wednesday by a nonpartisan think tank that tracks migration.

The increase primarily stemmed from the historic levels of migration at the southern border that started in 2021 and the Biden administration's wide use of humanitarian parole and other temporary legal status for millions of people, according to a Migration Policy Institute report based on the most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey in 2024.

"Between 2019 and 2024, MPI estimates the unauthorized immigrant population experienced a net growth of approximately 5 million people, or an average of 8 percent per year," according to the report.

"The increases were driven by the uncommonly strong U.S. economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the large-scale displacement from countries throughout the Americas fueled by gang violence, political repression, and economic challenges."

But under the second Trump administration's aggressive deportation campaign and continued practice of revoking previously granted legal status for immigrants, a decrease in the unauthorized population is likely.

"Should the administration succeed in its efforts to sizably ramp up deportations and if border entries remain at their remarkably low levels, the unauthorized immigrant population may begin to decrease into 2026 and beyond," according to the report.

Some of that 2024 growth was also due to several Biden administration policies. The administration created new humanitarian parole programs that allowed migrants from Afghanistan, Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, Ukraine and Venezuela to legally enter the United States and obtain work permits, according to the report.

Another tool rolled out by the Biden administration, the CBP One app, which allowed migrants to schedule appointments to apply for asylum, also contributed to the growth of migration to the U.S.

The biggest growth spurt occurred between 2022 and 2023, with an increase of 1.6 million newly arrived migrants.

The report also found that while Mexico typically stands as the top country of origin for migrants arriving, "the Mexican share of the unauthorized population has dropped dramatically — from being the overwhelming share in the 1980s and 1990s, to 62 percent in 2010 and 35 percent as of 2024."

Migrants from Central and South America have driven the change in nationality makeup, according to the report.

"This trend reflects sharp increases in recent arrivals of Ecuadorians, Colombians, and especially Venezuelans, as well as steady growth in unauthorized arrivals from Guatemala and Honduras," according to the report.

In 2023, the Biden administration created two new humanitarian parole processes. One was for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans. The second was for migrants using the CBP One app.

Those humanitarian programs were similar to one created in 2021 for Afghans, after the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from the country, and for Ukrainians, after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. In total, those humanitarian parole programs included roughly 1.4 million immigrants.

The second Trump administration ended those humanitarian parole protections, turned the CBP One app into a self-deportation tool, and has moved to end Temporary Protected Status for hundreds of thousands of immigrants.

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

Podcast: Rhoden's victory, a quote that doomed Doeden, and a Democrat's 'uphill battle'

BY MEGHAN O'BRIEN Ep. 27: Recapping the runoff: Pat Powers on a quote that doomed Doeden, Rhoden's victory and a Democrat's 'uphill battle'

POWERS: Larry is not what you might call a "bomb thrower." Larry's more of a very traditional Republican. And he's going to be, as I said, very thoughtful and deliberate. I don't think he's prone to flights of wild fancy like Toby would have been.

O'BRIEN: We're back with another episode of Searchlight Report, a podcast from South Dakota Searchlight that brings you up to date on policy and politics in the Mount Rushmore state. I'm your host, Meghan O'Brien. South Dakota Republicans have their nominee for governor, eight weeks after the primary election. None of the four candidates pulled the 35% of votes needed to win June's primary election outright. That pushed the top two vote-getters — Governor Larry Rhoden and businessman Toby Doeden — to the state's first-ever runoff election in a statewide race. Rhoden surged ahead after receiving 25% of the votes in the primary to receive 71% of the votes in the runoff. Rhoden will face Democratic nominee Dan Ahlers in the November election. South Dakota voters haven't elected a Democratic governor since 1974. Republican political commentator Pat Powers has written the South Dakota War College blog for more than 20 years. He joined me to talk about what he took away from the runoff election.

O'BRIEN: Just to start, thanks for joining again. I appreciate you taking the time. It was kind of an early night. It seemed to just kind of after the polls closed and everything...

POWERS: I think that was, uh, that was a historic first for how early Minnehaha County was able to get their election results in. Uh, you know, nobody was saying we needed a hand count or anything. They just put it all in the machine and it was done. And, you know, 9:30, 10:00, and Minnehaha was in.

O'BRIEN: Yeah, yeah. And we saw, I mean, we saw the polls of Rhoden being ahead and that that ended up kind of coming true last night, I guess. What are your reactions to the results?

POWERS: Well, I guess they were not fake. I think the results last night came about because ultimately the Doeden campaign stayed with their 30%. Maybe they peeled off a few people, but they stayed at 30. And I think that's evidence of the fact that they really didn't do any outreach to any of the other campaigns. I mean, they might have said they did. But, you know, I was originally a Dusty voter and I know I sure didn't see any outreach to the people who supported Dusty in the campaign nor did they really go after the Hansen people except in a little lip service. So, I think the quote was, I gotta scroll back a little, the quote on election night, where Toby, you know ... I think it was the agenda was set, the die was cast when he declared on election night in June that "I ended Dusty Johnson's political career." And, you know, he had won. I think, in South Dakota, that we don't necessarily like sore winners. Here was a time that he should have been reaching out and gracious and saying, you know, we can work together on things, agree where we can agree. No, he was kind of trying to dance on Dusty's figurative political grave and I think a lot of people understand that there might have been one election lost, but there's plenty of time in the future for maybe if Dusty decides to run for office again, that he may be well received. And here's all of his supporters that Toby was kicking in the teeth. I don't think that helped him. And he wasn't reaching out in any similar fashion to the Jon Hansen voters. So, you know, here we have an island and he never was able to grow past it. And there's other parts of it, too. I thought the advertising on Toby's side really didn't capitalize on his win on election night. And again, same problem not bringing people to his cause. It was just more of kind of more of the same. And I really didn't think the commercials were that great coming in on this second part of the primary. And so it just, again, it just kind of laid there and never was able to go past that initial 30%.

O'BRIEN: I want ... there's two things that I want to pull from. You'd mentioned him talking to or kind of talking about Dusty Johnson after Doeden's win. Um, Doeden had also posted on social media that he

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tried to get Jon Hansen as his lieutenant governor three separate times. Um, do you think that played a role in maybe getting or losing any of those Hansen voters?

POWERS: You know, again, he might have given it lip service, but I don't know that anybody really saw that as other than a statement, you know, we also saw it along those lines. What he was talking about, who he asked to be lieutenant governor. He brought up Casey Crabtree. I wonder if Casey was aware of this. You know, there's never any real indication that he talked to these people or we didn't have any statements from them coming out and saying that they were interested. He had been courting Taffy Howard for the entire election and at the Republican convention had been filming commercials with her. I mean, they were on camera, with his big filmers doing a few pieces and I don't think there's a delegate there who didn't know that. So, saying that Casey and Jason Williams from the treasurer's office were potentials, I don't know that anybody talked to those people about that.

O'BRIEN: And you also, in thinking about the advertising during this little stretch of the campaign here, last time during the primary, you said that no one had really taken the chance to define Toby Doeden, and that that was kind of an advantage for him. I think you'd kind of brought up the Rounds-Kirby-Barnett analogy of Rounds kind of flew under the radar. Kirby and Barnett kind of were dogging it out with each other. Do you think that played out at all this time?

POWERS: I think Larry's team had taken a few more hits at Toby than maybe Toby had gotten in the previous part of the cycle. But you know I don't think they were strident about it. It wasn't the complete focus. But they were sure out there talking about what Toby would do and called him 'Taxing Toby,' and things like that. There was a more defined effort to try to say, "This is what you're going to get." And also calling him out on some of his plans in terms of, "Well, what will these Toby tax proposals do to South Dakota?" Again, things that he was not challenged on before, which there are those of us who would write about it and say, this is ridiculous. This is not even constitutional. When he would talk about taxing people from out of state differently than he would tax South Dakotans. And so there was more of a focus on maybe digging into some of those proposals a bit further than they had in the first part of the primary. I mean, this was just such unheard territory. I mean, I think a lot of us were feeling there was voter fatigue. But if you look last night, that 30% is better than we had gotten in the 2024 primary. And we had a, you know, we didn't have to go to a runoff there. And we had 17% there. And, it completely overturned the legislature. Well, now we've had better turnouts turning the legislature back. I mean, I'm not going to call it the death knell of the populist movement in South Dakota, but they definitely suffered some setbacks in South Dakota. And maybe here in January, if we keep a lot of these new Republicans who are elected, uh, it might actually be a productive session where it's maybe a little less crazy and they try to get some things accomplished.

O'BRIEN: And can you explain a little bit more about populism, for listeners that don't know, can you explain a little bit about what it is and how you're kind of seeing that play out here?

POWERS: Well, you know, and just going to a basic definition, I mean, populism is an approach that promotes the common people and kind of casts people as salt of the earth and the others as the elite rich people. If you go back 100 years, it was the people who were in favor of the railroads. I mean, because this is not the first populist movement in South Dakota. It actually happened back around the late 1800s, early 1900s. And it's something that split the Republican Party for decades. They would have actually had a Republican state convention with the populist groups. And then you would have with the more traditional one, with the more traditional Republican groups, and then they would come together and have the general Republican group where they would both run, you know, they'd run a populist candidate and then a regular Republican candidate. And so it's not the first time it's happened. And it's just you know, they're trying to label and split members of the party. You know it's the pure people, the grassroots people and those corrupt establishment elites. And it's not really very productive. They ... a few years back, you know, there's, you hear the term RINO - 'Republican in Name Only.' And that's really the slam that the populists would have against regular Republicans who maybe are not quite as hardcore conservative as they are because they're more your traditional, what you might call your 'Eisenhower Republicans' or your

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'Reagan Republicans. ' You know, they're a section of the party that's business and development oriented who believes that, you know, we will see lower taxes through growth, as opposed to the populists who just say, "Well, cut the taxes and then we'll figure it out. " And, it doesn't always work that way.

O'BRIEN: Right. And so when we're looking at it, I want to hold on to that split because we'll come back to that. But when we're looking at what worked for Rhoden, then, what do you think kind of helped push him over and win this?

POWERS: Well Rhoden has never been somebody who's you know, you would see as bombastic. You know, Larry's been around a long time. I mean, I've been acquainted with Larry for years, and, you know, he's a good guy. You know, he's not fit to tangents where he's going off and talking about, you know, how he's going to upset the apple cart and he's just going to cut taxes. He's very much more deliberate. I mean, he had headed up the property tax force reviews in the past for the legislature. And you know, they've tried to find ways to work within the present system without throwing it out because we're, you know, South Dakota is a very conservative state to begin with. And the question is, how do you lower taxes when you know we've got them cut down to the bone? How do you cut government when government is cut down to the bone? Well, you're really kind of rearranging chairs and, you know, because there's some funds that can't be cut unless we want to put our federal funding in danger for things like Medicaid and special education and other, you know, other aspects of government funding where we rely heavily on partnerships with the federal government. So if you're coming in like a Toby Doeden, you can come in and very irresponsibly say, "Well, we're just going to cut that. " Well, you don't really have to go in and explain. Well we've lost \$50 million in highway funding because we cut \$5 million from what we're spending on roads, you know. And Larry knows those things. And which is why, you know, I think he is a lot more deliberate in what he says South Dakota can do.

O'BRIEN: Okay. And in these past eight weeks, there's been a lot of other things kind of going on as this runoff has gone on. We had the Sioux Falls mayoral election that had taken some more time than anticipated, um, some pretty significant endorsements, the Republican Convention for the state. I guess, were there any kind of things throughout that eight week run that really, you think made a difference or had a big impact?

POWERS: Well, you know, at the end of the day, it didn't. I mean, as I said earlier, I think that it potentially was giving the impression that we were all sick of elections and it could really affect this turnout because, you know, you have a mayoral race and then a mayoral runoff, and then the Republican convention. And it's just event after event after event. We don't have the breaks that we usually have. In fact, we're going to have to do this again because the Democrats now want to reopen their own convention and try to swap out some candidates or maybe add a candidate for attorney general. So, we're not even done in this exhausting cycle where we don't really seem to have a summer break to go on vacation. So I think there was that danger that people were fatigued by it. I mean, I think I saw some, uh, interviews on TV where they talked about that, "They're tired of it, " but, uh, you wouldn't have known last night with a 30% turnout, which is phenomenal.

O'BRIEN: Yeah, it was, I think the Secretary of State's Office said about 36% that...I mean, and that's pretty...

POWERS: That's tremendous. Uh, you know, that is a huge turnout. And I think a lot of them, I know I, when I went in and voted, I voted early, my wife, my kids, I think there was a lot of early voting going on. And so that was just kind of the quiet effort. People just went and did it as it was convenient as opposed to everybody showing up on Election Day because Election Day, the turnout was very quiet, but they had banked so many votes. And I found it interesting that I don't know that either campaign really ran what you might consider a traditional 'get out the vote' effort. You really didn't see that from either side. So, you couldn't say one was stronger than the other and 'get out the vote' effort. But if they came out, they voted for Larry.

O'BRIEN: Yeah, that was kind of a sentiment that I had heard and some of our other reporters had heard at the polls, was some folks weren't there necessarily to vote for Rhoden, but more so there to vote against Doeden, I guess.

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POWERS: Well, and you know, that's the question is, is he going to come back at some point in the future? Um, I mean, he spent, you know, he spent \$2 million in the 2025 portion of the race. He spent \$2 million in the pre-primary report which runs up until two weeks before the first primary. And then we had this 10 week stretch where, you know, he may have spent another million or two. And that's a lot of money if you're paying it out of pocket. So, the question is, is he going to try to continue his movement, or is he going to step back and, uh, and maybe retool and see what he did? What could he have done differently? Uh, or is he just done? I mean, if I had five or six million dollars, I would not spend it on a campaign to be governor.

O'BRIEN: That's fair, that's fair. We saw, too, some of the legislators that might have aligned a little bit more with Doeden's platform not be successful in some of their primaries. Do you think that he has a chance at the state legislature?

POWERS: Well, you know, really, if you run for the state legislature, you're one of over 100 people. I think he views himself as being more on that statewide stage. So, I don't know that you would see a Doeden campaign for the state legislature. I could see him running for a different office, you know, maybe at the federal level, but, you know, we'll see, we'll see. You know, politics are, you know, it's about timing and opportunity and we'll see what happens. And, you know, whether he decides to try to self-fund again or if he wants to go out in a traditional campaign and raise money. You know, one thing that people don't understand, and I've talked to candidates who say, "Well, should, I should just pay for this myself?" And my advice has always been, "No, absolutely not. " Because if somebody donates to you, that's a vote. That's their vote of confidence. That is them going and encouraging their friends saying, "Hey, look, I went out and I supported this candidate. I hope you'll join me. "

O'BRIEN: Right. And so I want to go back to that split that you talked a little bit about within the Republican Party here in the state. Rhoden and Doeden obviously seemed to align with two different sides of the Republican Party. Do you see Rhoden unifying the Republican Party before November? And how do you see that playing out?

POWERS: Well, I think he, you know, in this in this runoff, Larry has united the party as much as I think I've seen it being united for a while, you know, he's going to go, as I said, he's going to go into this next session with a fairly friendly legislature. I think they're going to be strong and they are going to have their own agenda, but I think they're friendlier than they would have been with Toby. You know, you have to understand a lot of these, there's this block of legislators who were elected, and a lot of them were elected by people who were aligned with Dusty Johnson. I mean, Dusty, he may have lost the initial primary, but, you know, you might say he saved the legislature or at least created a legislative environment that Larry Rhoden's going to enjoy a lot more than he would have otherwise.

O'BRIEN: And is there any chance that the split in the Republican Party will cause some Republican voters to switch over and vote for the Democratic nominee, Dan Ahlers, here in November?

POWERS: You know, I don't know that they will, you know, they would have to hear something from Dan that's directly oppositional to what Larry believes. And, you know, Larry is not what you might call a "bomb thrower. " Larry's more of a very traditional Republican. And he's going to be, as I said, very thoughtful and deliberate. I don't think he's prone to flights of wild fancy like Toby would have been. So that, I mean, that's going to complicate Dan's uphill battle. Just like some of the Republicans who, in the primary, they left Toby alone because that's who they wanted to run against in a runoff. Democrats would have rather had Toby in a runoff. So, you know, now they've got Larry, they've got an incumbent governor who's, you know, again, proven himself to be pretty, pretty steady. And so, you know, they're going to have to provide contrast as to why Dan Ahlers is a better choice than Larry Rhoden. And that's going to be a tougher hill for them to climb. You know, they can't really say, "Well, he's the you know, he's the MAGA Republican. " Well, you know, Larry is Larry. He got in without any endorsements from anybody. And, you know, what you see is what you get. So, you know, now they have to draw a difference between Larry's record and what they would have done if Democrats were in charge. And traditionally in South Dakota, that has not been a message that has sold very well for them in the last 40, 50 years.

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O'BRIEN: Well, is there anything that's kind of all of my questions that I have. Do you have anything else that you want to mention or anything else that...

POWERS: I think this is a great opportunity for the governor to continue to help right the ship in the Republican Party, to maybe help get a little more stability for the state Republican Party. I think it's, right now, everything is Larry's to do with as he will. And, I think he's going to set us on a good path for the next legislative session. And we'll have to just see what comes after that.

O'BRIEN: Okay. Sounds good. Well, that's everything. I appreciate your time and you joining again, I appreciate it.

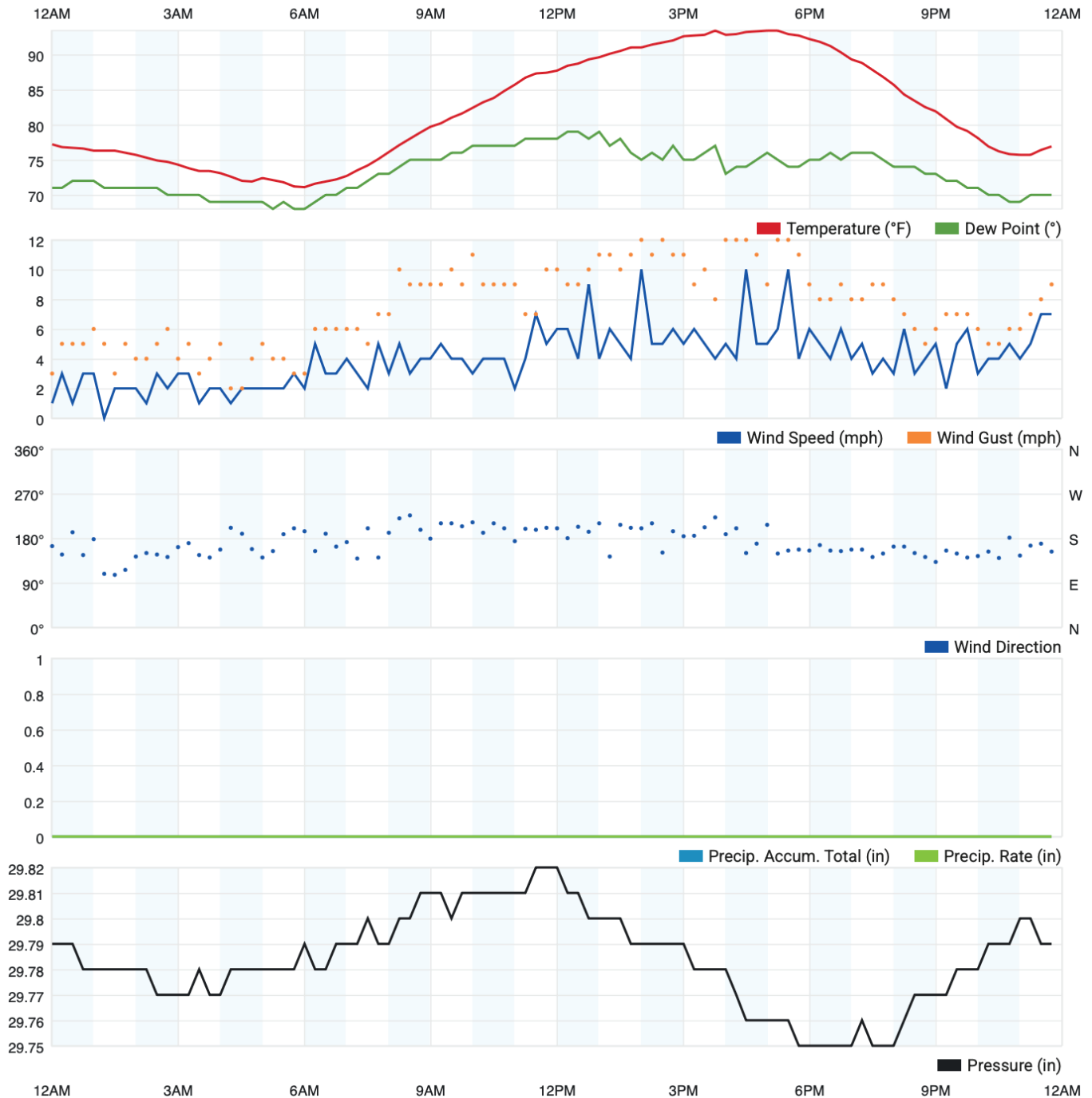
POWERS: Oh, oh, you're very welcome. Very welcome. Thank you for having me on. Rhoden will face Ahlers for the governorship on the November ballot. That's all we have for this episode of Searchlight Report. Audio for this episode of the podcast came from recordings by South Dakota Searchlight. The podcast is based on reporting by South Dakota Searchlight's staff — editor Seth Tupper, senior reporter John Hult and reporters Joshua Haiar, Makenzie Huber and me. I write the scripts and produce the audio, with editing by Seth Tupper. South Dakota Searchlight is part of States Newsroom, the nation's largest nonprofit news organization. Until next time, I'm South Dakota Searchlight's Meghan O'Brien with the Searchlight Report.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

July 29, 2026



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Today

Tonight

Friday

Friday Night

Saturday



High: 82 °F

Chance
T-storms then
Showers



Low: 62 °F

Chance
T-storms



High: 82 °F

Becoming
Sunny



Low: 58 °F

Mostly Clear



High: 84 °F

Sunny

THREAT ASSESSMENT

HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

2

WHAT THIS MEANS:
Scattered Severe Storms
Possible

**Mid afternoon through
late evening**

PRIMARY THREATS



LARGE HAIL
of 1" in diameter



DAMAGING
WIND GUSTS
of 60-70 mph

SECONDARY THREATS



HEAVY
RAINFALL



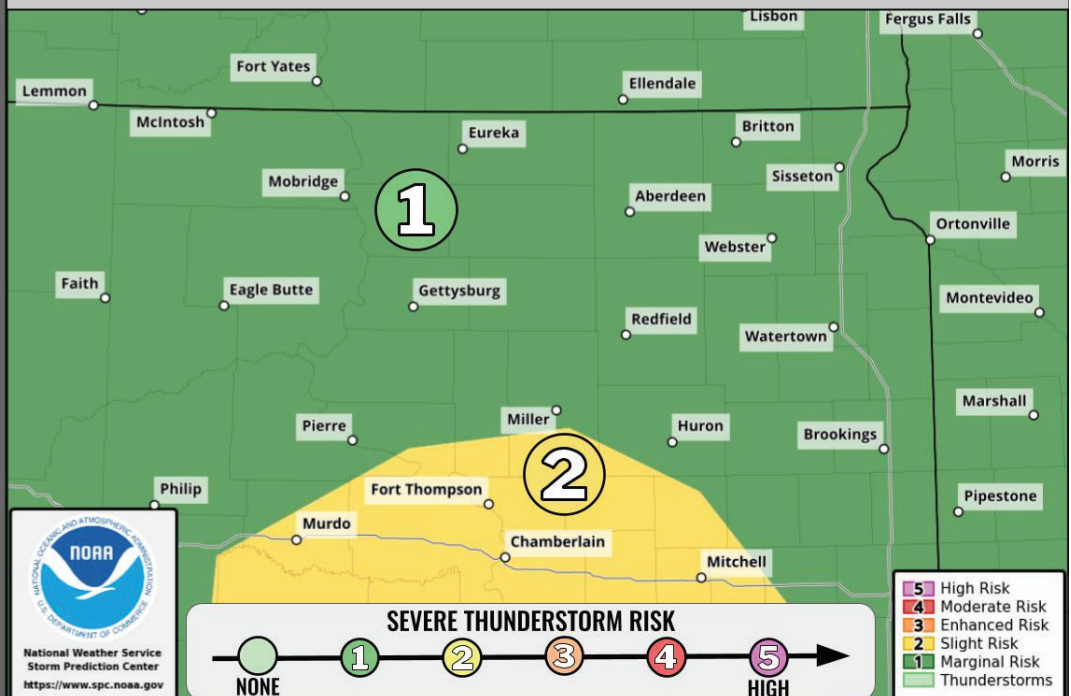
FLASH
FLOODING?

NWS

Aberdeen, SD



Marginal to Slight Risk For Severe Storms Thursday



Thursday will bring much cooler temperatures with highs only in the 80s. There will also be some morning showers. Scattered severe storms pop up during the mid afternoon and continue into the evening hours. A Slight Risk (level 2 out of 5) is in place for portions of south central SD with a Marginal Risk (level 1 out of 5) over central and northeast SD into west central MN. The main hazard will once again be wind, gusts of 60-70 mph expected. 1 inch diameter hail, heavy rains, and some local flash flooding are also possible.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 94 °F at 4:50 PM

Low Temp: 71 °F at 5:50 AM

Wind: 14 mph at 5:17 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 106 in 2006

Record Low: 39 in 1971

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 3.01

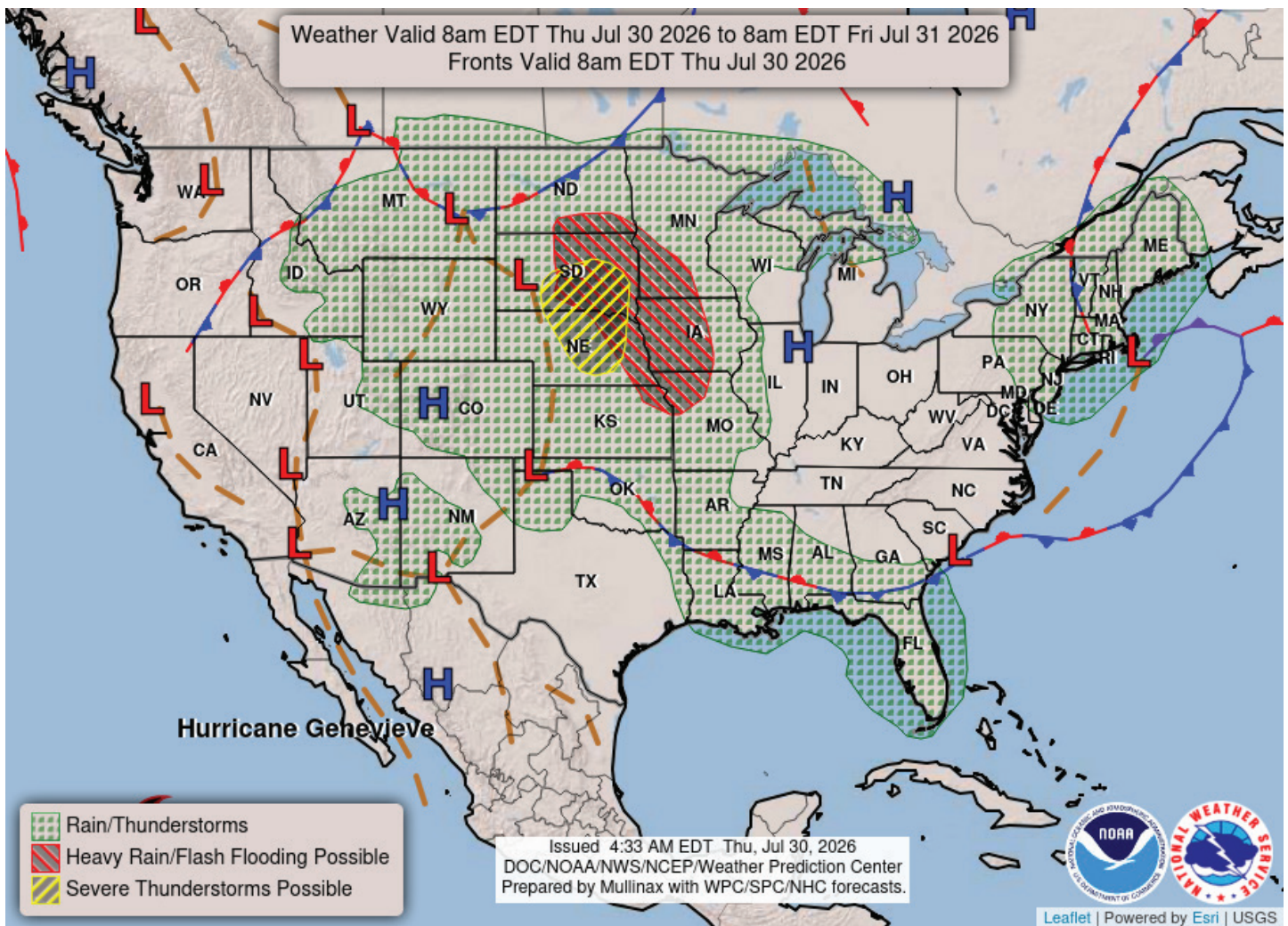
Precip to date in July.: 6.13

Average Precip to date: 14.02

Precip Year to Date: 15.60

Sunset Tonight: 9:03 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:15 am



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Today in Weather History

July 30, 1981: Operation Skywarn organized by the National Weather Service in Bismarck four years ago had a perfect opportunity to put the training into operation on this day. A spotter 20 miles west of Bismarck identified a rotating wall cloud 10 minutes before a tornado touchdown. The strong tornado was rated as having F3 strength, leaving behind an 18-mile long path of destruction. The force of the storm drove a stick between a tire and rim. A 6-inch steel beam was twisted and found near the high tension tower which had been toppled.

July 30, 2001: Strong winds of 81 mph blew much of the roof off of the bowling alley in Mobridge. Some flying debris also damaged a trailer home. Many trees were snapped in two or uprooted, and many power lines were downed. High winds brought down tree branches and also knocked the power out for several hours in Pollock.

July 30, 2010: Very heavy rains of 5 to 10 inches caused the Rosehill Dam to break in the early morning hours in southeast Hand County. Flash flooding began around 1 am CDT with two campers being swept up around 130 am CDT. The two campers clung to a tree until they could be rescued about 6 am CDT. They were both injured with one camper being treated for hypothermia and other airlifted to Sioux Falls for broken ribs and head trauma. The dam broke at 330 am CDT with the spillway breaking at 420 am CDT. There was between a 100 to the 150-foot hole left by the dam break. The flash flooding continued downstream on Sand Creek causing damage to area farms, filling basements, and flooding many roads.

1949 — The state record for Connecticut was established when the town of Greenville registered an afternoon high of 102 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1965 — The temperature at Portland, OR, reached 107 degrees to equal their all-time record high. (The Weather Channel)

1970: Hurricane Celia was born in the northwest of the Caribbean Sea on this day. The hurricane would be one of the worst ever to hit Texas and would reach Texas late on August 3. The storm reached its peak as it made landfall near Corpus Christi, Texas, as a strong Category 3 hurricane. Hurricane Celia is currently the last major hurricane to make landfall on the middle Texas Coast until Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

1979 — A forty-minute hailstorm bombed Fort Collins, CO, with baseball to softball size hail. Two thousand homes and 2500 automobiles were damaged, and about 25 persons were injured, mainly when hit on the head by the huge stones. A three month old baby died later of injuries. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — Afternoon highs of 105 degrees at Aberdeen SD, 102 degrees at Bismarck, ND, and 102 degrees at Pueblo, CO, were records for the date. Pueblo, CO, reported just .09 inch of rain for the first thirty days of the month. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — A dozen cities in the north central and northeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Downtown Baltimore, MD, hit 103 degrees, marking a record eight days of 100 degree heat for the month, and ten for the year. The high of 101 degrees at Billings, MT, marked a record seventeen days of 100 degree heat for the year. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the northeast, with nearly fifty reports of large hail or damaging winds in Pennsylvania and New York State. A tree fell on a car at Erie, PA, injuring four persons. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Morning thunderstorms over central Missouri deluged Columbia with 5.98 inches of rain causing flash flooding. Daytime thunderstorms in Kentucky drenched Paducah with 1.73 inches of rain in less than half an hour. Evening thunderstorms in the north central U.S. produced wind gusts to 78 mph east of Moccasin, MT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



Equipped for the Task

Our inadequacy doesn't disqualify us from God's calling—it positions us to depend on His strength.

Exodus 4:1-13: 1 Then Moses said, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'"

2 The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff."

3 Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it.

4 But the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail"—so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand--

5 "that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."

6 The LORD furthermore said to him, "Now put your hand into your bosom." So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow.

7 Then He said, "Put your hand into your bosom again." So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh.

8 "If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign.

9 "But if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

10 Then Moses said to the LORD, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."

11 The LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"

12 "Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say."

13 But he said, "Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will."

Yesterday we discussed how God promised Moses, "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12)—offering His presence as the sufficient answer to something that seemed impossible. Today we see how God also provides practical help for the tasks He gives us. Sometimes that help comes through the people He places in our life.

Moses' inability to speak well left him feeling inadequate. But God reassured him by saying, "I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say" (4:12). Then the Lord went a step further by calling Moses' brother Aaron to proclaim the message (vv. 14-15).

God could have supernaturally given Moses eloquence. Instead, He sent a partner. This shows us something important about how God works.

The Lord had an answer for each one of Moses' concerns. When we follow Him, He likewise provides what we need to fulfill our calling. Sometimes that's courage, sometimes it's clarity, and sometimes it's another person who shores up our weaknesses. As we step out in obedience, we discover that God's provision isn't just a promise—it's practical help that shows up in real and recognizable ways.

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

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The Groton Independent

Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.29.26

9 10 25 27 36 1

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 32 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.28.26

34 48 49 59 70 12

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$50,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 17 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.29.26

11 12 20 26 33 8

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,250,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 32 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.29.26

3 16 18 25 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 47 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.29.26

24 37 40 51 55 5

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 16 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.29.26

30 36 40 42 57 2

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$707,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 16 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

NorthWestern Energy Reports Second Quarter 2026 Financial Results

BUTTE, Mont. & SIOUX FALLS, S.D.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Jul 29, 2026--

NorthWestern Energy Group, Inc. d/b/a NorthWestern Energy (Nasdaq: NWE) reported financial results for the Second Quarter of 2026. Net income for the period was \$25.0 million, or \$0.40 per diluted share, as compared with net income of \$21.2 million, or \$0.35 per diluted share, for the same period in 2025. This increase was primarily due to new rates and retail volumes. These were offset in part by operating, administrative, and general costs, including merger-related costs and costs associated with our additional ownership interests in Colstrip Units 3 and 4, depreciation expense, and interest expense.

NorthWestern's Second Quarter 2026 non-GAAP net income and diluted earnings per share were \$31.1 million and \$0.50, respectively, compared to \$24.1 million and \$0.40 in 2025. See "Adjusted Non-GAAP Earnings" and "Non-GAAP Financial Measures" sections below for more information on these measures.

"We are pleased to report solid results for the quarter and exciting progress on the merger," said President and CEO Brian Bird. "In May, we received merger approval from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the Nebraska Public Service Commission followed by approval from the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission in June. That leaves Montana as the only remaining regulatory approval needed for the merger. A hearing with the Montana Public Service Commission was held in May and we await their final order. In the meantime, we remain focused on executing our strategic priorities, delivering safe, reliable, and affordable service to our customers, and integration planning to position the combined company for long-term success."

TRANSACTION UPDATE

On August 18, 2025, we entered into a Merger Agreement with Black Hills Corporation and a wholly owned subsidiary of Black Hills. The Merger Agreement provides for an all-stock merger of equals between NorthWestern and Black Hills upon the terms and subject to the conditions set forth therein. The new corporate name selected for the resulting parent company of the combined corporate group is Bright Horizon Energy.

In April 2026, shareholders of each company voted to approve the Merger and the waiting period under the Hart-Scott-Rodino Antitrust Improvements Act expired, permitting consummation of the transaction.

In May 2026, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and the Nebraska Public Service Commission (NPSC) each approved the Merger. In June 2026, the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission (SDPUC) approved the merger.

We filed an application with the Montana Public Service Commission (MPSC) for approval of the Merger, and in April 2026, we reached a settlement agreement with certain key intervenors in Montana, which is subject to the approval by the MPSC. In May 2026, a hearing with the MPSC was held and we await their final order.

We anticipate the transaction closing by year-end 2026, subject to the satisfaction or waiver of certain closing conditions.

During the three and six months ended June 30, 2026, we have incurred \$3.3 million and \$6.7 million, respectively, of merger-related costs, which are included in our Administrative and general expenses.

FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

Affirming 2026 Guidance and Long-Term Growth Rates

We are affirming our 2026 non-GAAP earnings guidance of \$3.68 - \$3.83 per diluted share. This guidance is based upon, but not limited to, the following major assumptions:

Normal weather in our service territories;Excludes costs related to the pending merger with Black Hills Corp.;Approval of the Power Cost and Credit Adjustment Mechanism (PCCAM) waiver and power prices sufficient to recover operating expense from incremental Avista and Puget Colstrip interests;An effective

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income tax rate of approximately 14 percent to 18 percent; and Diluted average shares outstanding of approximately 61.8 million.

We are affirming our long-term diluted earnings per share growth guidance of 4% to 6%, based on our 2024 adjusted diluted non-GAAP EPS baseline of \$3.40.

Additionally, we are affirming our \$3.2 billion capital investment plan for 2026-2030, which is expected to support rate base growth of 4% to 6% from our 2024 base year of approximately \$5.4 billion.

We anticipate funding capital expenditures through cash flows from operations, available credit sources, debt issuances, and future rate increases. In order to fund South Dakota generation investment, equity issuances are expected beginning in 2027.

Dividend Declared

NorthWestern Energy Group's Board of Directors has declared a quarterly common stock dividend of \$0.67 per share payable on September 1, 2026, to shareholders of record as of August 17, 2026. As previously disclosed in the Company's 2025 Annual Report issued in March 2026, this dividend was expected to be payable on September 30, 2026, to shareholders of record on September 15, 2026. The Board revised the record and payment dates in connection with the pending merger transaction and the dividend coordination provisions of the merger agreement.

NorthWestern remains committed to maintaining a dividend payout ratio within our targeted range of 60-70% over the long term.

Additional information regarding this release can be found in the earnings presentation at <https://www.northwesternenergy.com/investors/earnings>.

COMPANY UPDATES

Montana Rate Review

In December 2025, the MPSC issued a final order approving our partial electric settlement agreement. The final order also suspended the 90/10 cost sharing mechanism of the PCCAM on a temporary basis pending further review by the MPSC. Within this final order, the MPSC disallowed a portion of the capital costs related to the construction of Yellowstone County Generating Station (YCGS). As a result, in the fourth quarter of 2025 we recorded a \$30.9 million non-cash charge for the regulatory disallowance.

In January 2026, we filed a Motion for Reconsideration (Motion) as it relates to this final order. Among other things, our Motion requests that the MPSC reconsider their prudence conclusions regarding the capital costs associated with the construction of YCGS and clarification as to the effective date of the PCCAM sharing mechanism suspension, for which we have requested an effective date of July 1, 2025, to align with the PCCAM tracker year. Any subsequent modifications by the MPSC to their final order are expected to be reflected in our 2026 results.

Montana Large New Load Tariff Rule

In March 2026, we filed an application with the MPSC requesting approval of a Large New Load tariff rule (LNL Rule) to establish requirements and contract terms for providing electric service to bundled customers with new or expanded loads of five megawatts or greater, including data centers and other energy-intensive operations. This filing establishes a framework governing agreements between us and large new load customers and is intended to address the costs and operational considerations associated with serving those loads while protecting existing customers from cost shifting and other adverse impacts. Under this proposed framework, for the largest commitments, 50 megawatts or greater, we would file the executed Electric Service Agreement with the MPSC for review and approval before service begins. For customers with loads between 5 and 49 megawatts, the tariff's standardized process and mandatory protections apply, but individual agreements do not require case-specific MPSC approval filings. This application initiates a public regulatory proceeding that will include opportunities for review and public comment consistent with MPSC procedures.

Data Center Development

As previously disclosed, we have signed development agreements with both Sabey Data Centers and Atlas Power Holdings LLC to provide electric supply services for data centers being developed in Montana. In April 2026, we signed a development agreement with Quantica Infrastructure to evaluate the trans-

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mission infrastructure and generation resources needed to support their proposed need. The combined energy service requirement associated with these development agreements is currently expected to be 150 megawatts beginning in late 2027, with growth of up to approximately 1,500 megawatts or more by 2030. We are working with each of these parties to execute electric service agreements.

Resources and regulatory mechanisms, such as the LNL Rule discussed above, to be utilized for serving these requests are pending further evaluation and regulatory considerations.

Colstrip Acquisitions and Requests for Cost Recovery

As previously disclosed, we entered into definitive agreements with Avista and Puget to acquire their respective interests in Colstrip Units 3 and 4 for \$0 and completed these acquisitions on January 1, 2026. Accordingly, we are responsible for the associated operating costs beginning on January 1, 2026, which we will not collect through utility base rates until requested in a future Montana rate review. Puget and Avista will remain responsible for their respective pre-closing share of environmental, asset retirement obligations, and pension liabilities attributed to events or conditions existing prior to the closing of the transaction and for any future decommissioning and demolition costs associated with the existing facilities that comprise their interests.

Avista Interests - The 222 megawatts of generation capacity from Colstrip Units 3 and 4 acquired from Avista (Avista Interests) on January 1, 2026, was identified as a key element in our strategy to achieve resource adequacy for customers, as outlined in our 2023 Montana Integrated Resource Plan. Noting the costs associated with operating this resource are not currently reflected in utility customer rates, in August 2025, we filed a temporary PCCAM tariff waiver request with the MPSC that could provide a near-term cost-recovery mechanism to offset a portion of the approximately \$18.0 million in annual incremental operating and maintenance costs associated with the Avista Interests. This waiver requested that the MPSC allow us to keep 100 percent of the net revenue associated with certain designated power sales contracts up to the amount of the operating and maintenance expenses we incur associated with our Avista Interests. Furthermore, the waiver request indicated that any net revenues from the designated contracts exceeding the operating and maintenance expenses associated with our Avista Interests would continue to flow back to retail customers. In January 2026, the MPSC approved our PCCAM tariff waiver request on an interim basis with final approval or denial subject to the ongoing PCCAM docket process.

During the three and six months ended June 30, 2026, power prices in the Pacific Northwest associated with these designated power sales contracts included within our PCCAM tariff waiver were insufficient to contribute to the recovery of the operating and maintenance expenses associated with the Avista Interests.

Puget Interests - The 370 megawatts of generation capacity from Colstrip Units 3 and 4 acquired from Puget (Puget Interests) on January 1, 2026, increases our ownership share of the facility to 55 percent and provides an increase in voting share in determining strategic direction and investment decisions at the facility. Unlike the Avista Interests, we do not currently need this capacity to serve existing customers in Montana. As such, the Puget Interests are held by our FERC regulated subsidiary to isolate the costs associated with this acquired interest from our Montana retail customers. While we expect our future opportunity to serve growing customer demand, including large-load customers, may be supported by this resource, in October 2025, we signed a contract to sell the dispatchable capacity and associated energy from the Puget Interests beginning January 1, 2026, through late 2027. Revenues from this agreement are expected to largely offset the estimated \$30.0 million of annual incremental operating and maintenance costs associated with the Puget Interests. In addition, in October 2025, we submitted a request to the FERC for approval of cost-based rates for our subsidiary that will own the Puget Interests. In February 2026, the FERC approved both the cost-based rates and the contract rates retroactive to January 1, 2026. In March 2026, two MPSC commissioners, in their individual capacity, filed a motion with the FERC requesting a rehearing that largely reiterated arguments previously rejected by the FERC. The FERC denied this motion by operation of law. In June 2026, the two MPSC commissioners appealed the decision to the Ninth Circuit. We have intervened in the case.

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Generation Capacity in South Dakota

The Southwest Power Pool (SPP) has recently updated its resource accreditation and planning reserve margin (PRM) requirements in response to growing reliability concerns. As a result, SPP is requiring additional accredited capacity by 2030 to meet the updated PRM targets. In October 2025, we submitted a project with the SPP under their Expedited Resource Adequacy Study program for the construction of a 131 MW natural gas generating facility located in Aberdeen, South Dakota, to meet regional capacity needs by 2030. Anticipated costs for this project are approximately \$300.0 million. As of June 30, 2026, we have recorded \$42.3 million within Other noncurrent assets on the Condensed Consolidated Balance Sheets for non-refundable milestone payments to secure the turbines that will be used at this facility.

Regional Transmission Development Activities

In December 2024, we signed a nonbinding memorandum of understanding (MOU) with North Plains Connector LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Grid United, to own 10 percent (300 megawatts) of the North Plains Connector (NPC) Consortium project. The project is entering the permitting phase. Currently, construction is planned to commence in 2028, subject to receipt of regulatory approvals, with the project expected to be operational by 2032. Under the terms of the MOU, Grid United will continue to fund the development of the NPC and we will make our investment decision when the regulatory approvals and permits are in place. The project is a critical infrastructure investment that aligns with our commitment to providing reliable and affordable energy to our customers while also supporting broader grid resilience efforts in the region.

We have also entered into a nonbinding letter of intent with Grid United to continue transmission development to further enhance the grid through the southwest corridor of Montana. Development to expand the southwest corridor of Montana through grid build out would represent a significant step in enhancing connectivity between Montana and the broader Western energy market - bolstering grid reliability, allowing for critical import capability, and enabling customers to access and benefit from emerging energy markets in the West.

South Dakota Wildfire Risk Mitigation

The South Dakota Legislature approved Senate Bill 36, and the Governor signed this bill into law in March 2026. It precludes common law strict liability claims for utility operations alleged to have caused wildfire-related damages; establishes a statutory standard of care, supplanting common law causes of action and other theories of recovery; and creates a rebuttable presumption that a valid and current wildfire mitigation plan is reasonable preparation for, and mitigation of, wildfire risk. The legislation also defines the availability of damages by allowing noneconomic personal injury damages only when there is bodily injury and punitive damages only when an injured party proves by clear and convincing evidence that a qualified utility acted with willful and wanton misconduct and the qualified utility's willful and wanton misconduct was the actual and proximate cause of damages to the plaintiff. We anticipate filing our wildfire mitigation plan with the SDPUC in the third quarter of 2026.

Financing Update

On April 28, 2026, NWE Public Service priced \$150.0 million aggregate principal amount of South Dakota First Mortgage Bonds at a fixed interest rate of 5.51 percent maturing on June 15, 2036. We completed the issuance and sale of these bonds on June 15, 2026. Proceeds were utilized to redeem NWE Public Service's \$60.0 million of 2.80 percent South Dakota First Mortgage Bonds due on June 15, 2026, to repay outstanding borrowings under our credit facility, and for general utility purposes.

On May 27, 2026, NW Corp entered into a \$225.0 million secured Term Loan Credit Agreement (NW Corp Term Loan) with a maturity date of November 26, 2027. NW Corp's obligations under the NW Corp Term Loan are secured by \$225.0 million of Montana First Mortgage Bonds issued to the administrative agent of the term loan facility. Borrowings may be made at a variable interest rate equal to the Secured Overnight Financing Rate plus an applicable margin as provided in the NW Corp Term Loan. Proceeds were used to repay a portion of NW Corp's outstanding revolving credit facility borrowings. The NW Corp Term Loan provides for prepayment of the principal and interest; however, amounts prepaid may not be reborrowed.

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The NW Corp Term Loan requires NW Corp to maintain a consolidated indebtedness to total capitalization ratio of 65 percent or less. It also contains covenants which, among other things, limit our ability to engage in any consolidation or merger (except for our pending merger with Black Hills) or otherwise liquidate or dissolve, dispose of property, and restricts certain affiliate transactions.

The US and Iran trade missile barrages as hopes dim for a quick resolution

By SAMY MAGDY and ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — The U.S. and Iran each fired barrages of missiles Thursday, as the pattern of back-and-forth strikes took hold again and hope dimmed for any quick resolution.

After a brief respite, the risk of a return to all-out war emerged once more, with the fighting threatening to engulf even more countries: Jordan said Thursday it intercepted Iranian missiles for the second consecutive day, while Kuwait said a strike in the northern part of the country killed one person. Also this week, drones caused fires on ships at an Egyptian port, and Saudi Arabia said it came under fire from Iran-backed militias in Iraq.

The spiraling violence underscored the difficulty of winding down a five-month conflict that has sent the price of fuel and other basics soaring, jolted the world economy, and added to concerns about American stockpiles of weapons needed to defend its bases and allies. After an earlier hiatus had given hope that diplomatic efforts were moving forward, there was no public sign of progress.

The US and Iran trade strikes

An Iranian strike hit a Chinese firm's building in Kuwait on Thursday, severely damaging the structure and killing a worker, Kuwait's military said, hours after Jordan's air defenses shot down five missiles launched from Iran.

No casualties were reported from Jordan's interception, Jordan's state-run Petra news agency said, quoting the spokesman for the country's armed forces. Both countries are U.S. allies and host American troops.

The attacks came after the U.S. military said it completed "a heavy wave of strikes against Iran," conducted in response to an earlier Iranian missile attack on a U.S. base in Jordan. President Donald Trump vowed to hit Iran "very hard" after it targeted the base.

The military's Central Command said in a social media post that the U.S. struck "dozens" of targets belonging to Iran's Revolutionary Guard, including military command centers as well as missile and drone facilities, and coastal surveillance and defense sites.

Iran's official IRNA news agency said three people were killed and two were wounded in a strike on the island of Qeshm, which lies just off the Iranian mainland in the Strait of Hormuz — a crucial waterway for the world's energy supplies that has been at the center of the conflict.

The latest barrage came after the U.S. partnered with Saudi Arabia to strike Iran-backed militias in Iraq, killing at least 20 fighters and six Iranian advisers on Wednesday.

Before the latest eruption, mediators had expressed optimism about bringing the U.S. and Iran back to the negotiating table.

A regional official said Wednesday that mediators are "still trying with both sides" to restore calm and get an interim agreement to end the war back on track. He gave no details on whether progress was being made and spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door diplomacy.

Fires were reported on two natural gas vessels at an Egyptian port

Elsewhere, British maritime security firm Ambrey said drone strikes ignited fires on two natural gas vessels at the Egyptian port of Damietta on Wednesday. It was not immediately clear who was responsible for the strikes on a U.S.-owned floating storage facility and a Greek-owned tanker. No injuries were reported.

The office of the Egyptian prime minister said initial investigations showed the fires on the two vessels had been caused by a drone.

Egypt, a close U.S. ally and regional mediator, is one of the only countries in the Middle East to have

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been spared direct military action during the war. A strike by Iran or its allies, if confirmed, would mark a significant widening of the conflict.

Asked during an Oval Office event if Iran was responsible for the strikes on the vessels, Trump responded: "It's a little more of the same."

The Damietta Port Authority said in a statement on Facebook on Thursday that the facility was fully operational.

The war has wreaked havoc on the global economy

Since Iran began threatening and firing on ships in the Strait of Hormuz early in the war, the conflict has wreaked havoc on the global economy as energy shipments through the waterway ground to a near halt. Much of the diplomacy around ending the war has focused on reopening the strait, through which 20% of oil and natural gas shipments passed in peacetime.

The strait is once again effectively closed — and in recent weeks, fighting elsewhere has squeezed energy supplies further.

Saudi Arabia has accused the Iraqi militias of firing drones against its oil facilities over the past days. An umbrella group of Iraqi militias initially denied the allegations, while another Iran-backed group — the Houthis rebels in Yemen — said they had attacked Saudi energy facilities as part of a separate but related conflict.

The Houthis have declared a blockade of Saudi shipping and threatened to choke off another crucial Middle East trade route, the Bab el-Mandeb strait from the Red Sea into the Gulf of Aden. That route became even more important during the war, as Saudi Arabia used it to bypass the Strait of Hormuz.

On Monday, the Houthis said they had launched drones targeting oil facilities used to transport oil across Saudi Arabia to the Red Sea port of Yanbu. The rebels said the attack was in response to a Saudi drone they said breached Yemen's airspace.

Planet Labs satellite imagery from Monday analyzed by The Associated Press showed damage to Saudi Aramco's Abqaiq oil-processing facility, which is capable of processing approximately 7 million barrels of crude oil per day.

Saudi Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman met separately on Wednesday with Trump and Vice President JD Vance, according to two people familiar with the matter who were not authorized to comment publicly about the private meetings.

They said the Saudi decision to join the U.S. attacks against the Iraqi militias was meant to send a message to Iran that it wouldn't tolerate Iran or its proxies targeting the Saudi oil industry and other critical infrastructure. At the same time, the defense minister underscored to Trump and Vance that the Saudis want to see a de-escalation in the war and for Washington and Tehran to return to negotiations.

How views on Trump's handling of Iran have shifted, according to a new AP-NORC poll

By LINLEY SANDERS and MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Most Americans say the war in Iran has not been worth fighting, and President Donald Trump's approval rating on Iran has fallen slightly since last month, according to a new AP-NORC poll.

The results are a stark repudiation of Trump's approach to the conflict, which has dragged on far longer than he originally predicted.

About two-thirds of U.S. adults say the war with Iran, which began Feb. 28, has not been worthwhile, according to the new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. That includes the vast majority of Democrats and independents, as well as about 37% of Republicans.

The poll was conducted July 23-27, as the U.S. and Iran paused attacks following a nearly two-week escalation in the war. During the escalation, the U.S. targeted Iranian military and commercial sites while Iran attacked U.S. military facilities in the Middle East, resulting in additional deaths of American service members. Since the war began, 18 U.S. service members have been killed, but the Trump administration has sought to revise those numbers.

The survey reinforces how unpopular the Iran war has become at home, a potential problem for congress-

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sional Republicans up for reelection in November who have defended Trump's military actions. Just 28% of U.S. adults now approve of how Trump is handling Iran, a slight decline from 34% last month. Even Republicans appear to be increasingly unhappy with the prolonged conflict. Roughly 61% of Republicans approve of how Trump is handling Iran, an apparent decline from 71% in June. The margin of sampling error for Republicans is 6 points, so the decline is considered slight, but it's still noteworthy given Republicans' much higher approval of how Trump is handling the presidency overall.

Trump's overall approval rating is at 33%, slightly below where he stood at this point in his first term and similar to where former President Joe Biden stood about one and a half years into his presidency, when inflation peaked.

Robert McClary, a 52-year-old Republican from Sugar Grove, Ohio, is skeptical the war could be brought to an easy conclusion and disapproves of Trump's handling of it. McClary voted for the president once, in 2016, but recalls that during the last election, Trump campaigned on not starting new wars in the Middle East.

"I don't have any trust in this administration at all and to why they brought us into this war, why they're putting our soldiers at risk again," he said.

The findings also indicate that most Americans' goals for the conflict may not be aligned with Trump, who has repeatedly said the war was launched to keep a nuclear weapon out of Iran's hands. While about two-thirds of U.S. adults say it's "extremely" or "very" important to keep Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon — with Republicans especially likely to say this — even more Americans say it's highly important for the U.S. to keep gasoline prices low or negotiate a permanent ceasefire with Iran.

McClary added: "I really don't know what you can do now. I mean, you've kind of gotten yourself buried into this mess."

Relatively few want military action against Iran to continue

There's little appetite among Americans for a prolonged conflict.

Only about 2 in 10 U.S. adults want to continue military action in Iran, while about 3 in 10 say the U.S. should pause military action and seek a renewed ceasefire through negotiations. About 2 in 10 want to completely stop military action in Iran and roughly one-quarter don't know enough to say.

About half of Republicans say the U.S. should continue military action against Iran, particularly those who identify as "very conservative." Republicans who identify as MAGA — part of Trump's Make America Great Again movement — are much likelier than non-MAGA Republicans to say the war should continue. Non-MAGA Republicans are more likely to want a ceasefire or a complete halt to the military action.

Jennifer Norton, a 71-year-old Republican from Crossville, Tennessee, supports military action in Iran but has been displeased to see prices rising for things like beef roasts and hamburgers. Norton lives on a "modest income," and things are getting expensive.

"I am getting a little impatient, but when I start to dwell on that for a minute, I remember Mr. President Trump is a brilliant businessman," she said. "He can't tell us exactly what he's doing, but I trust that he's doing something. I mean, he is doing fine."

Independents and Democrats are more likely than Republicans to want to stop military action against Iran immediately, although about 3 in 10 Republicans want either a pause or complete stop to military action.

Ryan Sloan, a 39-year-old Republican in Lakeland, Florida, has come to disapprove of the conflict in Iran recently because he wants a better explanation from the Trump administration about why the war intensified in late July.

"Let's face it, not everybody's going to be happy with him," Sloan said. "I just wish I'd have had more transparency about why things were going on the way they were."

Most say it's important to keep gas prices down

Many Americans continue to be concerned about the pocketbook impact of the Iran war. About 7 in 10 U.S. adults — 72% — say it's "extremely" or "very" important for the U.S. to prevent domestic oil and gas prices from rising, up slightly from 67% in March.

Oil topped \$100 a barrel last week, ending a brief period of lower prices when hostilities between the

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U.S. and Iran eased in June. Gas prices rose above \$4 per gallon on average, and the elevated fuel price is hitting consumers in other ways, too. Inflation cooled last month but remains elevated, and consumer spending has slowed, with signs that Americans are taking advantage of sales and other incentives.

There are also indications that fluctuating gasoline prices are an increasingly big problem for many Americans. About 4 in 10 say the cost of gas for their car is a "major source" of stress in their life right now, compared to about 3 in 10 in February.

Mikal Baker, a 47-year-old political independent in Sandy Springs, Georgia, disapproves of the war in Iran and is frustrated by the effect on gas prices.

"I don't see the benefit. I don't see the total benefit of the American citizen for this war," he said. But Baker is skeptical it will ever come to an end. "I can't say it will ever be over with."

Some Americans may be hoping that gasoline prices could stabilize or go down. About 4 in 10 U.S. adults are "extremely" or "very" concerned about being able to afford gas in the next few months, down slightly from 45% in March.

Republicans prioritize keeping Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon

Even as most Americans prioritize keeping gas prices from rising, a similar share say it's "extremely" or "very" important to negotiate a permanent ceasefire with Iran.

About 7 in 10 Americans say it's "extremely" or "very" important for the U.S. to reach a ceasefire agreement, slightly higher than the roughly two-thirds who say it's at least "very" important to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. That's also well above the 4 in 10 who say it's "extremely" or "very" important to prevent Iran from threatening Israel.

Early in the conflict, Trump said the United States' primary objectives were to degrade Iran's military capability, eliminate their Navy and Air Force, keep them from gaining nuclear weapons and protect U.S. allies in the region.

Republicans, in particular, say it's highly important to keep Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. About 8 in 10 say this is at least "very" important, compared to roughly 7 in 10 who say that about preventing oil and gas prices from rising and negotiating a permanent ceasefire with Iran.

Sloan, the Florida Republican, believes it's important to keep Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon, adding: "We are most definitely their number one targets once they do have nuclear capabilities."

Tens of thousands of French wildfire evacuees allowed to return home as cooler weather moves in

By MARK CARLSON and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

LEGE-CAP FERRET, France (AP) — French authorities gave the go-ahead Thursday for 84,000 evacuees forced out by a monster wildfire to go back to their homes in southwest France, the strongest sign yet that firefighters are turning a corner in their battle against the flames that have burned an area four times the size of Paris.

The authorized returns announced Thursday covered nine localities that had been evacuated. In all, more than 220,000 people were forced to flee their homes since last week.

Higher humidity, cooler temperatures and slight rain raised hopes that Thursday could be a decisive step on the way to vanquishing the fire.

The regional prefecture said returning evacuees must keep their phones on for evacuation alerts and should pack in case they need to leave again.

Nearly two-thirds of the 224,000 people initially ordered to evacuate have now been allowed to go home. Some 60,000 people who had been evacuated from three suburbs of the city of Bordeaux, to the east, were given the go-ahead to return on Tuesday.

Authorities also said the A63 highway that has been closed since the weekend was reopening Thursday afternoon, clearing a major artery for road traffic with Spain and vacationers as France enters its peak August holiday period.

Local officials reported a "rather calm" night, with a fire that has not grown beyond the 42,000 hectares

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(about 162 sq. miles) already affected. Fire crews remained at "total mobilization" with 2,200 firefighters and over 20 aircraft.

Sophie Brocas, the prefect for the Gironde region, expressed some optimism that lower temperatures could help.

"If that's confirmed, we could foresee a return to a more normal life for residents, but also for businesses that need to work," she told reporters late Wednesday.

Humidity reached 80% overnight but was expected to drop by midday, authorities said. Some rainfall was expected along the coast that "could reach the fire zone," Gironde officials said in a morning note.

Temperatures that peaked around 40 Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) a day earlier were set to drop Thursday, topping out at 27 C (80 F) along the coast. An "orange" heat wave alert — the second-highest level after "red" — was lifted shortly before dawn.

The fires in the Bordeaux wine-growing, forested and tourism-heavy region are among the blazes that have swept across pockets of southern Europe in recent weeks, including Spain and Greece.

On Thursday, firefighters were tackling multiple forest fires in four of Turkey's western provinces, the state-run Anadolu news agency reported.

Blazes in touristic Mugla and Antalya and elsewhere raged overnight as hot weather and strong winds gripped the region. Residents were evacuated as teams with firefighting planes and helicopters battled the fires.

A day earlier, authorities in neighboring Greece said three firefighters had died on the island on Crete, as the wildfire emergency stretched from the Atlantic coast to the eastern Mediterranean.

At the peak of the evacuations, a third of a million people were driven from homes and vacation sites in France and Spain.

Russian missile and drone strikes across Ukraine kill at least 8 civilians and wound dozens

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A Russian ballistic missile and drone barrage across Ukraine overnight into Thursday killed at least eight civilians, including children, and wounded dozens of others, officials said.

The blitz expanded Russia's almost daily bombardment of Ukrainian cities as Moscow apparently looked to exploit Kyiv's critical shortage of Western-supplied anti-ballistic missile defenses.

NATO member Poland, meanwhile, was looking into Ukrainian reports that a Russian cruise missile entered its airspace during the onslaught.

The barrage spanned regions across Ukraine, including areas by the border with Poland that are far from the front line in the east of the country and where Ukraine is believed to store and manufacture weapons for its fight against Russia's more than 4-year-old invasion. Its long-range drones and missiles have battered Russia's oil sector, causing a fuel crisis.

The attack came two days after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met in Washington with U.S. President Donald Trump and representatives of American defense companies, as he pleads for swifter and bigger deliveries of Patriot air defense systems that are the best way to stop Russia's ballistic assaults.

The Iran war has drained stockpiles of the American-made interceptors. Trump has promised to grant Ukraine licenses to build its own Patriots, but production could take a long time to set up.

"Given the critical shortage of air defense missiles from our partners, our warriors are accomplishing truly incredible things, demonstrating a very high level of professionalism," Zelenskyy said on social media.

"This Russian terror once again proves that protection against the Russian missile threat is the most important task when it comes to saving the lives of our people," he said.

Russia says its attack targeted military sites

Zelenskyy said at least 10 Ukrainian regions were attacked, with dozens of homes, businesses and infrastructure facilities destroyed or damaged.

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Russia launched more than 70 missiles, a significant number of them ballistic, he said, along with more than 280 attack drones, of which more than 260 were intercepted.

The Russian Defense Ministry said it aimed at Ukrainian air bases, arms factories and military telecommunications and logistics facilities.

The targets included drone production factories and storage depots, a missile plant, an aircraft repair plant, a factory making electronic components, and a chemical plant, it said.

In the Dnipropetrovsk region, the Russian attack killed six people and wounded 10, Oleksandr Hanzha, head of the regional military administration, said.

Children were among the dead, he said on Telegram — a 6-year-old girl and boys aged 11 and 17 in the Kryvyi Rih area.

The children's parents were killed in the same attack, but two more children were pulled alive from under the rubble, Zelenskyy said.

"It was an ordinary home, blown (to) smithereens by a ballistic missile ... " he said on X.

In Kyiv, Russian forces struck the capital with ballistic missiles, killing a 31-year-old man and wounding two others, the National Police press service said. Residential buildings, a market, a garage cooperative, storage facilities and vehicles were damaged in the city, police said.

A cruise missile attack struck the western city of Lviv, wounding 34 people, including three children ages 6, 13 and 15, according to Maksym Kozytskyi, head of the Lviv regional military administration. Emergency crews were still searching through rubble.

In the Poltava region, a drone hit company warehouses, killing one person, regional military head Vitalii Diakivnych said.

Poland looks into whether a Russian cruise missile crossed its border

A Russian Kh-101 cruise missile crossed into Poland overnight, violating NATO airspace, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said on X.

Sybiha called it a clear demonstration that strengthening Ukraine's air defense is urgent and serves as a guarantee of wider European protection.

Polish authorities did not immediately confirm Sybiha's comments.

An unidentified object flying westward in the middle of the night was tracked in Polish airspace and an F-16 fighter jet was launched to identify and intercept it, the Operational Command of the Polish Armed Forces said on X.

The object disappeared from radar screens before it could be identified, the command said. A helicopter flew to its last known location, where the crew discovered a probable impact site in an undeveloped area near the village of Tarnawa-Kolonia in the Lublin province, the command wrote.

Polish authorities have not confirmed what, if anything, crashed. Prime Minister Donald Tusk traveled to the area Thursday morning to inspect the site.

Ukraine hits 2 more depots of major Russian online retailer

Meanwhile, Russia's Defense Ministry said that air defenses downed 258 Ukrainian drones overnight.

A depot belonging to Wildberries online retailer was set ablaze in Russia's Penza region southeast of Moscow, in the latest strike on the company's warehouses, Penza Gov. Oleg Melnichenko.

One person was injured and 200 workers were evacuated, he said.

Wildberries also reported that its warehouse in Sarapul in the region of Udmurtia, more than 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) from Ukraine, was struck by a Ukrainian drone and set ablaze. It said the workers had been safely evacuated.

Ukraine accuses Wildberries of supplying goods that can be used by the Russian military.

Hope dwindles for rescue in southwestern Japan quake as death toll climbs to 25

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

KUMAMOTO, Japan (AP) — Rural communities in southwestern Japan were struggling to get their lives back to normal Thursday, two days after a powerful earthquake set off an explosion at a mall, toppled a factory chimney and flattened homes, killing at least 25 people.

Time was running out to find survivors, as rescuers continued to work in the Kumamoto area on Japan's southern main island of Kyushu, where the magnitude 7.1 earthquake hit Tuesday.

The number of those missing was unclear. Of the deaths given in the latest tally, 25 have been confirmed as related to the disaster, but there were nine more deaths under investigation as likely to be connected, the Kumamoto prefectural government said. The quake left at least 86 people injured, five of them seriously, it said.

Survivors spoke about coming home and desperately pulling family members out of the wreckage. Some had suffered injuries and were rushed to the hospital.

Thousands of people spent another night at evacuation centers set up throughout the area in gymnasiums and other big spaces. Some homes were still without water or electricity, while others were simply afraid to go back.

Nearly 19,000 homes were still without electricity and more than 9,000 people were staying in the roughly 400 shelters, where power sources were being added to provide air conditioning.

Concerns were growing about illness, including from the sweltering heat. The Ministry of Environment sent out a heatstroke alert for the Kumamoto area, with temperatures expected to reach as high as 33 C (91 F) Thursday.

Some evacuees sleep in cars

In the town of Hikawa, one of the hardest-hit areas in Kumamoto, many residents are without water or electricity, or both, and some are staying inside their vehicles in parks or at the town hall parking lot.

At the front entrance of the town hall, officials delivered bottled water and packaged instant rice, while the Ground Self-Defense Force service members came with a trolley to provide fresh water.

Yoshiaki Nakashima, a 66-year-old resident who came with two bottles and his beloved pet dog to get water, said he is staying in a car because of his reluctance to stay at one of the three evacuation centers in the area. He also said he doesn't want to sleep at home because aftershocks made him feel uneasy.

"It's difficult to turn over while sleeping in a car," he said, but that living at a shelter is even more difficult.

Akiko Inazaki, another resident in her 30s, is living in a tent set up in the yard of her home, which has been without water and electricity since the quake. Inazaki, who also came to get water, said she will use it little by little.

"Fresh water is so valuable," she said. Inazaki said she drank so little that she almost had a heatstroke.

Risks of heatstroke are a major concern among officials.

Yutaka Kobayashi, a doctor dispatched from central Japan's Aichi prefecture, said he was touring evacuation centers Thursday to assess the condition of evacuees, especially elderly people and those with injuries as they cope with a harsh environment.

"We have to make sure elderly people are not developing heatstrokes or dehydration," he said in Hikawa.

While the town parking lot was nearly packed the first night, some residents have moved to three public schools where air-conditioning is running, Hikawa officials said.

A town official, Yuzuru Tamura, said they are starting to run out of emergency food supply, such as canned bread and instant rice.

Emergency personnel search for missing people

The most serious damage was at the Aeon Mall shopping center in the town of Kashima, which was bustling with thousands of people when the quake struck in the late afternoon.

The company said some 3,000 customers were evacuated to a parking lot before the explosion hap-

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pened in another part of the mall, where some people were still working. The mall's second floor collapsed, trapping people.

As of early Thursday, six people were confirmed to have died at the mall site among the 11 people pulled out of the wreckage, according to Kumamoto authorities.

In the Yatsushiro area, where a chimney collapsed at a Nippon Paper Industries factory, 10 people were rescued, but eight others died, and one remained missing, according to the Kumamoto prefectural government disaster team.

Footage provided by the Japanese government and military showed rescue workers drilling through the collapsed parts of the building in an attempt to get to anyone who may still be trapped inside.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi told reporters the central government will take a lead role in coordinating the various rescue efforts. Restoring electricity, gas and water to stricken areas, while providing a supply of fresh water is key, she said.

"The needs on the ground are constantly changing. To put to rest the people's feelings of uncertainty, we will do all that needs to be done," she said.

Australian watchdog files legal action against Telegram, saying it failed to remove violent content

By ROD McGUIRK and CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-McLAY Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Australia's online safety watchdog has filed legal action against messaging app Telegram, saying the platform failed to remove extremist content including videos of white supremacist mass shootings in Buffalo, New York, and the New Zealand city of Christchurch as well as Islamic State group beheadings.

The United Arab Emirates-based app, which reports having 1 billion users worldwide, faces a fine of up to 54.6 million Australian dollars (\$38 million) if convicted in the Australian Federal Court for "alleged failure to detect and remove pro-terror material," eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant said Thursday.

The civil action is a test of Australia's 2021 law requiring tech platforms to work to keep illegal and pro-terrorism material off their networks.

Telegram denied the claims. "We reject these allegations and will contest them in court," a spokesperson said in a written statement sent on Telegram.

Regulator says app must take responsibility

The platform is one of the world's most popular messaging apps. The Australian regulator is taking issue with what's shared in group chats of up to 200 people and channels with unlimited reach.

"This case concerns content linked to some of the most notorious acts of known extremist violence in recent history, including material associated with the Christchurch and Buffalo terror attacks," Inman Grant said in a statement.

"We allege that this content remained accessible on the service long after Telegram had been put on notice," she said.

The crimes cited by Inman Grant were ideologically-driven massacres performed for online audiences. Years later, digital artifacts of the massacres are still confounding regulators, who fear the power of videos and so-called manifestos to radicalize others.

In Buffalo in 2022, an American white supremacist livestreamed on Twitch part of a shooting at a supermarket in which he killed 10 Black people. He cited among his motivations the crimes of an Australian white supremacist who in 2019 livestreamed on Facebook a shooting at two Christchurch mosques, where he murdered 51 Muslim worshippers.

Telegram channels established after these and other hate-fueled crimes were populated by users who endorsed the killers and shared videos and other content from the massacres. The Australian watchdog's claim, filed to the federal court Wednesday, said the unlimited broadcast size of Telegram channels meant the app must take responsibility for culling harmful material.

Telegram says it blocks 'terrorist-related communities'

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The messaging app's statement said that the platform's "extensive anti-terrorism efforts are well-documented," adding a link to its published figures recording blocked content and channels. More than 150,000 "terrorist-related communities" have been blocked from the platform this year, according to the figures.

Inman Grant said eSafety began urging Telegram to comply with its own policies in March 2024, but the platform had been "non-responsive" for months.

The Australian official said that changed after France arrested Telegram's Russian billionaire founder and CEO Pavel Durov in August 2024 over allegations that his platform was being used for illegal activity, including drug trafficking and the distribution of images of child sexual abuse. He was released after four days of questioning on bail of 5 million euros (\$5.7 million).

Telegram had "become more compliant initially with us and with other regulators after France took action against the company," Inman Grant said.

"They've still kept a permissive hosting environment for terrorist content," she added.

The Australian court case also related to IS beheadings and other "horrific material used for propaganda and for radicalization," she said.

"When platforms are alerted to terrorist content, they must act," Inman Grant said.

On Wednesday, Russia's Federal Security Service accused Durov of aiding what it called terrorist activities. The service also said it was adding Durov's name to international wanted lists.

Telegram said in its statement supplied to The Associated Press on Thursday that it is committed to protecting user privacy and human rights such as freedom of speech and assembly. It said it had played a prominent role in pro-democracy movements around the world, including in Iran, Russia, Belarus, Myanmar and Hong Kong.

Between prices and a diarrhea-causing parasite, lettuce is causing hard times at some restaurants

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

It's been a choppy year for restaurants that lean into lettuce.

Lettuce prices rose sharply in the first half of 2026 due to hot weather in Arizona, where about one-third of America's lettuce is grown. Now, restaurants are dealing with the fallout from a cyclospora outbreak linked to shredded lettuce that has sickened thousands of Americans.

Taco Bell will likely see the biggest sales impact from the outbreak, which began in late June. Federal health officials first tied the outbreak to shredded iceberg lettuce served at Taco Bell restaurants in Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio and West Virginia. Later, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration said customers in Illinois, Kansas, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania were also affected.

Taco Bell said on July 17 that it had voluntarily removed shredded iceberg lettuce supplied by Taylor Farms from its U.S. restaurants. But its customer volume has suffered. As of July 23, Taco Bell visits were 21% lower than average across the U.S., according to Placer.ai, a market research company.

Cases have continued to grow, however, and it's becoming clear that Taco Bell wasn't the outbreak's sole source, said Craig Hedberg, a food safety researcher at the University of Minnesota. As the FDA investigation progresses, officials should get a better understanding of which illnesses are connected and "how complex this outbreak actually has become."

In the meantime, consumers remain cautious. Foot traffic at Chopt, a salad-focused chain with 105 locations, was down 12% as of July 23, according to Placer.ai. M Science, another market research firm, found that weekly spending at the salad chain Sweetgreen dropped 10 percentage points compared to last year during the first half of July.

Chopt didn't respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press. Sweetgreen, which has 285 U.S. locations, did not confirm a drop in sales and said in a statement that its food hasn't been connected to the current cyclospora outbreak.

"We follow rigorous food safety standards and can trace our ingredients from restaurant to farm," the

company said.

The outbreak came on top of an already difficult year for the lettuce industry and people who love eating salads. The retail price of a pound of iceberg lettuce jumped nearly 20% between January and June of this year, according to government data. Consumers paid an average of 33% more last month for all fresh lettuce compared to a year earlier, the U.S. Department of Agriculture said.

Lettuce prices advertised by major grocery stores last week averaged \$1.86 for a head of iceberg, 25 cents more than the same week a year earlier, according to the USDA. A head of red leaf lettuce cost 52 cents more at \$1.66, and a bunch of romaine had an advertised price of \$2.49 — \$1.55 higher, the department reported.

Shoppers caught a break with some types of salad mixes, though, which stores advertised at prices 7 to 24 cents cheaper than a year prior, the USDA said.

Elizabeth Canales, an associate professor of agricultural economics at Mississippi State University, said unusually hot weather in Arizona early in the year caused crops to mature too early. That caused big supply gaps until California production began in late April.

Fuel costs, which increased after the U.S. and Israel launched strikes on Iran and Iran blocked most oil tankers from leaving the Persian Gulf, have also been an issue, according to Canales. Lettuce is especially perishable and requires energy for cooling from the time it's picked to the time it's sold, Canales said.

"The cold chain needs to be maintained. Cooling and transporting it is very important," Canales said.

Lettuce has been linked to multiple food poisoning outbreaks in the past, including two in 2018 involving E. coli linked to romaine lettuce grown in Arizona and California.

Record-low Danube River affects tourism and industry as drought and heat grip Central Europe

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — As wildfires rage in France and Spain and a renewed heat wave is bearing down on Western Europe, a prolonged drought half a continent away is setting record low water levels on one of Europe's largest rivers, disrupting tourism and industry and confronting residents with the realities of climate change.

The Danube River, which runs through 10 countries from southwestern Germany to the Black Sea, has receded to never-before-seen lows along much of its course, exposing rocks, sand bars and old shipwrecks that have rarely been seen before.

In Budapest, Hungary's capital, the national water authority measured the Danube's water level at 23 centimeters (9 inches) on Wednesday morning, well below the previous all-time low of 33 centimeters (13 inches) set in 2018.

The river is expected to further ebb in the coming days with no significant rain in the forecast and temperatures expected to rise to over 38 degrees Celsius (100 degrees Fahrenheit) across the region.

Drought upends boat traffic

As Danube levels sank to a new low on Tuesday, photographer Gábor Kertész went to the base of Budapest's Margaret Bridge — typically underwater but now an exposed shoal — to document the sight.

"The bare rocks, the dry sand bars around the bridge pillars ... it's all shocking to see how things were before and how they are now," he said. "Where will this lead, what will happen? We don't know that yet, but this must be the result of climate change."

Much of Central Europe has been under a prolonged drought for most of the year, and successive heat waves have accelerated evaporation and caused waterways to dry out.

According to the Hungarian Meteorological Service, 90-day precipitation totals are between 80-130 millimeters (3.1-5.1 inches) lower across nearly the entire country compared to multi-year averages.

The low water level has forced popular cruise ships, where passengers usually disembark for sightseeing in Budapest, to dock far upriver, while cargo ships have stopped operating nearly entirely, according

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to Hungary's Ministry of Transport and Investment.

In Bulgaria, where the Danube forms a border with Romania, police on Tuesday evacuated 186 tourists from a cruise ship that had run aground near the port city of Vidin.

Passengers of the Viking Ullur ran out of food and water after the vessel, which had been scheduled to take on supplies in Vidin, was unable to reach the port after running into a shallow shoal, according to Bulgaria's state news agency BTA. The ship's 52 crew members could have to remain onboard for an extended period depending on navigation conditions and refloating options, police said.

In Serbia, hundreds of small boats and dozens of cargo ships were marooned on the dried out river bank near the northern city of Novi Sad.

One house boat owner, Radovan Segrt, who runs river excursions on his vessel, told The Associated Press that the water in the Danube had withdrawn "some 15 to 20 meters (50 to 65 feet) from it's shore."

"The summer season is over now, as far as boat riding is concerned," he said.

Low water levels force nuclear plant shut downs

The receding waters are also affecting nuclear energy production in numerous countries where water from the Danube is typically used to cool reactors.

In Romania, where Danube water flow had fallen to 1,630 cubic meters per second, around a third of a typical July average, authorities shut down a reactor unit at the Cernavoda power plant on Tuesday for safety reasons and announced another would be shut down soon after.

Similarly, Hungary's Paks nuclear plant, which supplies nearly half of the country's electricity, began powering down a reactor on Wednesday due to restricted cooling-water supplies. That came after two successive reductions in power output in two reactors over the previous two days.

Drought exposes treasures and dangers

The exposed river bed can also pose dangers. Last week, authorities in Budapest closed the Margaret Bridge after a bomb dating from World War II was exposed at its base by the receding water levels.

Treasure hunter Zsolt Horváth was using the extreme conditions to fish metal objects from the exposed bank with a powerful magnet on Tuesday. He said he got a lot of pleasure from finding things like an old radio amplifier or bullet casings from the World Wars.

Horváth said that while "having so little water in the Danube is a blessing for this kind of activity, otherwise, it's a curse."

The Mediterranean's warming waters are drawing hundreds of invasive species

By SILVIA STELLACCI and MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS Associated Press

ROME (AP) — The Mediterranean of our ancestors is no more.

Scientists say climate change, caused mainly by burning oil, coal and gas, is making the Mediterranean Sea hotter, bringing hundreds of new and invasive fish species that decimate indigenous populations.

As biodiversity diminishes, coastal communities will struggle to make ends meet in the ways they've known for generations.

"The Mediterranean of our grandfathers, of our elders, and of the Greeks, of ancient Greece is lost forever. So many of those changes are irreversible," said Ernesto Azzuro, a marine biologist with the Italian National Research Council's Institute for Marine Biological Resources and Biotechnology.

Warmth can't dissipate in the Mediterranean's basin

Scientists have designated the Mediterranean as a climate change "hot spot," with its waters expected to warm by 2 to 6 degrees Celsius (3.6 to 10.8 degrees Fahrenheit) by 2100. Heat waves are likely to become more frequent and more extreme, according to the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and Environmental Change, an independent network of scientists.

Ronan McAdam, an oceanographer with the Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change, said a key factor in the warming is that the sea is an enclosed basin and warmth can't dissipate like in the vastness of the oceans.

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The warming waters have made an inviting new home for invasive species like the spotted puffer fish, a voracious predator and the "worst invader," Azzuro said.

These species are now heading toward France and Spain after entering the Mediterranean through the Suez Canal.

The U.N. food and agriculture body's General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean said such invasive species have been present for decades, but their spread accelerated after the early 2000s, coinciding with rising sea temperatures. For example, the lionfish was first recorded in the eastern Mediterranean in 2012 and has expanded rapidly westward.

"The Mediterranean will be even poorer, even with less species, simply because climate change is really making this part of the Mediterranean, especially the eastern part of the Mediterranean, really unsuitable for native species," Azzuro said.

Cyprus, due to its proximity to the Suez Canal, was first to feel the impact of these invasive fish. Lionfish supplanted indigenous stocks like the red mullet to the dismay of fishers, who have seen local varieties popular with customers greatly diminish.

Then there are rabbitfish that can devour algae from the sea bottom, destroying the habitat for many indigenous species.

"We know what should be done. We should reduce the use of fossil (fuels)," said Piero Genovesi Papik, a zoologist with Italy's Higher Institute for Environmental Protection and Research. "But that's definitely an urgent matter for the humanity, and we all know the solutions, but of course they require a global and joint vision."

About 1,000 invasive species have been identified

Azzuro said about 1,000 invasive species have been identified in the Mediterranean, with 800 of them firmly established.

The changes are stark. Azzuro said the shallows of the eastern Mediterranean have lost 93% of their mollusk population. Along the Adriatic coast, once abundant with mussels, nearly all have died off because of the sea temperatures that at times have exceeded 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit).

From Venice in the north to Bari in the south, "the die-off was spectacular," he said. "Unless we ... find population able to survive through these different climates, the future of mussels is not a happy future, at least in the Adriatic Sea."

Azzuro said his institute and its partner a few years ago launched a campaign, "Beware of those four," to raise awareness about the dangers that invasive species pose to human health.

For instance, puffer fish is toxic and potentially lethal if consumed by humans. The lionfish's poisonous spikes can badly hurt anyone who's stung.

Experts say the spread of invasives can't be reversed

Scientists are discussing how coastal communities can cope. One way is to commercialize invasive species that are edible. Another is to pay fishers to catch inedible ones like the puffer fish so they can be incinerated.

Some species, like the lionfish, have "clear economic benefits because it's sold at very high prices, especially in some countries," Azzuro said. But fishers haven't taken advantage of the invasive dusky spinefoot, whose population has grown significantly in Italian waters.

Papik, the zoologist, said that while it's "too late" to reverse the spread of invasive species in the Mediterranean, there are practical ways to mitigate the impact.

First is to prevent their further migration by enforcing an international treaty obliging national authorities to treat ballast waters inside incoming ships that may carry such species.

"This is something that is technically doable and that can reduce the number of ... new alien species by 95 to 99%," he said. Another tactic is treating ship hulls with special paint that thwarts unwanted hitchhikers from latching on.

Papik also said fishing policies are being amended that would allow native species to reclaim some of their number, like growing mollusks that are less susceptible to the alien blue crab.

"In the coming years, I think that the challenge will be to restore, to find new ways to restore the en-

vironment," Papik said.

Wildfires near Bordeaux bring more troubles to France's wine industry

By EVA VAN DAM, JAMEY KEATEN and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

SADIRAC, France (AP) — From his vineyards in Bordeaux wine country, Edouard le Grix de la Salle can sometimes smell the burning forests far away. The smoke brings a whiff of hardship for the region's economic fortunes.

Wildfires that have burned an area four times the size of Paris and driven 220,000 people from homes and some of the region's tourist attractions promise to sting France's already squeezed economy.

"It's a physical apocalypse when you see all these sites where there's nothing left aside from burnt homes and forests, and then there's the economic apocalypse," said Patrick Seguin, president of the regional chamber of commerce, his voice choking with emotion in a phone interview.

It's "going to be a stab in the back for what remains of our economy."

Le Grix de la Salle is among entrepreneurs bracing for pain. French government appeals for people to avoid the region are causing consternation.

"It's incredible that they've said such a thing, especially when wine tourism is becoming more and more important," Le Grix de la Salle said.

Bordeaux's legendary wine has seen consumption plunge as young people turn to other beverages and competition from vineyards abroad has grown. U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs have given winemakers — and much of the global economy — an added hangover.

"The wine business has been in crisis for several years now and it's worsening with the geopolitical problems, the now widespread problems of inflation and the fact that wine is falling out of fashion among younger people," Le Grix de la Salle said.

"Tourism was really the only dynamic part of the business that was still growing, both for us and, more generally, for Bordeaux wines," he said. "And now this comes along as a brake."

His family's Grand Verdus wine estate is roughly 35 kilometers (20 miles) from the fires that have raged since last week on the other side of the Garonne River that runs through Bordeaux. Bordeaux's Gironde region is mainland France's largest by area and the fires have hit only a small percentage of it. But the mark on its reputation is sizable.

"How did they not think about protecting that sector? And the cultural sector, too. There's so much to visit in Bordeaux. There are so many museums, there are châteaux. It's unbelievable," Le Grix de la Salle said.

The region in southwest France is replete with vacation spots for tourists lured by soft-sand beaches, winemaking châteaux, some of France's largest pine forests and the historic city of Bordeaux, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The oyster-rich Arcachon Bay draws foodies. But the fire and evacuations have emptied some prime spots.

The chamber of commerce says 39,000 businesses have been affected in the region that's a hub of defense and aerospace industries, including Airbus, Dassault and Thales.

Even before the fires, the chamber of commerce said rising energy costs were squeezing profits. Some 94% of businesses responding to a poll of regional enterprises in mid-July said they face difficulties.

"We're getting more and more calls from heads of small- and medium-sized businesses, tiny businesses and craft businesses that are calling for help and saying, 'What am I going to do tomorrow?'" Seguin said.

Two commercial courts in the cities of Bordeaux and Libourne reported a 37% increase in business liquidations from June 2025 to the same month this year, he noted.

Bordeaux Mayor Thomas Cazenave said some restaurateurs told him that reservations have plummeted. He is pushing back against other officials' pleas that people avoid the region. He repeatedly has noted that the city hasn't been evacuated and isn't closed for business.

"The museums are open, the cafes and restaurants are open," he said. "Life also goes on in our beautiful city."

US-Iran conflict enters new phase as Saudi Arabia helps hit proxies and diplomacy stalls again

By FARNOUSH AMIRI, MATTHEW LEE, AAMER MADHANI and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — The stop-start fighting between the United States and Iran appears to have entered a new phase as Saudi Arabia has publicly joined military escalations against Tehran-backed proxies. At the same time, an already untenable diplomatic effort to end the war has faltered once again as mistrust deepens between the longtime adversaries.

Despite several days of relative calm, both sides carried out military strikes in the last 24 hours that once again risk a return to all-out war — and further expansion in the region — while little is clear about what strategy, if any, American or Iranian officials have for a path forward.

While President Donald Trump and his allies have spent recent days arguing that Iran is begging to return to the negotiating table, Iran's deputy foreign minister said Tuesday that his country has made no requests to restart the diplomatic track in more than two weeks.

Following a thwarted attack on the U.S. base in Jordan, Trump turned back to threats Wednesday even while sustaining the prospect of continued talks.

"They've already apologized, but, you know, we got to smack them a little bit," he told reporters in the Oval Office. He added: "It's our turn, and we'll see if we get there with an agreement at some point. But we're going to hit them very hard."

Hours later, the strikes followed as the U.S. military said it launched a "a powerful response to yesterday's attempted Iranian attacks on U.S. forces based in the Middle East" in a social media post. It did not immediately disclose the targets of the attack.

There's a sense of déjà vu as the Republican president has vacillated for the past several months between insisting a deal was near to end the war and Tehran's nuclear program and then using vulgarities and threats to get Iran to capitulate to U.S. demands — to no avail.

The stakes for continued U.S. military action have never been higher for Trump and his party as the conflict, unpopular among many Americans, has jolted the world economy just months before critical mid-term elections in November. The renewed fighting also has killed and injured more American troops and been complicated by concerns that the U.S. is further drawing down stockpiles of key air defense systems needed to defend its bases and allies.

In the past day, Iran said it fired ballistic missiles at Jordan's Muwaffaq Salti Air Base, a key U.S. military hub for the region, which Trump said were intercepted. And Saudi Arabia joined the U.S. in striking multiple logistics and weapons sites used by Iranian-backed militias in Iraq.

The first publicly announced joint U.S.-Saudi strikes followed drone attacks on the kingdom, complicating a conflict that now includes nearly every country in the region. A U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to detail sensitive military operations, said the two attacks were not connected.

Saudi defense minister makes White House visit

Saudi Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman met separately Wednesday with Trump and Vice President JD Vance, according to two people familiar with the matter who were not authorized to comment publicly about the private meeting.

The defense minister conveyed the view of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's de facto leader, that Iran has lost leverage in Syria and Lebanon but is still managing to provide support to the Houthis in Yemen and militias in Iraq, according to one of the people familiar with Prince Khalid's talks with Trump and Vance.

The Iran-aligned Houthi group earlier this week said it fired ballistic missiles at a Saudi oil tanker, days after declaring it was imposing a naval blockade on Saudi vessels in the Red Sea.

The Saudi decision to join the U.S. attacks against the Iraqi militias was meant to send a message to Iran that it wouldn't tolerate Iran or its proxies targeting the Saudi oil industry and other critical infrastructure, the person added.

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At the same time, the defense minister underscored to Trump and Vance that the Saudis want to see a de-escalation in the war and want Washington and Tehran to return to negotiations.

Drone strikes also ignited fires on two natural gas vessels at a port in Egypt, a close U.S. ally and regional mediator that is one of the only countries in the Middle East to have been spared from direct military action during the war. A strike by Iran or its allies, if confirmed, would mark a significant widening of the conflict.

The U.S.-Saudi strikes came hours after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu departed his first meeting with Trump since they launched the war against Iran on Feb. 28.

An Israeli official briefed on the meeting Tuesday at the White House said Netanyahu assured Trump that it is the U.S., not Israel, that is in the driver's seat with Iran, attempting to push back on the notion that he's increasingly out of step with his closest ally on the way ahead.

Yet, Israeli officials also have privately expressed concern that Trump, with midterm elections looming, is trying to "keep this war on a low flame," according to a person familiar with Netanyahu's government's internal deliberations. The person and the Israeli official were not authorized to comment and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The person added that Israeli officials have become increasingly concerned about Trump's sensitivity to surging oil prices as the Strait of Hormuz remains effectively closed to global energy shipments and about the growing trepidation among some in the U.S. administration about the burn rate of critical missile interceptors.

The recent fighting with Iran used up more of the U.S. military's already diminished stockpiles of Patriot and THAAD interceptors, potentially putting American troops at more risk if hostilities resume, according to an analysis released this week from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank.

Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has told Trump that the state of the munitions stockpile could have an impact on military operations in Iran, according to another U.S. official. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive conversations, said the message was delivered as part of Caine's regular duties of providing military advice and options to Trump.

A history of failed diplomacy plagues US-Iran prospects

The Trump administration does not seem to have a strategy to resume negotiations with Iran over ending the conflict.

Despite efforts by some mediators to get talks restarted — or at least find a point at which they could begin again — the administration is not actively pursuing talks at the moment, a senior U.S. official said.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, said the latest developments in the region suggested that any resumption in direct diplomacy was not imminent.

Analysts called the uncertainty and lack of strategy a result of deep, growing mistrust between Washington and Tehran, especially after an interim ceasefire proposal signed in mid-June collapsed in recent weeks.

Ali Vaez, Iran project director at the International Crisis Group, said senior Iranian officials were nearly unanimous in their decision to approve that memorandum of understanding with the U.S.

"But now none of them believe that Trump is a reliable negotiating partner," he said. "The problem, I think, is that Trump also has now the same impression about the Iranians."

In some respects, the on-again, off-again nature of talks and back-and-forth military attacks should not be surprising.

The history of U.S. negotiations with Iran after 1979 is littered with failure, false starts and stops, and military actions that have nonetheless stopped short of the kind of conflict the two countries are now in.

Despite its flaws, the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran secured by the Obama administration was the first major agreement between the two countries since the Algiers Accords in 1981 that ended the American hostage crisis and laid a patchwork path for the resolution of other issues, including the unfreezing of Shah-era Iranian assets seized by the U.S. after the Islamic Revolution.

However, even from the beginning, both sides accused each other of violating the terms of these deals.

Accusations of violations of the Algiers Accords, which led to a period of great animosity, including U.S. support for Saddam Hussein's Iraq during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, became the norm.

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Despite the semi-rapprochement around the 2015 nuclear deal, Trump's withdrawal from it in 2018 during his first term, his imposition of a "maximum pressure" sanctions campaign against Tehran, and the U.S. assassination of Iran's top military leader Qassem Soleimani in early 2020, sent the relationship to new lows.

Urban League report says Trump administration is harming Black Americans' chances at American Dream

By MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The American Dream may not be dead for many Black Americans, but it is further away than at any point since the Civil Rights Movement, warns a report by the National Urban League.

Released on Thursday, the annual "State of Black America" report grimly describes Black Americans' economic and political prospects as having worsened due to policy changes from President Donald Trump's administration, according to a copy obtained by The Associated Press.

The report contends that the challenges it highlights for Black communities are warning signs for the prosperity of all Americans.

"It may be the focus is us, but the impact is not just us," said Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League. "While they have targeted and focused on Black Americans, these attacks are going to impact broadly working Americans, poor Americans, aspirational middle-class Americans, and this is what this report points to."

Tracing the arc of American history, the Urban League describes Black Americans' struggle for emancipation from slavery and equal economic and political rights as a gruesome but optimistic part of the American story.

Now, the report says, the Trump administration is at odds with the goals and achievements of the Civil Rights Movement, citing the overhaul of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, as well as the president's focus on overhauling voting laws through the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act, as examples of rollbacks of long-sought civil rights policies.

The report's authors offer policy and strategy recommendations for civil rights groups aiming to combat the Trump administration.

"The civil rights community must consolidate its legal resistance and turn courtroom wins into durable policy," the report says. "The movement must build economic infrastructure that doesn't depend on the goodwill of any one administration."

Report contributors include potential Democratic presidential contender

This year's report includes contributions from members of Congress, and policy and legal experts, as well as some media personalities.

U.S. Senators Angela Alsobrooks, Lisa Blunt Rochester and Raphael Warnock all contributed to the report, as well as Maryland Gov. Wes Moore and Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey contributed a video message to the report.

Moore, who is widely viewed as a potential 2028 presidential contender, submitted an essay focused on closing the racial wealth gap and Black Americans' history of economic advancement in the face of adversity.

"With wisdom and grit, my mom was able to lift me and my family to a higher rung on the economic ladder. But too often wisdom and grit aren't enough," Moore wrote.

He later called closing the racial wealth gap "a matter of moral clarity" but cautioned that "government alone cannot close the racial wealth gap. It's going to take all of us," referencing the private sector and civil society.

Report blasts 'economic assault' on Black Americans

Whether corporate America and major nonprofits are still willing to participate is an open question. The report condemns the Trump administration's efforts to roll back diversity initiatives and economic advancement projects in the private sector, and expressed frustration with companies that cooperated with an "economic assault" on Americans, especially Black Americans.

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"This has been a campaign of coercion and oppression directed at these institutions who have been out here working hard to, if you will, change America," Morial said. "The important thing about companies is that every company has not bent the knee. Some may have done some cosmetic changes. Some have been in full and complete retreat."

The DEI rollbacks are a jarring reversal for the Urban League, which held sway in the Biden White House on economic and social policies. The report lauds President Joe Biden's administration for signing a sweeping COVID-19 stimulus package, as well as laws supporting minority small businesses and a bipartisan infrastructure bill.

"Not every promise was kept, and the current administration is pushing to roll our wins back, but these wins serve as a blueprint for what is possible through sustained advocacy and a clear vision," the authors write. The agenda, the Urban League declares, was "the most consequential federal investments in Black America since the Great Society."

The organization and its civil rights allies now find themselves in a strikingly different political environment under the Trump administration.

"Looking at our current political landscape, the calls for racial healing and righting of this nation's wrongs in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd feel like a fever dream," the report reads.

But the study also acknowledges that Black Americans have overcome more dire and discriminatory moments.

Latest Black America report is Urban League's 50th edition

The Urban League's inaugural 1976 report on the state of Black America was described by the New York Times at the time as "a profoundly depressing document" that laid out the persistent disparities between the economic outlooks of Black and white Americans, a decade after the Civil Rights Movement's crowning achievements were signed into law.

The report was established as a response to that year's State of the Union address by President Gerald R. Ford and the Democratic response, neither of which mentioned the economic outlooks for Black Americans. The report offered policy recommendations on crime, education housing, social services and general economic policy.

"It is a document that does not attempt to cover up the seriousness of the situation black people find themselves in," the authors wrote at the time. Several of its recommendations were later taken up by President Jimmy Carter, who was elected to the White House months after the report's release.

This year's 50th anniversary document echoes the frustration found in the inaugural report. While Morial acknowledged that the Urban League's assessments may lead to pessimism, he urged Americans concerned about civil rights and economic progress to respond at the ballot box and with their pocketbooks.

"We cannot be dejected. We cannot be cynical. We must act," Morial said. "We have to fight to make sure that those that are really trying to kill the essence of the American dream don't win."

Trump touted his tariffs in Michigan despite rising costs. Even some of his supporters are worried

By JACQUELINE GANUN and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

MILFORD, Mich. (AP) — Flying to a rally at General Motors this week, President Donald Trump declared that "car companies are doing better than they've ever done" thanks to his tariffs.

"All because of Trump," he said.

It was a message the president repeated while touring a collection of new vehicles, predicting that "it's amazing what tariffs will do for General Motors" before autographing a white Corvette commemorating America's 250th anniversary. He later told a crowd of cheering supporters that "Michigan is thriving."

That's not exactly true, at least according to many metrics. Tariffs have cost businesses in Michigan and across the country billions of dollars while helping to stoke inflation that has continued to run hot — despite Trump's assurances that his business background would wipe it out.

Many Americans believe tariffs have pushed prices higher and the war in Iran has also increased gasoline

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prices, hurting consumer confidence in the economy while keeping Trump's approval ratings low.

There are few places where contradictions between the president's boasts and the economic reality of his tariffs are more likely to collide ahead of November's midterm elections than in battleground Michigan, which holds its primary on Tuesday. Trump won the state in 2016 and then again in 2024, after it had flipped to Democrat Joe Biden in 2020.

During his rally in Milford, northwest of Detroit, the crowd was adoring. But even some of Trump's ardent supporters said prices are too high and tariffs had caused short-term economic pain — even as they still support the president overall.

Lisa Scherer, a 64-year-old who used to run a landscaping company and work as a bus driver and union steward, acknowledged that high gas prices are "hurting a lot" and it is "very rough" to afford things.

"But I'm just hoping, if we hang in there," she said, emphasizing that she still thinks the president is doing a good job.

Michigan and Canada have deep trade ties

Though the Supreme Court struck down many of the tariffs Trump ordered upon first returning to the White House, the administration has launched new import taxes and recently invoked the Tariff Act of 1930 to accuse Canada of using discriminatory practices and plans to impose 50% tariffs on many imports from that country.

Michigan relies on supply chains that are heavily integrated with Canada after decades of policies that encouraged reducing bilateral trade barriers. That included the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement from Trump's first term. Trump chose not to renew that trade pact, setting up years of negotiations.

GM said it was "honored to spend time showcasing our vehicles and facilities" for Trump. But automakers have long said that tariffs increase production costs — so much so that the president offered them a reprieve from his auto-part tariffs, extending in October what was supposed to have been a short-term rebate until 2030.

Veteran Michigan pollster Bernie Porn said Trump's rosy words can't hide how his tariffs are helping intensify voters' concerns about inflation and affordability.

"When I was listening to him, I said, 'What planet are you on?'" Porn said.

Porn noted that some Republicans nationally are worried that their voters won't be motivated to turn out in November and "I doubt if Michigan is going to be very different."

"He is like an anchor around Republicans," Porn said.

Trump's policies don't bother Joe Miskovich, the 57-year-old owner of an aerospace business from Fenton, Michigan, about 20 miles north of Milford. He said of tariffs that "the American public needs to look at the bigger picture."

People need to see, Miskovich said, that "yes, granted, there might be a little higher increase in price. But the long-term effect is going to be absolutely positive to the nation."

Trump is helping decide next week's primaries

As he's done in key midterm primary races nationwide, the president has used endorsements to help ensure candidates he sees as most loyal or potentially helpful to his policies prevail. In Michigan's Republican gubernatorial primary on Tuesday, Trump has endorsed Congressman John James over rival Perry Johnson.

Also speaking was former Rep. Mike Rogers, who is again running for Senate after narrowly losing to Democratic Sen. Elissa Slotkin two years ago.

More national attention has been focused on the state's Democratic Senate primary, which will decide if Rogers faces Rep. Haley Stevens or progressive favorite Abdul El-Sayed. But Rogers said Michigan needs a senator who promotes Trump's agenda, not someone who works to stymie it.

"This is the time that we will stand up and get Michigan up off of her knees," he said at Trump's rally.

Scherer, who once ran the landscaping company, drove nearly five hours from her home in the suburbs of Columbus, Ohio, to see Trump's speech. She's nonetheless worried that the president has left behind some supporters like herself who helped get him back to the White House.

"I'm brutally honest, like Trump is, aren't I? He's forgot about the people on a fixed income," said Scherer,

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who lives on Social Security benefits of \$1,100 per month. "But I look at it like, I guess, No pain, no gain."

Automakers plan to increase domestic production — eventually

Republican Michigan House Speaker Matt Hall praised tariffs at Trump's rally, while also noting that the president last year announced a new fighter jet mission that secured the future of the state's Selfridge Air National Guard Base.

"This is what putting Michigan first looks like," he said.

Some auto companies have pledged to ramp up U.S. production, yet those benefits aren't being felt yet. GM announced in June 2025 that it planned to invest \$4 billion to shift some vehicle production from Mexico to the U.S. starting next year.

Ford and Stellantis, which owns Chrysler, have a similar timeline for expanding domestic operations.

Toyota also said it would invest \$3.6 billion and relocate production of its Tacoma pickup from Mexico to Texas, but that will happen over roughly four years.

In the meantime, Michigan has seen only modest increases in auto sector job creation during Trump's second term, while jobs tied to auto parts manufacturing declined by about 4,000 statewide through June when compared to the same month last year.

Michigan has lost 8,300 manufacturing jobs since Trump announced his "Liberation Day" tariffs in April of last year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Among some of Trump's base, economic worries show

Outwardly, the rally was a lovefest. When the president told of encountering a "beautiful" waitress in Las Vegas during the 2024 campaign, a man in the audience bellowed, "You're beautiful!"

Later, the crowd began chanting "10 more years!" when Trump talked about needing to leave office after January 2029.

"Trump is, like, No. 1. You know, he's the best," said Rose Stroud, 75, who attended the rally from Commerce, Michigan. "He thinks about the people, about what they need."

Some attendees insisted that the president should get the benefit of the doubt — even as concerns about kitchen table issues tick up.

"There's always a method to the madness, and people sometimes don't understand or get it," said Roy Parks, 49, a self-employed handyman, photographer and videographer from Milford. "But there's always a reason he's doing things a certain way, and it may not make sense at first, but after six, twelve months, it all comes together."

He said the same goes for tariffs: "You may not like it at first, but it's a short-term pinch, short-term pain, but long-term good. It works out in the end. It's for the best."

"When you rip off the Band-Aid right away, it stings," Parks added. "But, after a few minutes, there's no pain. You have to go through a little bit of pain at first to get to long-term good."

US launches strikes on Iranian targets a day after it foiled missile attack on American forces

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — The U.S. military said early Thursday it had completed "a heavy wave of strikes against Iran" conducted in response to an earlier Iranian missile attack on a U.S. base in Jordan. The latest barrage came after the U.S. partnered with Saudi Arabia to strike Iran-backed militias in neighboring Iraq, killing at least 20 fighters and six Iranian advisers.

Central Command said in a social media post that over two hours the U.S. struck "dozens" of targets belonging to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, including military command centers as well as missile and drone facilities, and coastal surveillance and defense sites.

The new strikes came hours after U.S. President Donald Trump vowed to hit Iran "very hard" after it targeted a base in Jordan that hosts U.S. troops.

Iranian state media said two people were injured in attacks on the island of Qeshm in the Strait of Hormuz and that explosions were also reported in Khuzestan province to the northwest.

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Elsewhere, drone strikes ignited fires on two natural gas vessels at the Egyptian port of Damietta, according to British maritime security firm Ambrey. It was not immediately clear who was responsible for the strikes on a U.S.-owned floating storage facility and a Greek-owned tanker. No injuries were reported.

The flare-ups on multiple fronts after several days of relative calm raised the risk of a return to all-out war. It also underscored the difficulty of winding down a five-month conflict that has jolted the world economy and is unpopular among Americans. The fighting was also likely to add to concerns that the U.S. is further drawing down already diminished stockpiles of sophisticated munitions needed to defend its bases and allies.

Egypt, a close U.S. ally and regional mediator, is one of the only countries in the Middle East to have been spared direct military action during the war. A strike by Iran or its allies, if confirmed, would mark a significant widening of the conflict.

Asked during an Oval Office event if Iran was responsible for the strikes on the natural gas vessels, Trump responded: "It's a little more of the same."

"In the meantime, we're going to be hitting them very hard because it's our turn to hit them," he added.

Saudi Arabia had accused the Iraqi militias of firing drones against its oil facilities over the past two days. An umbrella group of Iraqi militias initially denied the allegations, while another Iran-backed group — the Houthi rebels in Yemen — said they had attacked Saudi energy facilities as part of a separate but related conflict.

Saudi Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman met separately on Wednesday with Trump and Vice President JD Vance, according to two people familiar with the matter who were not authorized to comment publicly about the private meetings.

They said the Saudi decision to join the U.S. attacks against the Iraqi militias was meant to send a message to Iran that it wouldn't tolerate Iran or its proxies targeting the Saudi oil industry and other critical infrastructure. At the same time, the defense minister underscored to Trump and Vance that the Saudis want to see a de-escalation in the war and Washington and Tehran to return to negotiations.

Before the latest eruption, mediators had expressed optimism about bringing the U.S. and Iran back to the negotiating table. An interim agreement collapsed in recent weeks over renewed fighting in the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway for global energy supplies that Iranian attacks have again effectively closed.

A regional official said mediators are "still trying with both sides" to restore calm and get the ceasefire back on track. He gave no details on whether progress was being made and spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door diplomacy.

The renewed hostilities sent oil prices spiking. Brent crude, the international standard, jumped 7.3% to \$88.093 a barrel.

Jordan intercepts missiles and US strikes militias in Iraq

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard said it fired missiles Tuesday at Jordan's Muwaffaq Salti Air Base, a key U.S. military hub for the region, in a statement carried by the state-run IRNA news agency.

Jordan's military said five Iranian missiles had been intercepted and destroyed.

The U.S. military later announced that American and Saudi fighter aircraft had struck multiple logistics and weapons sites in eastern Iraq in response to the alleged drone attacks on Saudi Arabia.

The Popular Mobilization Forces, a coalition of primarily Shiite Iranian-backed armed groups that is officially under the command of the Iraqi military, said at least 20 fighters were killed and 32 wounded in the overnight strikes.

Six Iranian advisers were also killed, according to two Iraqi militia officials, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly. Iran's deputy governor for political, security and social affairs in Markazi province told Iranian state media that four advisers were killed.

The coalition joined the fight against the Islamic State group after it seized large sections of Iraq in 2014. The Iraqi government later designated the coalition as an "independent military formation" within the armed forces, but the militias have significant autonomy and some have attacked U.S. facilities.

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Iraq's government decried the U.S.-Saudi attacks, though a Fox News reporter said in an on-air segment that Trump told him they were done in coordination with the Iraqi government.

Iraq's National Security Council said the strikes had been carried out "while the Iraqi government was in contact with relevant parties to investigate and address all the concerns raised by the Saudi and American sides." It said "a number of innocent people" had been killed and wounded.

A visit to Saudi Arabia by Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi that had been scheduled for Thursday was postponed indefinitely, said two Iraqi government officials on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly.

Attacks on Saudi oil facilities could worsen global energy crisis

Saudi Arabia is also locked in a renewed conflict with the Houthis. The rebels have declared a blockade of Saudi shipping that could choke off another crucial Middle East trade route, the Bab el-Mandeb strait from the Red Sea into the Gulf of Aden.

On Monday, the Houthis said they had launched drones targeting oil facilities used to transport oil across Saudi Arabia to the Red Sea port city of Yanbu, a key bypass for Saudi exports blocked by Iran's chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz.

The rebels said the attack was in response to a Saudi drone they said had breached Yemen's airspace.

Planet Labs satellite imagery from Monday analyzed by AP showed damage to Saudi Aramco's Abqaiq oil-processing facility. The massive facility is capable of processing approximately 7 million barrels of crude oil per day.

Iran rejects Oman proposal for managing Strait of Hormuz

The Strait of Hormuz has been a major flashpoint in the conflict. Iran's deputy foreign minister said his country had rejected a proposal from Oman, which lies on the other side of the strait, to jointly manage ship traffic.

In an interview with Iran's state-run television, Kazem Gharibabadi said Oman's proposal included dividing the strait into two routes.

Iran offered a counterproposal with a temporary plan for the transit of vessels through its territorial waters, he said, adding that Tehran's policy is for the strait "never to return to its prewar situation," when ships moved freely.

Southern Europe burns as 3 firefighters die and France battles blaze 4 times the size of Paris

By THOMAS ADAMSON, MARK CARLSON and EMMA DA SILVA Associated Press

LEGE-CAP FERRET, France (AP) — An uncontained wildfire four times the size of Paris threatened to surge again in southwest France on Wednesday — as three firefighters died in Greece and crews across southern Europe confronted a punishing mix of heat, drought and strong winds.

The deaths on Crete brought a fatal new dimension to a wildfire emergency stretching from the Atlantic coast to the eastern Mediterranean. At the peak of the evacuations, a third of a million people were driven from homes and vacation sites in France and Spain.

In France's Gironde region, the country's biggest blaze had not spread during a calm night, authorities said. But as temperatures approached 40 C (104 F) Wednesday afternoon and winds strengthened, the reprieve threatened to be short-lived.

The landscape was so combustible that investigators believe routine brush-clearing work near a high-voltage line may have sparked the inferno, even though the work appeared to comply with regulations.

At the command center in Lège, firefighters bent over maps spread across a car hood, tracking three danger zones: northern Cap-Ferret; the wooded corridor around Marcheprime, Cestas and Saint-Jean-d'Illac; and a military site near Martignas, where a major outbreak forced a large deployment.

Both firefighters and residents mobilize against the blaze

More than 2,200 firefighters and over 20 aircraft remained mobilized, backed by crews from across France and European partners.

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"We strike quickly and strike hard at any new smoke emissions," Gironde fire commander Matthieu Jo-main said.

Beyond the command center, civilians were trying to hold the line themselves. At Souge, volunteers flooded the edges of dirt tracks while a local digger driver plowed through still-burning soil, trying to keep flames from crossing back when the expected west wind arrived. In Lacanau, residents pumped water from a lake into tanks headed for hot spots and firefighters' cisterns.

"If one day the fire starts in our neck of the woods, I know very well that all the people here would do the same for us," said Flavien Dubuch, 33, who drove from Saint-Émilion with his father to help.

Hottest day this week

The advance of major fires in the Landes and Var regions has been halted. That left Gironde as France's biggest remaining wildfire battle, Interior Minister Laurent Nuñez said.

The Gironde fire forced 220,000 people to flee at the peak of the crisis. Tens of thousands have since been allowed home, but authorities warned that the danger had not passed.

Extreme heat strips moisture from vegetation and drives down humidity, turning grasses, brush and forest litter into faster-burning fuel.

Investigators believe contractors working near a high-voltage line for power-grid operator Enedis ignited the blaze while using a brush-cutting machine, Bordeaux prosecutor Renaud Gaudeul said.

Météo-France said Wednesday would be the hottest and driest day of the week, with elevated wildfire danger across every region of France. Drought now covers mainland France and Corsica, with soils nearing the record dryness reached in August 2022.

Smoke from the Gironde and Landes fires also pushed particulate pollution higher across both departments, regional air-quality monitors said.

More evacuations ordered in France

Gironde authorities ordered 4,000 more people out of tourist sites along the Atlantic coast on Tuesday, widening what may be France's largest peacetime evacuation.

"The situation remains complicated. That's clear. We're not out of the woods," said Gironde prefect Sophie Brocas, who also authorized 60,000 evacuees to return to three Bordeaux suburbs untouched by fire.

The opposing movements — thousands ordered out of coastal resorts as others returned with mobile phones on and emergency bags packed — captured how precarious the situation remains.

The disruption was spreading beyond the burn zone into Bordeaux's peak tourism season.

Edouard le Grix de la Salle, who runs Château du Grand Verdus with his brother, said official appeals to avoid the region threatened its wine-tourism trade. "How did they not think about protecting that sector?" he told The Associated Press.

At one point the Gironde blaze created a black thundercloud, electrified and lit from within, that generated lightning, violent winds and new fires beyond the original front. The pyrocumulonimbus was the first recorded in France.

Fire in Greece turns deadly for firefighters

Two firefighters died Wednesday while battling a wildfire in the Rethymno region of Crete, Greece's fire department said. They were among about 125 firefighters confronting flames fanned by strong winds, with four helicopters and four water-dropping planes deployed.

The circumstances of their deaths were not immediately clear. The department said they died "in the line of duty to protect the lives and property of citizens and the natural environment."

A third firefighter also died Wednesday outside the fire perimeter, after tackling a separate blaze in Greece's southern Peloponnese region.

Tens of thousands begin returning home in Spain

At the height of the crisis, roughly 330,000 people were driven from homes and vacation sites across France and Spain.

Tens of thousands of people began returning home in central Spain after firefighters made progress around Madrid and Avila. Evacuation orders were lifted for about 20,000 people in the Madrid region, while stay-at-home restrictions ended for another 14,000.

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But 10,000 people remain under evacuation orders in Castellón, where a fire was still out of control as Spain braced for its fourth heat wave of the summer.

More than 1,160 square kilometers (448 square miles) have burned across France this year, according to the Interior Ministry.

Europe is the world's fastest-warming continent, warming at more than twice the global average, according to the European Union's Copernicus climate service. Western Europe recorded its hottest June on record, with extreme heat and widespread dryness contributing to the spread and intensification of fires in France and Spain, Copernicus said.

Senate panel delays vote on Blanche attorney general nomination as key Republicans withhold support

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Todd Blanche's nomination to become attorney general stalled Wednesday as lawmakers scrapped a planned committee vote after key Republicans demanded more assurances about the settlement of President Donald Trump's lawsuit against the Internal Revenue Service.

The Senate Judiciary Committee had been expected to vote Thursday on whether to advance Blanche's nomination to the full chamber. But resistance from two Republican senators on the committee who could block Blanche's nomination threw his confirmation into doubt.

A spokesperson for the committee said in a statement Wednesday night that the vote would be postponed "as work continues to secure sufficient support." The delay came after hours of negotiations between the Justice Department and Republican Sens. John Cornyn and Thom Tillis over the controversial settlement that afforded Trump and members of his family protection from tax audits.

At the center of the fight is the resolution of Trump's \$10 billion lawsuit against the IRS. It included a deal to drop tax claims against the president and a now-scrapped plan to create a \$1.776 billion "Anti-Weaponization Fund" to compensate people who believe they were wronged by the Justice Department. The department said in June that it was no longer moving forward with the "Anti-Weaponization Fund" amid bipartisan outrage, but officials have said the audit immunity agreement remains in place.

Cornyn and Tillis have demanded additional assurances in writing that the "Anti-Weaponization Fund" is dead and have pressed for clarification on the scope of the tax immunity deal. Cornyn has said he wants the administration to modify that piece of the settlement to make clear that it covers only existing audits and does not protect the president from examination of future tax filings.

Cornyn, who recently lost the Republican primary in Texas, accused the Justice Department earlier Wednesday of "stonewalling" and said "the ball is in Blanche's court."

"We've been trying to help them get to a conclusion here and they won't let us. It's baffling to me," Cornyn told reporters.

Blanche didn't answer shouted questions from reporters as he left Capitol Hill, where he had been meeting with senators Wednesday. The Justice Department sent Cornyn and Tillis new language Wednesday evening in an effort to satisfy their demands, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to talk about sensitive discussions surrounding Blanche's confirmation.

After the vote was postponed, the department said in a statement that it looks "forward to continuing to work productively with Senators to address any concerns."

Trump on Wednesday downplayed any concerns about Blanche's path to confirmation, calling his attorney general pick and former personal attorney "outstanding."

"Maybe John Cornyn's upset with me because I didn't endorse him," Trump told reporters in response to questions about the senator's requests.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton won the state's Republican nomination for the U.S. Senate, easily defeating Cornyn. Trump had endorsed Paxton.

Some lawmakers have questioned whether the "Anti-Weaponization Fund" could be resurrected absent a commitment in writing from the Trump administration that it is not moving forward, especially since Trump

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has expressed continued support for the idea. Blanche had previously resisted requests for a formal written retraction, though he told senators at his confirmation hearing earlier this month that the administration would be willing to help craft legislation to bar the creation of the fund.

The settlement resulting from Trump's lawsuit over his leaked tax returns has drawn intense scrutiny both in Congress and in court. The judge handling the case said in a scathing ruling earlier this month that Trump had effectively engaged in self-dealing through the lawsuit and that she was troubled Blanche had signed the settlement, given his prior representation of Trump.

Blanche has said he disagrees "with the judge's insinuations" about him.

Rescuers search for survivors after a quake kills 18 in southwestern Japan

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

KUMAMOTO, Japan (AP) — Soldiers and emergency workers combed through a badly damaged shopping mall and collapsed houses looking for trapped survivors Wednesday after a powerful earthquake that killed at least 18 people, including a foreigner, in southwestern Japan.

The magnitude 7.1 earthquake that hit a day earlier in the Kumamoto area on the southern main island of Kyushu also left at least 62 people injured, six of them seriously, the prefectural government said. The tally has been steadily growing, fanning fears it may continue to rise.

Some of the most serious damage was at the Aeon Mall shopping center in the town of Kashima, which was bustling with thousands of people when the quake happened. The company said some 3,000 customers were evacuated to a parking lot before a gas explosion happened in another part of the mall, where some people were still working.

Fumika Ono was shopping at a mall with her older sister when the ground shook so fiercely she lost her balance and ducked. Children began screaming and goods scattered on the floor.

The 19-year-old was among the crowd of shoppers who managed to escape safely.

The sweltering weather heightened worries about the survivors as rescuers braved the heat. It remained unclear how many people might still be missing.

The mall's second floor collapsed, trapping people. Witnesses said the explosion shook the area as much as the quake.

Three people remained missing, while four deaths were confirmed at the mall site, according to Aeon President Akio Yoshida.

"We take it seriously that an explosion happened and precious lives were lost," Yoshida told a news conference in Kumamoto, where he bowed deeply along with two other executives.

Japanese media footage of the mall showed that part of the ceiling had caved in, and metal pieces and other debris were scattered about as helmeted and masked rescue workers searched the area.

Kiyoshi Matsunaga, 74, who lives in the mall's neighborhood and was at a supermarket just a few blocks away, said Tuesday's quake reminded him of a deadly quake 10 years ago that hit Kumamoto and killed 50 people.

He stopped in his tracks when the shaking began while he was pushing his cart toward a cash register. Things scattered from the shelves. He could not move, he recalled.

"I was frightened," he said.

Japan is one of the most quake-prone nations in the world.

In the Nuyamazu district, a pair of temple gates at a 16th-century Buddhist temple collapsed. They had just been repaired five years ago.

Yuki Kiyozumi, deputy chief priest at the temple, recalled how she had to crawl on the floor because the shaking was so violent. She had just returned home from a meeting and was about to feed her cat.

"I don't even know if or how we can rebuild them again," she said, while cleaning up damaged ornaments and furniture.

In nearby Yatsushiro, a chimney collapse at a Nippon Paper Industries factory killed five people while

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seven others were rescued from the debris, according to the Kumamoto prefectural government disaster team.

Four people were still believed to be trapped there, it said.

In the first reported death of a foreign national, a Vietnamese technical intern was killed after a crane fell on him at a factory where he worked, according to the Vietnamese government. He had arrived in Japan in January. Seven other Vietnamese technical interns at the factory evacuated safely.

Separately, a Vietnamese woman married to one of the workers was injured when a wall collapsed and was being treated at a hospital.

Nearly 34,900 homes were still without electricity and some 15,000 homes without running water, Kumamoto officials said. More than 8,800 people left their homes to stay in over 400 shelters, where power sources were being added to provide air conditioning.

Aerial police footage showed some homes in residential areas were completely flattened, including a few that crumbled into a nearby river.

Service members of Japan's Self-Defense Force joined rescue workers in the search and rescue operations. Hundreds of professionals were helping with the effort, including firefighters from Taiwan.

"There are people who are still waiting to be rescued, and it's a race against time," Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said. "We will go all out to find and rescue as many people as we can."

Takaichi said the government was preparing to deliver food and other necessities to hard-hit areas. She also offered her condolences to the victims and sympathy to their relatives, while urging those affected by the quake to take care of themselves under the hot weather.

Bullet train services remained suspended. Although operations at Aso Kumamoto Airport resumed Wednesday, some airlines canceled flights as a precautionary measure.

Police: Bullets that killed 2 bystanders at Seattle festival weren't from teen shooter's gun

By GENE JOHNSON and HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Preliminary testing showed the bullets that killed two bystanders during a shootout at a crowded Seattle food festival last weekend didn't come from the gun a 15-year-old arrested at the scene was seen firing, police said in court documents filed Wednesday.

The teen repeatedly shot an untraceable ghost gun into a crowd, police said, and the King County prosecutor's office filed charges of first-degree assault with a firearm and unlawful possession of a handgun.

In a statement supporting the charges, police said preliminary testing of bullets recovered from the two bystanders killed showed they did not match that weapon.

The shooting in the waning hours of the Bite of Seattle festival near the Space Needle left three people dead, including a 19-year-old suspect, and at least four bystanders injured, including a toddler. Police believe it was gang-related, and they continue searching for others who might have been involved.

Police Chief Shon Barnes had previously said there was possibly another person with a gunshot wound that investigators were looking to speak with, but the department said Wednesday there was no eighth victim.

Testing on shell casings found at the scene suggest four weapons were fired, the statement said. Police said they recovered three guns, but only two of them had been fired, which means two weapons involved in the gunbattle were not found at the scene. It isn't clear which weapon or weapons fired the bullets that hit the festival attendees.

Dozens of officers were at Seattle Center, a sprawling park, providing security for the event, when the shooting began. Some heard the gunshots, and one officer saw the 15-year-old firing, police said.

A witness told investigators that he heard gunshots and saw the people around him duck, Detective Matt Blackburn wrote in the statement. The witness saw a man in a light blue top who started running; the witness believed that was where the first shots came from.

The witness reported that he then saw the 15-year-old unzip a bag that was strapped around his torso

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and pull out a gun with an extended magazine. The teen shot multiple times toward the other suspect, Blackburn wrote. Two shell casings from the teen's ghost gun were found at the scene.

The teen surrendered when confronted by an officer. As police escorted him past the dead 19-year-old's body, he said, "Love you bro," Blackburn wrote.

Prosecutors on Wednesday asked a judge to move the case to adult court, a decision that can take months after the judge considers arguments from both sides. The teen's public defender, Hong Tran, said in an email Wednesday the teen would contest the effort to try him as an adult.

If the teen is convicted as an adult, the charges would carry a sentencing range of about eight to 10 years in prison, plus possibly another five years for the firearm enhancement. However, judges in Washington may also choose to sentence juveniles as juveniles even if they are convicted in adult court.

In juvenile court, the charges would carry a sentencing range of two to 2 1/2 years. It was not immediately clear whether the firearm enhancement might add additional time in juvenile detention.

The King County Medical Examiner's Office identified the dead bystanders as Carlos Israel Sanchez Villalba, 44, and Ashley Whitehead, 56. The suspect killed was Junior Cee Niko Semo, 19.

Villalba was a husband and father of three known for his kindness and willingness to help others, according to a GoFundMe campaign launched Monday to help his family with funeral expenses.

Whitehead had just moved to Washington from Alabama a year ago and was enjoying the festival with one of her adult daughters when she was shot, her cousin Michelle Whitehead told The Associated Press. She was taken to the hospital and died in surgery, she said.

The police department opened an online portal on Wednesday for the public to share video and photos from the shooting.

Man convicted in terrorism trial over the 2022 stabbing of author Salman Rushdie

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

A man was convicted Wednesday of federal terrorism charges in the 2022 stabbing of Salman Rushdie, the author who has faced a decades-old death threat over his novel "The Satanic Verses."

After just a couple of hours of deliberations, a jury found Hadi Matar guilty of all the charges against him, including engaging in an act of transnational terrorism.

Rushdie, who was about to speak on writers' safety, was slashed 15 times on an amphitheater stage in 2022. He was gravely wounded and lost the sight in his right eye.

Prosecutors asserted that Matar was motivated by the late Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's 1989 call for Rushdie's death because of "The Satanic Verses."

"His brutal attack on Mr. Rushdie during a peaceful speaking event is a chilling reminder of the global reach of Iranian terrorism," Assistant Attorney General for National Security John Eisenberg said in a statement after the verdict, adding that "justice has been done." Iran's government has denied involvement in the attack.

Matar's defense: No evidence of his state of mind

Messages seeking comment on the verdict were sent to Matar's attorneys and Rushdie's assistant. During the trial, defense lawyer Nathaniel Barone said the government had no proof of what was in Matar's head.

Matar himself declined to testify. Rushdie did, telling jurors: "I can't say what his ambitions or his aim was, but the wounds were dispersed across my body."

Matar, 28, is already serving a 25-year New York state prison sentence on an attempted murder conviction in the stabbing. His federal sentencing is set for Nov. 3, when he faces a potential life term.

Rushdie won Britain's prestigious Booker Prize for his 1981 novel "Midnight's Children," about his native India. "The Satanic Verses," a novel of magical realism about the lives and dreams of two actors who survive a plane explosion, followed in 1988.

It drew critical acclaim in the United Kingdom but engendered protests around the Muslim world over what some believers saw as blasphemous suggestions about Islam's Prophet Muhammad, particularly in

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a dream sequence. Over the ensuing years, at least 45 people were killed in riots over the book, a Japanese translator was stabbed to death, and an Italian translator and Norwegian publisher were attacked.

Rushdie, who was born into a Muslim family, has said the dream sequence was just that. But he went into hiding for years, gradually emerging after Iran's government distanced itself in 1998 from Khomeini's fatwa, or religious edict.

"For two decades or more, I led a public life without a hint of trouble," Rushdie testified at the trial in Buffalo, New York.

Yet the fatwa was never rescinded; indeed, Khomeini's successor, the late Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, indicated in 2017 that it remained in effect. An Iranian foundation has offered a more than \$3 million bounty for killing Rushdie.

Prosecutors: Matar's messages showed him zeroing in on Rushdie

Matar broached the fatwa with contacts in messaging apps in 2021 and 2022, according to exhibits shown in court. The messages showed Matar fuming that he felt Rushdie had attacked Islam and, by surviving, emboldened others to insult the faith. Matar alluded to a 2006 comment along those lines by the late Hezbollah militant group leader Hassan Nasrallah, the messages showed.

Born in the U.S., Matar also holds citizenship in Lebanon, where Hezbollah is based. Prosecutors said that photos in Matar's New Jersey bedroom and on his computer indicated his support for Hezbollah, which the U.S. has designated a terrorist organization.

Matar "spent months planning and preparing to carry out what he hoped would be the execution of Salman Rushdie," U.S. Attorney Michael DiGiacomo said in a statement Wednesday.

The messages showed Matar initially talked about wanting to "expose" Rushdie, then about taking his life. In a private note to himself, he wrote: "We need to kill him ASAP," Assistant U.S. Attorney Timothy Lynch said in an opening statement on July 22. The prosecutor said Matar framed the planned killing as part of what he considered a jihad, or holy war.

By spring 2022, the electronic chats showed, Matar wrote that he had discerned where Rushdie lived and was tracking his public appearances, eventually pointing out his scheduled August 2022 talk at the Chautauqua Institution, a western New York arts and intellectual center.

As Rushdie was being introduced, his attacker climbed on stage behind him, then stabbed him as the audience gasped. Spectators and another speaker, Henry Reese, scrambled to aid Rushdie. Law enforcement officers, assigned to the event, arrested the attacker — soon identified as Matar — after civilians restrained him.

Rushdie published a 2024 memoir about the attack, then returned to fiction with last year's "The Eleventh Hour." The author, who was knighted by Britain's late Queen Elizabeth II, received a Dayton Literary Peace Prize lifetime achievement award in November.

Fauci repeatedly invokes the Fifth Amendment in a contentious Senate committee hearing

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Dr. Anthony Fauci on Wednesday repeatedly invoked the Fifth Amendment and declined to answer dozens of questions from senators in a Republican-led committee hearing about his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The decision, at least for now, shielded Fauci from answering questions that could expose him to accusations of lying under oath. Though he received a pardon in early 2025 from Democratic President Joe Biden, some Republicans pursuing a yearslong campaign for his arrest had suggested he could still face charges for any perjury committed during Wednesday's hearing.

The scientist, who helped lead the nation's COVID-19 response, was subpoenaed to testify under oath by Republican Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, who has long had an antagonistic relationship with Fauci.

In response to angry, sometimes mocking questions from Republican senators, Fauci declined to answer more than 100 times, injecting new drama into partisan divides that have festered for years about the

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origins and handling of the pandemic. Fauci himself has become a polarizing figure, even receiving death threats that prompted him to seek security.

In his opening statement, Fauci said Paul has an "obvious obsession with calling for my prosecution."

"The only conclusion I can reach is that the sole reason he is calling me before this committee is to get me to say something, anything, that could vindicate his repeated public pledges that I end up, in his words, 'behind bars,'" Fauci said, adding that while it pained him to do so, he was following his attorney's advice by taking the Fifth.

Paul, who has long argued that Fauci should be criminally investigated, based on his belief that the scientist was dishonest in previous testimony to Congress, announced that the committee will vote next week on whether to hold Fauci in contempt for declining to answer questions.

He did not say whether he would push for a criminal contempt referral to federal prosecutors or another charge. He also raised questions about whether Fauci's pardon affects his eligibility for Fifth Amendment protections.

Republicans accuse Fauci of lying while Democrats say he didn't deserve that

In the combative hearing, Paul and other Republicans accused Fauci of lying in earlier testimony about the coronavirus' origins, something the longtime National Institutes of Health scientist has forcefully denied. Democrats called the hearing a politically motivated attempt at entrapping Fauci and praised the scientist for his work during the pandemic.

With Fauci declining to answer questions throughout, Paul dominated the approximately three-hour hearing, listing a litany of accusations and detailed questions.

"Today will be the capstone to Anthony Fauci's 40 years of abuse of power at NIH," Paul said. "History will judge, but the facts as we now know them paint a sordid tale of dishonesty, misjudgment and ultimately the hubris, the likes of which the world has never seen."

In a heated moment during the hearing, Paul ejected Fauci's attorney, David Schertler, from the room after he tried to speak without being recognized. In a statement, Schertler said the removal was "outrageous and demonstrates the completely biased and baseless nature of this proceeding." In another statement, he called Paul's accusations about Fauci "false and disgraceful."

Democratic senators praised Fauci and said he didn't deserve the treatment he was getting.

"This hearing is designed to entrap you," said Sen. Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire.

Paul released some of Fauci's diary

Leading up to the hearing, Paul released more than 1,000 pages of Fauci's personal diary covering the pandemic years. Pointing to some notes about early efforts at understanding how the virus emerged, Paul said on social media that what Fauci "wrote privately and what he told the country are two different stories."

Some of the diary entries — including Fauci's uncertainty in the pandemic's earliest days as scientists around the world raced to understand the new virus and how best to curb it before vaccines could be created — already were reflected in a 2024 memoir and in interviews at the time.

But they have nonetheless drawn attention from people who blame Fauci for mask mandates, school closures and other policies they believe infringed on their rights as hundreds of thousands of people were dying.

President Donald Trump on Wednesday wrote on social media that he stopped relying on Fauci over the course of the pandemic because he felt the scientist made bad decisions about masks, shutdowns, and other issues. He later told reporters he watched the entire hearing.

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a longtime anti-vaccine activist before entering public office, said on social media that his department had found the diary entries on government property and had given them to the committee.

Dozens of disease experts defend Fauci in letter

Scientists also scrambled to Fauci's defense ahead of the unusual hearing — the second time he has been back before Congress to discuss pandemic origins since leaving the government in 2022. While the COVID-19 pandemic introduced him to millions of Americans, he talked the nation through numerous out-

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breaks over decades, including HIV, Ebola and the 2001 anthrax attacks, while advising seven presidents.

In a public letter, more than 150 infectious-disease experts and other scientists wrote that “no credible evidence has been produced to support these absurd charges” and that they are urging elected officials to “stop these witch-hunts.”

Among topics discussed at Wednesday’s hearing was whether NIH-funded research in China may have played a role in how the pandemic started.

Many scientists believe the virus most likely emerged in nature and jumped from animals to people, coming to light when it spread at a wildlife market in the Chinese city of Wuhan. There’s no new scientific evidence supporting the theory that the virus might instead have leaked from a laboratory, a theory Paul champions. A GOP-led subcommittee that studied the question in 2024 found no evidence linking Fauci to wrongdoing.

Fauci has long said publicly that he was open to both theories but that there’s more evidence supporting COVID-19’s natural origins.

Republicans also have accused Fauci of lying about whether his agency funded what’s known as gain-of-function research — the practice of enhancing a virus in a lab to study its potential real-world impact — at a lab in Wuhan.

The NIH, for years, gave grants to a New York nonprofit called EcoHealth Alliance, which used some of the funds to work with a Chinese lab studying coronaviruses commonly carried by bats. But the definition of gain-of-function covers both general research and especially risky experiments that enhance the ability of potential pandemic viruses to spread or cause severe disease in humans. Fauci has previously stressed he was using the risky experiment definition and “it would be molecularly impossible” for those bat virus experiments to have turned into the pandemic virus.

Trump, a Republican, paused some federally funded gain-of-function research last year, and on Tuesday his administration announced new rules to tighten oversight.

‘She killed the kids!’ 911 call from Lindsay Clancy’s husband brings tears to the courtroom

By MICHAEL CASEY and LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

PLYMOUTH, Mass. (AP) — Lindsay Clancy sobbed in court Wednesday as jurors listened to the anguished 911 call her then-husband made after returning from an errand to find she’d strangled their three children in their Massachusetts home.

On the roughly 7-minute recording, Patrick Clancy can be heard speaking with his wife upon finding her badly injured and bleeding in their yard, after she jumped from the home’s second-story window.

“Look at me,” he says. “Say my name.”

He then tells the dispatcher he’s going to check on the children. Moments later, he howls and cries after finding them in the basement. The confused dispatcher repeatedly asks what happened.

“She killed the kids!” he yells.

Three years after their deaths, the murder trial has centered on Lindsay Clancy’s mental state at the time. Her lawyers will seek to prove she had postpregnancy psychosis, a rare mental illness linked to the stress, sleep deprivation and hormonal changes that follow childbirth.

Prosecutors say Clancy, a former labor and delivery nurse at Massachusetts General Hospital, acted intentionally and is criminally responsible for the deaths of 3-year-old Dawson, 5-year-old Cora, and 8-month-old Callan in January 2023.

EDITOR’S NOTE: If you or someone you know needs help, the national suicide and crisis lifeline in the U.S. is available by calling or texting 988. There is also an online chat at 988lifeline.org

Her lawyer said in opening arguments Monday that she had bipolar disorder, and that antidepressants

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prescribed after the birth of her third child worsened her condition. On the day of the killings, Lindsay Clancy said she heard a voice telling her, "This is your last chance. Kill the children so you can kill yourself," according to her lawyer.

If convicted of murder, she faces life in prison without parole. If found not guilty due to a lack of criminal responsibility, she would be committed to a state mental health facility.

Patrick Clancy has said in interviews that he forgives his ex-wife, whom he viewed as ill rather than evil. The trial marks the first time he has seen Lindsay Casey since the killings.

A husband's emotional testimony and a chilling 911 call

Patrick Clancy testified Wednesday that his last image of Dawson was of the boy sitting on the couch, eating chicken nuggets and green beans. Lindsay Clancy had asked her husband to make a quick trip for takeout food and medication at a pharmacy for Cora. Prosecutors say this was an excuse to get him out of the house.

Jurors were shown surveillance video from the pharmacy of Patrick Clancy on the phone with his wife, asking a question about the medicine.

"She was pretty quiet. It sounded like she was busy," he testified Wednesday. "I remember hanging up thinking she was probably in the middle of giving baths or something like that."

Returning home, it was unusually silent. He called out to his family.

When no one answered, he searched the children's rooms and the bathroom, again thinking they might be in the tub, before finding blood throughout the main bedroom and a window open.

Injured but conscious, Lindsay Clancy told him she'd tried to kill herself and that the kids were in the basement, without saying they were dead. He didn't realize he was still on the phone with 911 as he ran downstairs to find each had been strangled with exercise bands.

Lindsay Clancy's parents, seated in the front of the court, also cried as the call was played. Patrick had already left the room after finishing his testimony.

Jurors were shown the clothes each child had been wearing, with a prosecutor pulling the items from clear plastic evidence bags: pajamas and a pink robe for Cora; a nightshirt and dinosaur underwear for Dawson; a red onesie decorated with snowflakes for Callan.

The trial will hinge on Lindsay Clancy's mental state

Patrick Clancy testified Monday about his wife's deteriorating mental health in the months before the killings, including her telling him about intrusive thoughts of harming the children and of suicide.

Lindsay Clancy had sought care from experts in postpartum mood disorders, was put on multiple psychiatric medications, and when nothing worked, checked in to a psychiatric hospital. She killed the children 19 days after she was discharged.

No one ever told Patrick Clancy his wife shouldn't be alone with the children, he testified Wednesday. "I didn't know what psychosis was until after this happened."

Clancy and her ex-husband accuse her medical providers of failing to properly diagnose, treat and monitor her, according to lawsuits filed earlier this year.

On cross-examination, Clancy's attorney, Kevin Reddington, aimed to demonstrate she took her medications and closely tracked her declining mental health. He introduced daily, handwritten notes she took of her medicines and her mood, including repeatedly writing "horrible thoughts." She also had a book and fact sheet on postpartum anxiety and a chart where she tracked her mood.

Reddington also got Patrick Clancy to acknowledge that many of her medical appointments starting in the summer of 2022 were with nurse practitioners and on Zoom calls lasting only 20 minutes. They also went through multiple medications she was prescribed, including Seroquel -- an antipsychotic medication for which doctors increased her dosage in December.

"The idea was that it would help with sleep, but she didn't get better. She got worse," Patrick Clancy said.

Wisconsin judge says voters who have returned absentee ballot for state primary cannot get a new one

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Wisconsin voters who have already returned their absentee ballots for the state's primary are not allowed to void those and request a new one, a judge ruled Wednesday.

The ruling deals a blow to Democrats, who filed a lawsuit seeking to give voters a do-over because of a chaotic party primary in the governor's race.

More than 117,000 absentee ballots had been returned by Wednesday. Democrats were concerned that many of those might have been cast for Lt. Gov. Sara Rodriguez, who had been seen as a Democratic frontrunner before she dropped out on July 17 amid a campaign finance scandal. A day later, Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley, who had bowed out on July 8, reentered the race.

Rodriguez's name remains on the ballot, along with former state economic development director Missy Hughes, who dropped out in June.

The bipartisan Wisconsin Elections Commission voted 4-2 on July 9 to distribute guidance to clerks saying absentee voters cannot change their ballot after it has been returned. The rarely used process is known as ballot spoiling.

Democrats objected and supported the lawsuit filed by three voters, arguing that state law allows voters who have submitted absentee ballots to change their mind before those ballots are counted on Election Day.

"Voters across Wisconsin will be disenfranchised" if not allowed to do that, attorney Eduardo Castro argued in court on Tuesday.

But Dane County Circuit Judge David Conway disagreed, ruling on Wednesday that "the unambiguous language of the statute does not allow a voter to spoil an absentee ballot after it is returned." He said the guidance issued by the elections commission to the roughly 2,000 clerks who run elections at the local level was consistent with the law.

The judge declined to issue a temporary restraining order sought by Democrats. They had wanted the judge to order the state elections commission to rescind its guidance.

"The judge got it right," said Don Millis, the Republican chair of the elections commission. "The law is clear. Once a voter returns an absentee ballot to the clerk, the voter cannot decide to change his or her vote. The law does not permit do-overs."

Wisconsin Democratic Party Chair Devin Remiker said the ruling was wrong, but didn't say if the party would appeal.

The Republican National Committee opposed the effort to allow for revoting.

Ballot spoiling was the subject of a 2022 lawsuit brought by a Republican group. In that case, a Waukesha County judge agreed that the elections commission must rescind its guidance that allowed voters to cast a second ballot. But the state appeals court earlier this year vacated that ruling on technical grounds and did not rule on the merits.

The winner of the Democratic primary will advance to November's general election, most likely against Republican U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany, who has only token opposition in his party's primary. Democratic Gov. Tony Evers is not seeking a third term.

Democrats hope to keep the governor's office and flip both chambers of the Legislature to gain full control of state government for the first time since 2010.

Lindsey Graham returns home one last time for his funeral in South Carolina

By MEG KINNARD and JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Sen. Lindsey Graham returned for the last time Wednesday to South Carolina, where powerful friends remembered him as someone who never stopped working for the state he loved.

After Graham was eulogized Tuesday in the nation's capital as an indefatigable dealmaker by the presi-

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dent, vice president and others, mourners in Columbia recalled him as the son of pool hall owners who "was born with a plastic fork in his mouth," as former Rep. Trey Gowdy put it.

The Republican seemed to know every mayor and small-town police chief and the location of every Chick-fil-A in South Carolina, and made sure GOP candidates had money to run in legislative and local elections across the state.

"Lindsey Graham understood the hopes and dreams and needs of his state and delivered every time," said Republican Gov. Henry McMaster, who ended his remarks by telling Graham he loved him.

Friends recall his humor, work ethic and love of people

Graham died suddenly on July 11 at his home in Washington, likely of an aortic tear, according to preliminary findings. He had just returned from a whirlwind trip to a NATO summit in Turkey, where he celebrated his 71st birthday, and a visit to Ukraine as he negotiated punishing sanctions against Russia. Senators voted late Tuesday to advance the package as a final gesture for their colleague.

Wednesday's funeral was at First Baptist, the giant downtown church where his predecessor Republican Sen. Strom Thurmond was eulogized 23 years ago.

One of Graham's many friends in Congress, Gowdy said the senator rose to power through humor, genuine caring for all people and a relentless work ethic. He joked the governor should change the name of the state capital of Columbia to honor Graham, even though his friend wouldn't want it.

"It wasn't the trapping of office he cared about. It was the work," Gowdy said.

Graham also remembered for peacemaking and unpopular votes

Gowdy spoke for nearly 30 minutes. He remembered a man who knew who he was, cast unpopular votes because they were the right thing to do, loved kids even though he was never married or a father — one joking bit of advice Graham gave youngsters was to "never do for yourself what someone else will do for you" — and was the least pretentious person in politics.

"He was the worst at carrying a grudge," Gowdy related, drawing laughter from the crowd. "I had to keep a list of who we were mad at because he could not remember who had done what."

People who thought Graham was a warmonger were wrong, Gowdy said. President Donald Trump said Tuesday that "Lindsey liked war."

"Blessed be the peacemakers. He was on a trip that turned out to be his last trip trying to broker peace in a war where hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives," Gowdy said.

Democratic U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, the only remaining member of the South Carolina delegation in power when Graham arrived in Washington in 1995, read Psalm 23.

In a memory that reflected Graham's ability to see across party lines, McMaster recalled how Graham, newly elected to the Senate, grasped the hand of longtime Democratic Sen. Fritz Hollings and raised it up to a largely Republican crowd. Applause for Hollings had been "polite," he said, but "began to swell" as Graham was announced.

"So there we were, if you get this picture, our two U.S. senators, hands held high, waving to the crowd, when the thunderous applause washed off both of them," McMaster said. "I believe that not many men would have done what Lindsey did."

Funeral process included a horse-drawn caisson and military jets

On Tuesday, Graham's flag-draped casket was at the U.S. Capitol, where the Republican spent more than 30 years talking and laughing and badgering his colleagues into action. Trump then joined foreign leaders at a memorial service at the Washington National Cathedral, a testament to Graham's stature on the global stage, calling him "a giant of the United States Senate, a true American original who left us much too soon."

Wednesday's ceremonies began at the Statehouse, where Graham started his political career in 1993. A horse-drawn caisson carrying his casket paused in front of a dozen law enforcement officers for a flyover by four military jets, and then proceeded to the church, where his family followed military pallbearers inside. A 130-member choir sang hymns.

Hundreds of movers in South Carolina politics gathered, including both nominees for governor — Republican Attorney General Alan Wilson and Democratic state Rep. Jermaine Johnson — along with longtime Republican politicians like former House Speaker and Ambassador to Canada David Wilkins and former

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U.S. Rep. Henry Brown.

Graham's burial Wednesday near his home in Pickens County was planned as a private ceremony.

Graham's sister now faces a special primary

Several speakers praised the senator's younger sister Darline Graham, who dabbed her eyes as she sat with her family in a front pew.

"What a powerful, graceful person to show up here under such immense pressure," Sen. Tim Scott said in his eulogy.

Graham's death, after winning the Republican nomination for a fifth term, has created opportunities for political change. McMaster named Darline Graham to hold his seat until January. She then surprised many by deciding to run for the full six-year term herself.

Darline Graham now has eight competitors in a special primary on Aug. 11 to decide the Republican nominee, including former Gov. Mark Sanford and U.S. Reps. Ralph Norman and Russell Fry, all three of whom attended Wednesday's service. Three other candidates who paid the filing fee were kicked off the ballot because they didn't meet new party requirements. A runoff, if needed, is Aug. 25.

Fed leaves interest rate unchanged but with 3 dissents as Warsh praises 'good family fight'

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve left its key interest rate unchanged Wednesday, although three officials dissented in favor of higher rates as the central bank wrestles with how to deal with persistently high inflation.

The Fed's rate-setting committee reached its decision after two days of deliberations, marking the fifth straight meeting at which the benchmark rate was kept at around 3.6%.

Some economists and Wall Street analysts had predicted the Fed would hike its rate by a quarter point. But while the decision to stand pat could be seen as good news for consumers, they might not feel much relief with the average credit card rate still near 20% and mortgage rates the highest since last August.

Inflation has been stuck above the central bank's 2% target for more than five years. The Iran war has generated uncertainty over the economic outlook and has driven energy prices higher, intensifying inflationary pressure and creating a quandary for Fed policymakers. In addition, the vast amounts of money being spent by technology companies on artificial intelligence are both driving manufacturing and have resulted in increased prices for items such as computer chips and electricity. President Donald Trump's tariffs on foreign goods are also adding to inflation pressures.

The three regional Fed bank presidents who dissented — Beth Hammack of the Cleveland Fed; Neel Kashkari from Minneapolis; and Lorie Logan from Dallas — had previously called for or signaled that they would be open to raising rates to combat high prices.

"The dissents send a clear message: The Fed is not yet convinced the inflation battle has been won," said Seema Shah, chief global strategist at Principal Asset Management.

At a press conference following the rate decision, Fed Chair Kevin Warsh reiterated the Fed's commitment to combating inflation. At the same time, Warsh said, "We have no magic wand. This isn't something we're going to be able to carry out in days or weeks."

Warsh said he welcomed vigorous debate at the committee meeting. "I asked for a good family fight and I got one," he told reporters at a press conference.

Warsh has sought to make the central bank more tight-lipped about what it's doing. When Fed officials make their views public, he reasons, they are less likely to adjust to new information. Even without much guidance from the Fed, he said approvingly that financial markets had made their own judgments about interest rates, pushing up yields in the past few weeks. The yield on the 10-year Treasury, for instance, has risen from around 4.50% in mid-June to 4.64% just ahead of the Fed's rate decision.

The market is "learning to play the ball and not the referee," Warsh said.

But some economists were frustrated by the Fed chair's ambiguous answers to questions. Thomas Ryan

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and Stephen Brown of Capital Economics, for instance, complained in a commentary that Warsh's "vague" responses "make forecasting the Fed's next move even trickier than it already was."

Coming into Wednesday, traders on Wall Street saw a 33% chance the Fed would issue a rate hike, although most expected policymakers to hold off, reluctant to risk disrupting financial markets. But most expect a rate hike in September, according to data from CME Group.

Trump, who had persistently pressured the Fed to cut rates, voiced support for Warsh. "He's fantastic. He's a brilliant guy. Smart. I know he'd love to see lower interest rates, but he's got a board and it's a political board and they want to keep rates up," Trump told reporters.

Fed officials likely want to see more economic data before changing the benchmark rate. On Thursday, the Commerce Department delivers the first look at April-June economic growth and it will also publish the Fed's preferred inflation measure – the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index – for June.

Adding uncertainty to the Fed's decision-making process is the rising violence in Iran. The price of oil briefly blasted past \$100 a barrel last week on intensifying fighting.

After the U.S. and Israel attacks on Feb. 28, Iran shut down the Strait of Hormuz – through which a fifth of the world's oil and natural gas pass. That caused the greatest disruption in oil supplies in history and sent energy prices surging. They've since bobbed up and down depending on the ever-changing state of the conflict and negotiations to de-escalate it, but the average cost for a barrel is \$10 to \$15 more today than it was at this point last year.

Inflation has exceeded the Fed's 2% target since early 2021 when the U.S. economy overheated as it roared back from COVID-19 lockdowns. Inflation peaked at just over 9% in mid-2022 and began to drop in the face of 11 rate hikes by the Fed in 2022 and 2023. But progress has more or less stalled.

So-called core inflation – which excludes volatile food and energy prices – cooled in June, partly because apartment rents aren't rising as fast as they had been. And a temporary drop in gasoline prices last month also helped contain overall inflation.

But several Fed policymakers have been arguing that the Fed will have to raise rates to return inflation to the 2% target.

"Sternly staring at inflation until it melts before our withering gaze is not an option," Christopher Waller, an influential member of the Fed's governing board, said in a speech this month. Still, Waller voted to leave rates alone this week.

Trump and DOJ ask Supreme Court to toss \$83 million defamation verdict in E. Jean Carroll case

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump and the Justice Department are asking the Supreme Court to toss an \$83 million defamation verdict won by writer E. Jean Carroll after she accused him of sexual assault, saying he can't be sued for comments he made while he was president.

It's the second time Trump has asked the justices to nix damages awarded by a jury to Carroll, a longtime advice columnist and former TV talk show host. The Supreme Court refused in June to hear his appeal of another verdict, for \$5 million, that found him liable for sexual abuse and defamation.

The latest case centers on comments Trump made during his first term as president. The Justice Department wants to invoke the Westfall Act, which shields government employees from being sued for doing their jobs.

"Absent this Court's intervention, the sitting President is facing nearly a hundred million dollars of personal liability for conduct that was well within the scope of his federal office," federal attorneys wrote. "That alone deserves this Court's attention."

The documents were reviewed Wednesday by The Associated Press and expected to be formally docketed with the court shortly.

Trump's lawyers, meanwhile, argued that an appeals court "engaged in procedural contortions" to avoid addressing Trump's claims that presidential immunity protects him from the \$83 million award because

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he made the statements in question in 2019 while he was president.

The lawyers argued that the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan ruled in a manner that "cries out for this Court's review in this unprecedented case" and called the damages "grossly excessive."

"This is the first case in our nation's history in which a court has imposed damages liability on a president for his conduct in office," the lawyers wrote.

Carroll's lawyers have declined to comment on the latest Trump filing.

Trump has long argued he cannot be sued over comments he made about Carroll during his first term where he disavowed knowing her and attacked her motivations for going public with her story in a recent memoir. He's also asking the Supreme Court justices to reconsider their rejection of his appeal in the \$5 million verdict.

The appeal comes about two years after the Supreme Court granted Trump broad immunity from criminal prosecution as a former president.

Carroll testified twice before New York juries that Trump sexually assaulted her in spring 1996 in a dressing room at Bergdorf Goodman, a luxury retailer across the street from Trump Tower. She first went public with the claims in a 2019 memoir.

She sued Trump for defamation after he accused her of making up the allegation to help book sales, adding that he'd never met her and "she's not my type." He has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.

A Manhattan jury awarded her \$83 million in damages in January 2024. Lower courts have so far rejected Trump's appeals to overturn the verdict, though the New York-based appeals court split over the decision and agreed to delay that payout until the Supreme Court weighs in.

In 2023, another jury said Carroll was entitled to \$5 million after concluding that Trump had subjected her to sexual abuse in the department store encounter and for defamation for remarks he had made after his first term ended. That judgment has been paid.

The Associated Press does not identify people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they come forward publicly, as Carroll has done.

Oil prices jump, while the Dow drops more than 1,100 as sinking AI stocks drag Wall Street lower

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Oil prices got back to jumping on Wednesday, while sinking technology stocks dragged Wall Street lower amid uncertainty about what the Federal Reserve will do to get high inflation under control.

The S&P 500 fell 1.5% after swinging sharply between gains and losses in the last hour of trading. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 1,153 points, or 2.2%, and the Nasdaq composite slumped 1.7% to fall 9.8% below its record set last month.

The action was more decisive in the oil market, where the price of Brent crude leaped 7.3% to settle at \$88.09 per barrel after fighting resumed in the war with Iran and raised worries about the global flow of oil.

Brent oil's price had swung as low as \$72 early this month and as high as \$102 last week on uncertainty about whether the United States and Iran could reach a deal to allow oil tankers to move freely again from the Middle East to customers worldwide.

The swings have raised worries that inflation will reaccelerate, and traders came into the day betting on a roughly 34% probability that the Fed would raise its main interest rate in the afternoon, according to data from CME Group.

Higher rates can keep a lid on inflation, but they can also slow the economy and undercut prices for stocks and other investments.

Fed officials instead voted to keep the federal funds rate steady, though three members of the policy-making committee did want to raise rates. The Fed's chairman, Kevin Warsh, implied the bond market may already be doing some of the work to restrain inflation, and he pointed to how yields have climbed since the central bank's last meeting six weeks ago.

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He reiterated his commitment to get inflation back to 2% following years of faster-than-hoped increases in prices, but he also stuck to his plan of giving financial markets fewer clues about what the Fed may do with interest rates in the near future.

With less guidance from the Fed, financial markets may be set for more volatile trading amid the uncertainty.

"Did the Fed take an explicit change in its policy rate today?" Warsh asked rhetorically in a press conference following the Fed's decision. "No, but I think that's the beginning of the story."

Treasury yields swiveled up and down following the Fed's decision and Warsh's insistence on not guiding the market.

The yield on the two-year Treasury, which closely tracks expectations for Fed action, fell to 4.24% from 4.26% late Tuesday.

But the 10-year Treasury yield, which moves more with expectations for inflation and economic growth in upcoming years, went in the opposite direction. It jumped to 4.68% from 4.61% late Tuesday.

That's up from 3.97% before the war with Iran sent oil prices much higher, and the increase has already sent long-term U.S. mortgage rates to their highest level in nearly a year.

Higher rates particularly hurt stocks seen as the most expensive, and scrutiny has already been rising on makers of computer chips and other winners of the frenzy around artificial-intelligence technology.

The recent surges for sellers of computer processors and memory are backed by real revenue and profits, but the exceptional growth won't be sustainable if AI does not produce as much profit and productivity as hoped.

The skepticism has hit South Korea's stock market in particular because it's dominated by two tech giants, Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix. Seoul's Kospi index tumbled 6% Wednesday, a day after it plunged 10.8%, and trimmed its gain for the year so far to 34.4%.

SK Hynix's stock in Seoul dropped 9.6%. It reported record amounts of revenue and profit for a quarter thanks to strong demand because of AI. But its 257% growth in revenue still wasn't enough to meet analysts' expectations.

On Wall Street, Nvidia was the heaviest weight on the S&P 500 after the chip company fell 3.6%.

KLA Corp., whose products and services help make semiconductors, lost 10.8% even though it reported stronger-than-forecast profit and revenue for the latest quarter. Expectations were high after its stock surged nearly 150% in this year's first six months.

On Tuesday, gains for stocks outside of AI helped offset weakness for tech companies. Analysts have been saying such a rotation in the market from AI to less-loved areas could be healthy, but the majority of U.S. stocks fell with tech on Wednesday.

Hims & Hers Health tumbled 14.7%, for example, after the Federal Trade Commission, Utah and California alleged it shared consumers' sensitive health information about medical conditions with third-party advertising platforms despite claiming its services maintain consumers' privacy. Hims & Hers said their lawsuit is contorting "the law to try to manufacture claims," which it called baseless.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 112.63 points to 7,316.15. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 1,153.18 to 51,594.14, and the Nasdaq composite sank 433.97 to 24,442.94.

In stock markets elsewhere around the world, indexes were mixed. Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose 2%, and Japan's Nikkei 225 fell 1.5% for two of the bigger moves.

'Pleading the Fifth' invokes a constitutional amendment that has a long history in US society

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — It was important enough to the framers of the U.S. Constitution to be included in the first 10 amendments known as the Bill of Rights — that no person "shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself."

As part of the Fifth Amendment, the right against self-incrimination is well known to the general public

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thanks to years of legal and police procedural shows on television as well as instances of high-profile use in real life. The amendment also includes a right to due process and protects against being prosecuted twice for the same offense.

It has seeped into the culture, too. "Pleading the Fifth" has become an idiom in the United States, used jokingly in casual conversation as a way to get out of answering a possibly uncomfortable question.

It's not a uniquely American principle

The general principle is not a uniquely American one. Its roots include English common law dating back to the 17th century.

At the time the Constitution was being written, it was enshrined along with other amendments to put limits on the newly created federal government. The Fifth Amendment and a handful of others were focused on criminal justice issues, with other amendments including things like the right to a lawyer and a speedy jury trial, and a prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment.

One of the core tenets of the U.S. criminal justice system is that people are innocent until proven guilty, and that it's up to the prosecuting power to prove guilt. Without a right to avoid self-incrimination, people could be put in the position of having to prove their own innocence rather than being shown as guilty.

It can be used in a number of circumstances

Over the course of U.S. history, the Fifth Amendment has expanded beyond federal criminal cases to the state court level, and to civil cases as well. There's a difference, though.

In criminal cases, if someone on trial invokes the amendment and refuses to testify, the jurors must be told that they can't assume that silence equals guilt. In civil cases, drawing a negative inference from a refusal to testify can be allowed.

Of course, even in criminal cases, if jurors are told it doesn't mean a defendant is guilty, they could still believe that not testifying correlates to having done what they are accused of. Witnesses can also plead the Fifth, but they can answer other questions — as opposed to defendants, for whom it's all or nothing in regards to testifying.

The Fifth Amendment's use has also shown up in hearings before Congress, when those who have been subpoenaed to testify under oath reference it out of concerns that something they say could then be used in some kind of criminal proceeding.

High-profile figures have invoked it

In a hearing before a Republican-led Senate committee about how he handled the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Anthony Fauci turned to the Fifth in declining to answer questions. It drew scorn from Republicans, while Democrats supported him.

In 2022, when he was out of the White House after his first term as president, Donald Trump used the Fifth repeatedly in a deposition for a civil case against the Trump Organization in New York.

In the 1950s, when Sen. Joe McCarthy held anticommunist hearings, some witnesses used the amendment when being questioned. Even though they had the right, McCarthy condemned them for it, and they faced consequences that included public censure and blacklisting.

Ukraine says it hits 2 major Russian oil refineries hours after Zelenskyy's meeting with Trump

By HANNA ARHIROVA and BARRY HATTON Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian forces hit two of Russia's biggest oil refineries overnight in its latest long-range strikes, officials said Wednesday, as Kyiv deepened its economic, military and diplomatic pressure on Moscow.

Ukraine's almost daily long-range drone and missile strikes using domestically developed weapons have battered Russian oil facilities for months. The operation has brought a fuel crisis that is embarrassing the Kremlin more than four years after Russia's all-out invasion of its neighbor.

The overnight attacks started fires at a Lukoil refinery in Russia's Perm region, more than 1,500 kilometers (900 miles) from Ukraine, and a refinery in Ryazan, about 400 kilometers (180 miles) from the border,

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Ukraine's Security Service and General Staff said in separate statements.

The refineries have a combined annual production capacity of around 220 million barrels of oil, according to Ukraine, and make a vital contribution to Russia's military effort and its government revenue.

It was not immediately possible to independently verify the claims. Ryazan Gov. Pavel Malkov said only that six people were taken to a hospital after a drone attack. He said drone debris caused fires at unidentified "industrial sites."

Russian online retailer Wildberries, a major supplier likened to Amazon that Ukraine has targeted in recent days, said it evacuated employees from a facility in Ryazan but provided no further details.

Russia has sophisticated air defenses but its vast territory is hard to comprehensively cover.

The attacks came hours after President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited Washington on Tuesday for talks with U.S. President Donald Trump to push for more vital American help for Ukraine's fight against its much bigger enemy.

"Russia must feel that every day of this war will only come at a higher cost for it. We need to weaken the aggressor and keep up the pressure to bring an end to this war closer," Zelenskyy said on social media.

Ukraine's recent high-profile successes against Russia have impressed Washington and helped restore U.S. goodwill after Trump's reluctance at the start of his second term to keep supporting Kyiv. That stance had raised the specter of Ukraine and Europe having to stand up to Russian aggression alone.

Zelenskyy says he had a good meeting with Trump

Zelenskyy said he had a "good meeting" with the American president, and Trump described the meeting as a "Great Honor." The talks took place behind closed doors.

"Many things were discussed. The meeting went very well!" Trump wrote on Truth Social.

Zelenskyy said he also had a meeting in Washington with representatives of both parties in the U.S. Senate, with more than 60 senators in attendance, as Ukraine pushes for more sanctions on Russia. He also met with representatives of Lockheed Martin, days after he welcomed a delegation from Raytheon to Kyiv.

The U.S. weapons manufacturers are a crucial source of sophisticated weaponry, such as Patriot air defense systems, that Ukraine hopes to make itself. Trump said earlier this month he would grant Ukraine licenses to manufacture the Patriots it needs to counter Russia's ballistic missiles.

Zelenskyy says Ukraine is discussing joint production and technology exchange with both Lockheed Martin and Raytheon.

Ukraine is ready to share its cutting-edge — and battle-tested — drone technology. Its swift technical innovation has paid dividends as it helps pin down Russia's bigger army on the front line and denies it supplies by hitting rear areas.

That has impressed countries around the world. Matthew Whitaker, the U.S. Ambassador to NATO, said during a visit to Ukraine earlier this week: "From reconnaissance and logistics to precision strikes, Ukraine has shown the world how unmanned systems can give smaller forces a decisive edge."

US envoys to visit Kyiv but no date set

Prospects for a settlement to stop the fighting appear dim, despite a yearlong diplomatic push by the Trump administration.

But U.S. officials also agreed that Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, the president's main envoys, would make a trip to Kyiv sometime in the future, according to a person familiar with the talks who was granted anonymity to discuss the closed-door meeting.

Maj. Gen. Mykhailo Drapatyi, the new commander-in-chief of Ukraine's military, said in a social media post on Wednesday that he had held his first phone conversation with Gen. Alexis G. Grynkeiwich, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe and Commander of U.S. European Command.

"I outlined my vision of Ukraine's victory and the capabilities required to achieve it," said Drapatyi, who was appointed last week as part of a government reshuffle.

"At this stage of the war, we must strengthen operations across multiple domains, prevent enemy infiltration into our defensive lines, and expand both long-range and medium-range precision strikes against the enemy," he added.

Ukraine says it hits over 200 Russian vessels in 3 weeks

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Ukrainian units also have struck 201 Russian vessels over the past three weeks in the Black Sea and Sea of Azov, which border both countries, a senior military official said.

The tally doesn't include vessels hit by Ukraine's Security Service and other military groups, a Ukrainian military commander who could be identified only by his call sign Magyar, in keeping with the rules of the Ukrainian military, said late Tuesday.

Ukrainian forces also struck a naval base used by Russia's Black Sea, according to the General Staff.

It reported other strikes on a radar station in Russia's Bryansk region on the border and on a drone launch site and a road bridge in the occupied part of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region.

The Russian Defense Ministry reported Wednesday that its air defenses shot down 295 Ukrainian drones overnight above a number of Russian regions and occupied Crimea.

Russian glide bombs struck the northeastern city of Kharkiv and 17 other places in the region of the same name over the previous 24 hours, wounding 11 people, the head of the regional military administration, Oleh Syniehubov, said.

FIFA hits Argentina with World Cup charges for scuffle and 'Malvinas' banner

CORAL GABLES, Fla. (AP) — FIFA lodged disciplinary charges against two Argentina players Wednesday for striking Spain opponents moments after the World Cup final and charged Argentina's soccer federation for players showing a political banner about the Falkland Islands after beating England in the semifinals.

A list of disciplinary cases opened by FIFA against Argentina also include "discriminatory chants and gestures" by fans, alleged assault by an assistant coach after the final and "throwing of objects by spectators in relation to several matches" at the World Cup.

Argentina midfielder Leandro Paredes faces three charges of assault in the post-game clashes after Spain's 1-0 win on July 19, defender Nahuel Molina faces two charges and coach Roberto Ayala one.

Molina and Thiago Almada also are charged with unsporting behavior, with the same charge leveled against Spain player Gavi.

Argentina's players carried a banner with the slogan "Las Malvinas son Argentinas" — "The Malvinas are Argentine" — after beating England 2-1 in the semifinals.

Argentina refers to the Falkland Islands as Islas Malvinas. They were invaded in 1982 under orders from Argentina's then-military dictatorship, triggering a 10-week war won by Britain.

British government officials urged FIFA to investigate, and the soccer body said Wednesday the formal charge was "using a sports event for demonstrations of a non-sporting nature."

FIFA said all the people charged "have now been provided with the opportunity to present their position, following which a decision will be issued by the FIFA Disciplinary Committee in due course."

Wisconsin's appeals court overturns ruling that had restored collective bargaining power

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — A Wisconsin appeals court on Wednesday restored a 2011 anti-union law that abolished collective bargaining rights, in a setback for unions and public workers. Unions are expected to appeal, sending the case to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, which is controlled by liberal justices.

The 2024 ruling striking down the law as unconstitutional had been on hold pending appeal, so Wednesday's reversal does not change the status quo. The law remains in effect, as it has been the past 15 years, as the legal fight continues.

Enactment of a 2011 anti-union state law, championed by Republicans, sparked weeks of protests and made Wisconsin the center of a national battle over union rights.

That law, known as Act 10, effectively ended most public employees' ability to bargain for wage increases and other issues, and forced them to pay more for health insurance and retirement benefits.

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Wisconsin court overturns ruling that struck down anti-union law

Supporters of the law say it gives local governments more control over workers and the powers needed to cut costs. They argue that repealing the law, which allowed schools and local governments to raise money through higher employee contributions for benefits, would bankrupt those entities.

Opponents argue the law has hurt schools and government agencies by stripping employees of the right to collectively bargain over pay and working conditions.

Christina Brey, a spokesperson for the unions that brought the lawsuit, said they remain confident on the merits of the case and that they are considering all available options.

"Wisconsin is better when all employees have a say in our workplaces, whether about class sizes in our schools, safety on the job, hours or any other number of areas," Brey said. "Public service workers across the state won't stop until we regain free, fair and full collective bargaining rights to negotiate with our employers."

Former Republican Gov. Scott Walker, who introduced and championed the law, praised the decision.

"This ruling is a major win for the hard-working taxpayers of Wisconsin and the people they elect to run our schools, state, and local governments," Walker said in a text message.

All five of the Democratic candidates for governor this year have vowed to repeal the law if elected. The primary is Aug. 11.

Tens of thousands protested the anti-union law at the state Capitol

The law was Walker's signature legislative achievement, catapulting him onto the national political stage and spurring an unsuccessful attempt to recall him from office. Walker used the furor to mount a brief, ill-fated run for president that ended in 2015.

The Republican-controlled Legislature approved the law despite the massive protests that went on for weeks and drew as many as 100,000 people to the state Capitol.

The law effectively ended collective bargaining for most public unions by allowing them to bargain solely over base wage increases no greater than inflation. It also disallowed the automatic withdrawal of union dues, required annual recertification votes for unions, and forced public workers to pay more for health insurance and retirement benefits. It led to a dramatic decrease in union membership across Wisconsin.

The law has withstood numerous legal challenges over the years, but this is the first since the Wisconsin Supreme Court flipped to liberal control in 2023.

The lawsuit, filed by seven unions and three union leaders, argued Act 10 should be struck down because it creates unconstitutional exemptions for firefighters and other public safety workers. Attorneys for the Legislature and state agencies countered that the exemptions are legal, have already been upheld by other courts, and that the case should be dismissed.

The Legislature said in court filings that arguments made in the current case were rejected in 2014 by the state Supreme Court. The only change since that ruling is the makeup of the Wisconsin Supreme Court, attorneys for the Legislature said.

Appeals court agrees with Republicans, questions timing of lawsuit

The three-judge appeals court panel ruled in a 2-1 decision to overturn a December 2024 ruling from Dane County Circuit Judge Jacob Frost, saying the challenged provisions of the law did not violate equal protection guarantees of the Wisconsin Constitution.

The lower court "had no legal basis" to declare the law unconstitutional, the appeals court said.

The Wisconsin Legislature had a "rational basis" for only placing certain public safety workers under the law, the appeals court said.

"Courts must respect both precedent and our role in deferring to the Legislature's fiscal policy decisions," the appeals court said.

Appeals Court Judge Shelley Grogan said in a concurring opinion that the timing of the lawsuit was "to say the least, suspect." The lawsuit was filed in November 2023, three months after the Wisconsin Supreme Court switched from majority conservative control to a majority of liberal justices.

"Renewed attempts to attack Act 10 on already-rejected bases simply because the composition of our supreme court has changed must be rejected," Grogan wrote. "A law's constitutionality does not ebb and

flow with a court's composition, and the judicial branch must not be used to advance political agendas on either side of the political spectrum."

Appeals Court Judge Lisa Neubauer, the lone liberal on the three-judge panel, dissented, saying the lower court was correct. She said the Legislature made "arbitrary and irrational distinctions" by taking away collective bargaining rights from some public employees but not others.

Fringe Israeli settler group is sneaking into Syria to try to claim land for a Jewish outpost

By NATALIE MELZER, ABBY SEWELL and JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

NAHARIYA, Israel (AP) — The Israeli military was about to launch a nighttime strike on a group of men in southern Syria when the soldiers noticed the long curls dangling from the temples of their targets. The troops held their fire.

These were not Syrian militants attempting to breach Israel's border, but religious Jews who had slipped into Syria and were on their way back.

The episode, first reported last week by Israel's public broadcaster and confirmed to The Associated Press by the Israeli military, has helped raise the profile of a fringe group of Israeli settlers that has staged numerous incursions into Syria, where they hope to establish Jewish settlements.

Israel's military has occupied the area in southern Syria for more than a year, but forays by civilian settler groups into the region have only recently become a regular occurrence.

The groups, with members numbering in the dozens, have attempted to cross from Israel to Syria every few days in recent weeks. The military is tasked with reining them in and, while most Israelis regard them as fringe, the wider settlement movement in Israel has strong backers in the country's far-right government.

The most prominent of the groups behind the incursions in Syria is known as "Pioneers of Bashan."

Pioneers of Bashan are named after a biblical region

Formed early last year, the Pioneers of Bashan are a group of right-wing Israeli activists aiming to establish Jewish settlements inside Syria. They are named after the biblical region of Bashan, which includes part of modern-day Syria and neighboring Jordan.

They have their sights set on an area of southwestern Syria that includes the provinces of Quneitra, Daraa and Sweida.

Part of this area, including the summit of Mount Hermon, is a "buffer zone" Israel declared in December 2024, soon after the ouster of former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in an insurgent offensive.

The region was known in Scripture for its fertile land and came to be associated with strength and divine providence. In the Bible, the Israelites under Moses conquered the Bashan from the mythical King Og and it was then handed to some of the Israelite tribes.

Members of the group claim a historical right to these lands and argue that their presence there will help Israel defend the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria during the 1967 Mideast war and later annexed — a move not recognized by most of the international community.

Some claim that Israeli settlement of the areas would protect members of the Druze religious minority after violence erupted last year between Druze groups and Sunni Bedouin tribes and Syrian government security forces. Hundreds of civilians — mostly Druze — were killed in sectarian revenge attacks.

Amos Azaria, a Pioneers of Bashan leader, said the group aims to establish a "humanitarian corridor" from Israel to the Druze enclave of Sweida by depopulating adjacent Sunni-majority areas.

"The entire Daraa district ... must be cleared of the enemies seeking our destruction and instead be filled with Jewish settlement," said Azaria, a computer science professor at Ariel University in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Aim to establish a Jewish outpost inside Syria

The group seeks first to establish a Jewish outpost in southern Syria next to the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights. Outposts, which settlers often call "young settlements," describe rustic footholds in territory they

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desire.

Settlers normally establish outposts in the hope that one day Israel's government will legalize them. That's how many Jewish settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank — which rights groups say are major drivers of settler violence and displacement of Palestinians — got their start.

So far their incursions into Syria have been brief. The military has removed the activists before they have been able to build anything.

Videos on the group's X account from July 5 show a group of religious teens seated on the ground with their arms linked together, as soldiers try to pry them apart.

A second video shows soldiers shoving several of the activists and zip tying their hands behind their backs.

A video posted by the group in April shows several dozen activists waving Israeli flags and chanting on the roof of a house said to be on the outskirts of the Syrian village of Hader, in Quneitra, as Israeli soldiers look on.

Israeli military says the group compromises its operations

Israel's military says it takes a firm hand with the border-crossers. It has repeatedly condemned the group for diverting troops' attention from military operations and compromising their security. It says it detains civilians caught crossing the border and hands them over to police, saying it "expects law enforcement authorities to bring those involved to justice."

Israel's Channel 12 reported last week that no indictments have been filed so far.

The border-crossers say they have cozy relationships with members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government. Several government ministers have expressed support for their cause, and the group's social media platforms document meetings it has held with at least two cabinet ministers, Amihai Eliyahu and Shlomo Karhi.

"We have support from friends in the government and many members of the Knesset," Azaria said.

Syria and Lebanon are more concerned about military occupation

Syrian officials have not commented publicly on the attempts by Israeli settler groups to enter Syria.

The Syrian government has condemned Israel's occupation of southern Syria and frequently calls for Israeli forces to withdraw and for the international community to intervene. Israeli troops have carried out incursions and raids in areas of Syria outside the buffer zone, sometimes clashing with local residents, who have increasingly attempted to block roads to keep them out.

Since Oct. 7, 2023, a similar movement has staged occasional marches along the Gaza border calling to reestablish settlements in the Gaza Strip. Israel removed its 21 settlements as part of its 2005 withdrawal from Gaza.

In Lebanon, a fringe Israeli settler group — "Uri Tzafon," or "Awaken, O North" — has staged incursions into the southern part of the country. Like Syrian officials, the Lebanese government has paid little attention to the group, focusing on calling for withdrawal of the Israeli army from southern Lebanon.

Still, some have warned against entirely discounting the settler groups.

Lebanese Deputy Prime Minister Tarek Mitri wrote on X of the attempts by the Uri Tzafon group to enter the country, "It is true that they are a small and fringe group and they withdrew under orders from the Israeli army."

But he pointed out that the movement to settle the West Bank began with an embattled band of right-wing religious activists, known as Gush Emunim, "which in its early days was a small group that faced some obstacles and difficulties."

Wildfires are more extreme in Europe and North America, but global burning is oddly decreasing

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

It seems as if the world is afire this summer. But even as wildfires in Europe and North America grow more extreme, key worldwide burning statistics are at a record low largely because Africa and Asia are

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controlling fire more.

Experts say these seemingly opposite trends are happening at the same time because of what humanity is doing to the planet.

"It does seem like a paradox because we're talking increases in fires, yet the global numbers have been going down and down. But they're both true," said fire scientist Mike Flannigan of Thompson Rivers University in Canada.

Spain's wildfire is that country's largest on record at more than 193 square miles (500 square kilometers) while wildfires in Europe have burned just a bit under 2025's all-time high. In Canada and the United States this summer, land burned by wildfires is at least 25% higher than the 10-year average and more than double what it was decades ago, according to national wildfire centers. Entire chunks of the continent were choked by smoke, causing unhealthy air quality.

Fires are worsening in terms of size, intensity, speed and frequency, especially in the U.S., Canada and Europe, said University of Colorado fire scientist Jennifer Balch.

"Extreme wildfires are on the rise globally in different parts of the world. And that's the piece that you know has us shaking in our boots," Balch said.

Fires decrease in Africa, Asia

And yet the world went into July this year with record low global emissions from burning fires, a key measure of their prevalence, the European climate center Copernicus reported. That is because fires in Africa and Asia are way down due to changing agricultural practices, fire management and where people are moving to, said Mark Parrington, a senior scientist at Copernicus. Copernicus calculated that this year's carbon emissions from burning are the lowest since satellites first measured nearly 25 years ago — about half what they were in the early 2000s.

"Africa dominates the global fire activity," said UCLA water and fire scientist Park Williams. "So if there's a trend in Africa, then that's going to be the trend in the global fire activity. In sub-Saharan Africa, fire activity over the last 25 years has gone down pretty dramatically."

On average, more than three-quarters of the global emissions from the burning of plant material comes from Africa and Asia, Copernicus statistics show. Less than one-eighth comes from North America and Europe.

Traditionally, huge grassland fires on the African savanna burned each year, compared to more intermittent forest fires in other regions, influencing worldwide fire totals, said John Abatzaglou, a fire scientist at the University of California Merced. But with more land being used for housing and farming, humans are limiting savanna fires, while also creating barriers to prevent fires from spreading, he said.

In Asia and the Amazon fires are often used to clear land for agriculture, experts said. So, Williams said, "it really is all driven by human demographic change."

Human fingerprints on North American and European fire trends

In North America and Europe there are also "human fingerprints" on the more extreme fires dominating the news, but that is from climate change Abatzaglou said. Climate change from the burning of coal, oil and gas is making it hotter and drier — ideal fire weather — five different experts told The Associated Press.

Hotter temperatures mean humans "have our foot on the gas pedal" for bigger fires, "but we also have lost the brakes on fire" because warmer and drier nights don't give forests — or firefighters — time to recover during darkness like they used to, Balch said.

When it gets hotter, the atmosphere sucks more moisture out of the ground, making it drier and easier to burn, Flannigan said. Climate change also increases the length of the burning season across North America and especially in northern forests where there used to be only a few days when the weather was conducive to wildfires, but now there are a lot more, he said.

And when climate change makes fire more extreme in places with larger populations, it tends to have a greater impact by burning more valuable property, Flannigan said.

Abatzaglou said that North America has long done a good job of fire suppression. But with climate change making fires more intense and frequent, "we're losing our ability to do that," he said.

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El Nino will add to fires

Fire activity is likely to get worse in the coming months because of the developing super strong El Nino. The weather pattern usually triggers more dangerous fires in the tropics, less so in the United States because of more rain, experts said. South American governments are already getting prepared.

"The most predictable outcome of El Nino is going to be more tropical fire, specifically tropical forests," Williams said.

Williams said El Nino could increase fires in the Amazon region, Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific.

While El Nino means more rain and fewer forest fires in the U.S. West, it can also mean more grass growth in deserts that adds fuel for eventual grass fires, Abatzaglou said. Examples of devastating grass fires include Los Angeles in 2025 and Hawaii in 2023.

Regardless of El Nino, scientists said areas in North America and Europe will have to improve planning and adaptation for worsening wildfires, including prescribed burns to thin excess trees and grasses.

"It's not a question of whether our landscapes are going to burn, it's the question of when they're going to burn," Balch said.

Russia accuses Telegram CEO Pavel Durov of aiding terrorism in its latest digital crackdown

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

Russian authorities said Wednesday they had charged Pavel Durov, the founder and CEO of the popular messaging app Telegram, with aiding terrorism, the latest step by the Kremlin to bring the internet and digital communications under its control.

The charges against the Russian-born Durov, who lives abroad, came as authorities have sought to restrict the use of Telegram as part of a widespread crackdown on online freedom that followed Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The Federal Security Service, or FSB, said in a statement it had accused Telegram's administration of failing to remove "numerous channels, chats and bots" allegedly used by "Ukrainian intelligence agencies, terrorist and extremist organizations to prepare and coordinate acts of sabotage and terrorism, mass murder, and cyber fraud" in Russia, which resulted in "numerous human casualties."

The FSB accused Ukrainian security services of using a popular dating chatbot on Telegram to lure and recruit Russians for "sabotage and terrorist activities," and said 46 users of the chatbot, from 12 to 22 years old, have been detained in Russia over the past year for assaulting law enforcement officers, arson and other acts.

It also said it was adding the name of the 41-year-old billionaire to international wanted lists.

Durov had said earlier this year that Russian authorities opened a criminal investigation against him, and he accused them of fabricating pretexts to restrict access to Telegram as part of an attempt to "suppress the right to privacy and free speech."

If convicted, he could face up to life in prison in Russia.

Telegram, which boasts of more than 1 billion users worldwide, did not respond to a request for comment. Its official website links to an account on X that on Wednesday posted an image of Durov raising a middle finger to the camera.

Telegram's website says that the company is based in Dubai and that Durov, who holds dual citizenship in France and the United Arab Emirates, lives there, too.

Russia has sought to censor the internet

Under President Vladimir Putin, Russian authorities have engaged in multipronged efforts to rein in the internet, adopting restrictive laws and banning websites and platforms that don't comply and focused on improving technology to monitor and manipulate online traffic.

Popular social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram and X, have been banned in Russia; YouTube has been throttled; popular messaging apps, such as Signal and Viber, have been blocked, and the

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most popular ones — WhatsApp and Telegram — have been restricted.

Russia's popular Facebook-like social media platform Vkontakte, founded by Durov long before he launched Telegram, had come under the control of Kremlin-friendly companies. Russia tried to block Telegram between 2018-20 but failed.

While it's still possible to circumvent some of the restrictions by using virtual private network services, many of them are routinely blocked, too.

At the same time, Russia actively promotes what it calls a "national" messaging app known as MAX, which critics say could be used for surveillance. The platform is touted as a one-stop shop for messaging, getting online government services, making payments and other activities. It openly says it will share user data with authorities upon request, and experts also say it doesn't use end-to-end encryption.

The Telegram restrictions have elicited widespread discontent in Russia, and this year activists in multiple regions tried to organize protests against it, but authorities quashed nearly all their attempts.

Military bloggers also have denounced the crackdown, arguing the app is an indispensable communications tool for Russian troops in Ukraine and for activists running crowdfunding campaigns to help Moscow's forces.

The government initially promised not to restrict Telegram on the battlefield, but a different message later came from the Kremlin. At a meeting with Putin for International Women's Day, a servicewoman called Telegram "an adversarial communications tool" and agreed with him when he said that "the use of communications systems that are not ours, not under our control, poses a danger to personnel" in battle.

Despite the restrictions, multiple Russian officials still use Telegram and regularly update their "channels" — its term for blogs — on the platform. The Kremlin's Telegram page had more than 284,000 followers as of Wednesday.

Durov was arrested in France in 2024

In 2024, Durov was arrested in Paris amid allegations that his platform was being used for illicit activity, including drug trafficking and the distribution of images of child sexual abuse. French authorities handed him preliminary charges for allegedly allowing criminal activity on the platform. In March 2025, Durov said he had returned to Dubai after spending "several months" in France.

The Kremlin at the time criticized the French authorities for their move against Durov as selective. Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said at the time that "yes, indeed, terrorists use Telegram. But terrorists also use cars. Why aren't they arresting the CEO of Renault or Citroen?"

Peskov didn't respond to a request for comment on what made Russian authorities change their position.

The Paris prosecutor's office told The Associated Press that Durov remains under formal investigation, facing an array of potential charges for alleged criminal activities linked to Telegram. French investigators have questioned him repeatedly, most recently this month, the office said in written comments Wednesday.

Russia is accused of using Telegram as a recruitment tool

Russia itself has faced accusations of using Telegram coordinate and recruit people to carry out acts of arson and sabotage in Ukraine and across Europe. In the U.K., a British man was recruited, likely by Russian military intelligence, on the platform to organize a plot in 2024 to set fire to a warehouse in London containing satellite equipment for Ukraine. He was also asked to kidnap a pro-Ukrainian exiled Russian billionaire living in London.

Dutch teenagers were arrested in the Netherlands in September after being contacted by Russian hackers on Telegram who wanted them to map Wi-Fi networks in The Hague. The city is the location of many sensitive organizations, including the International Criminal Court -- which has issued an arrest warrant for Putin -- as well as the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and Europol which helps European countries fight international crime.

Moscow has repeatedly denied involvement in acts of sabotage in Europe.

US bans foreign-made humanoid robots, targeting China over national security

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — The U.S. Federal Communications Commission is banning imports of new foreign-made humanoid robots and power inverters, citing national security risks, in a move that targets China. Beijing quickly accused the U.S. of protectionism.

The measures are likely to test relations with Beijing ahead of a planned U.S. visit by Chinese leader Xi Jinping to meet with U.S. President Donald Trump in September. China dominates the global market for humanoid robots with an estimated market share of roughly 85%.

The FCC's ban also includes new imports of quadruped robots, often referred to as four-legged robot dogs. The agency said imports of advanced robots pose cybersecurity and other national security risks. Offshore production of such equipment also leaves U.S. supply chains vulnerable to disruptions.

The ban on power inverters, which are used to convert direct current (DC) electricity into alternating current (AC) electricity and are used in renewable energy systems, data centers and household appliances, could have sweeping ramifications.

This is the latest in US restrictions on Chinese imports

FCC chairperson Brendan Carr said Tuesday that the move was to "secure America's critical supply chains." He said the bans apply to "new versions" of such imports.

The FCC's bans follow a slew of U.S. restrictions on imports of Chinese products, including drones, and on exports of U.S. advanced technology to China.

The U.S. is also weighing controls on use of Chinese open-source artificial intelligence models at a time when Chinese AI is rapidly gaining ground.

"It's a steady drumbeat of potential flashpoints heading into (the) Trump-Xi summit planned for September," said Samm Sacks, a senior fellow at the New America think tank focused on Chinese technology policies.

China has been rapidly expanding the use of robots, with policies supporting its technology sector. Morgan Stanley analysts forecast its market for humanoids could reach \$15 billion by 2030.

"Chinese manufacturers have been scaling production and reducing costs faster than most overseas competitors," said analyst Kangyuxiao Li at Morningstar.

"Restricting their access to the U.S. removes an important future market and protects U.S. developers from potential price competition," he said. "However, it will not materially slow China's overall humanoid development, given the size of its domestic manufacturing base and opportunities in other export markets."

Of the around 15,000 humanoid robots shipped globally in 2025, Unitree and AGIBOT, two of China's largest advanced robotics companies, each shipped more than 5,000. Their U.S. counterparts, like Tesla and Figure AI, each shipped a few hundred or less, according to the technology research and advisory group Omdia.

On the restrictions on power inverters, Cheng Wang, another Morningstar analyst, said the pressure on U.S. markets should be limited. The ban appears to not impact the continued use of existing devices nor the selling by Chinese companies of models that were previously approved by the United States.

China says protectionism will only hurt the US

China's Foreign Ministry hit back at the U.S. move, accusing Washington of overstretching the concept of national security to suppress Chinese companies.

China will take "all measures necessary" to defend the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese businesses, it said.

"Protectionism does not make the U.S. more competitive, and it will only hurt the interests of U.S. companies and consumers," Mao Ning, a ministry spokesperson, told reporters at a regular press conference Wednesday in Beijing.

The new bans could also potentially interfere with collaborations between U.S. and Chinese technology companies, said Lian Jye Su, a chief analyst at Omdia.

Nvidia, for example, in June revealed a humanoid robot reference design which uses the humanoid chassis of China's Unitree.

The Pentagon recently included Unitree and several other major Chinese technology companies on its list of firms that it said have ties to or aid the Chinese military. Beijing has rejected that claim.

A new media ecosystem is taking root on the left, reshaping Democratic politics

By ALI SWENSON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Farah Berent, a physician assistant in Holland, Michigan, used to learn about politics from channels like ABC, CBS and CNN. But that changed as she decided that coverage of the war in Gaza was irreparably biased.

"I couldn't stand all the lies on the stations," said Berent, arguing that there wasn't enough attention being paid to Palestinian suffering. "I started going to Instagram to get my news."

Berent is among many progressive-minded Americans who have sworn off legacy media institutions. They're turning to a widening mix of independent podcasts, social media accounts and digital news sites, part of an increasingly influential ecosystem that has boosted this year's wave of anti-establishment, left-leaning candidates who may not have gotten as much attention otherwise.

Liberals remain more likely than conservatives to trust mainstream outlets, but the splintering echoes how conservatives skeptical of their party created a collection of insurgent news sites years ago. The shift has elevated individual commentators with opinions on the news, some of whom have proven influential in driving people's votes.

Ryan Grim, a co-founder of Drop Site News and a veteran of online political debates, said progressive politicians have sought out his platform to reach voters. In a change from previous election cycles, "they have ways to get covered even if the mainstream just basically ignores them," he said.

One of those candidates is Abdul El-Sayed, who is running for U.S. Senate in Michigan and faces the more moderate U.S. Rep. Haley Stevens in the Aug 4. primary.

"I think in a lot of ways, where traditional media has been gatekeepers, we're watching that gatekeeping function fall away," El-Sayed said.

Anti-establishment media has exploded lately

These changes have been on display this year in places like New York City, where a slate of progressive congressional candidates endorsed by Mayor Zohran Mamdani defeated establishment-backed candidates.

Sara Hyler, a policy analyst in East Harlem, originally planned to support incumbent Rep. Adriano Espaillat in last month's Democratic primary. But then Hyler started learning about progressive outsider Darializa Avila Chevalier through YouTube videos and podcasts, including from the liberal media company MeidasTouch.

"My actual beliefs are to the left of Democrats. I don't want a moderate," said Hyler, who ultimately voted for Avila Chevalier in hopes she could help nudge Congress toward progressive policies.

The rise of independent media has been part of a digital transformation that transcends politics, as chronically online Americans are turning toward news from social media and content creators. But it's not just the popularity of smartphones driving that change.

"There's a complete lack of trust in any and all institutions now," said Mike Nellis, a Democratic consultant who hosts a podcast, writes a Substack and posts political analysis on social media. "That has led people to turn to individuals, and so now you're picking your flavor of person to listen to."

Among conservatives, faith in mainstream media and in the more moderate wing of the Republican Party faltered years ago, with the rise of the Tea Party movement paving the way for an alternative right-wing media ecosystem, including sites like the Daily Caller, Breitbart and The Blaze. Trump also tapped into a loose constellation of podcasts, including "The Joe Rogan Experience," for his successful comeback campaign.

Reece Peck, a media culture professor at the College of Staten Island, said the left-wing version of that has happened slowly, beginning with the momentum of Sen. Bernie Sanders' first presidential run in 2016.

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At the time, left-wing, anti-establishment YouTube accounts and podcasts like “The Young Turks” and “Chapo Trap House” were gaining attention but didn’t reach the majority of Democratic voters.

Now Democrats have realized their faith in institutions didn’t prevent Trump’s return.

“The ground has been made fertile for an anti-establishment media politics, where it just wasn’t quite there with the voter base in those previous cycles,” Peck said. Even older, moderate liberals, he said, have started to “throw their hands in the air and look for alternatives.”

YouTube accounts like “Secular Talk” and “Breaking Points,” streamers like Hasan Piker and new digital journalism organizations like More Perfect Union and The Lever are among those that have seen their audiences multiply.

Grim said Drop Site has amassed 800,000 free and 60,000 paid subscribers since launching two years ago — more than he’d anticipated.

Saul Levin, a Michigan progressive organizer who recently started his own podcast about artificial intelligence data centers, said Trump’s attacks on the existing media landscape are part of the reason for that growth.

“The investigations and raids on numerous different journalists, the appointment of specifically aligned billionaires to lead various major news agencies, is very troubling,” he said. “Creators and new media outlets are stepping in and trying to fill gaps.”

Alternative media is prominent in the Michigan primary

The Michigan primary will be the latest test of the evolving media ecosystem, which El-Sayed, a longtime podcaster himself, has tried to harness. Various progressive outlets, creators and organizers have aggressively promoted his campaign.

El-Sayed said the rise of independent media has let voters compare news across different channels and notice biases, but he doesn’t turn down opportunities on legacy media, either.

“I go on Fox News, I go on podcasts, I Twitch stream, we have a YouTube channel,” he said.

Stevens, who received endorsements from outgoing incumbent Sen. Gary Peters, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer, has a more traditional approach. She’s also backed by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, and its affiliated groups, which have spent close to \$30 million on the race.

Stevens’ campaign declined to comment for this story.

Reporting from progressive outlets has influenced how the race has unfolded. For example, Stevens parted ways with a campaign consultant when Drop Site revealed that she had also worked for tech company Palantir, which is controversial in liberal circles because of its government contracts involving immigration enforcement.

Democratic officials said Trump’s return to the White House has also revived interest in the party’s official channels. The Democratic National Committee’s relatively new digital media offering, a rapid-response clipping and messaging account with the handle @FactPostNews, has amassed more than 2 billion impressions on Threads, X, Facebook, Instagram and Bluesky in 2026 alone.

“I remember thinking to myself, there’s a chance that this flops and doesn’t get any traction,” said DNC Deputy Chief Mobilization Officer Paulina Mangubat. “It’s been really, really successful.”

At times, the mix of new voices on the left has erupted in public tensions.

Grim recently faced criticism for boosting failed Democratic candidate Graham Platner in Maine, and he was accused of trying to undermine the credibility of the sexual assault allegation that torpedoed Platner’s campaign. Grim said while he recognized people were angry, his reporting on the allegation was meant to share additional context.

“If we’re going to litigate allegations in the court of public opinion, we can’t pick and choose what details we want to share with the public out of a fear of how they’ll be received,” he said.

More recently, when Drop Site interviewed progressive U.S. Rep. Ro Khanna of California, one of its journalists pressed Khanna on whether Hamas was justified to attack Israeli soldiers on Oct. 7, 2023. Khanna refused to agree.

But Grim said those are the kinds of tough questions independent media are there to ask — and that

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American voters increasingly want to see their representatives in Congress answer.

"People want to see you being accountable to questions, and if they don't agree with you, sometimes that's fine," he said. "I think the smarter politicians are starting to recognize that."

Today in History: July 30, Jenner takes gold in Montreal

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, July 30, the 211th day of 2026. There are 154 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On July 30, 1976, Bruce Jenner, now known as Caitlyn Jenner, set a world record of 8,618 points and won the gold medal in the Olympic decathlon at the Montreal Summer Games.

Also on this date:

In 1619, the first representative assembly in colonial America convened in Jamestown in the Virginia Colony.

In 1864, during the Civil War, Union forces tried to take Petersburg, Virginia, by exploding a gunpowder-laden mine shaft beneath Confederate defense lines; the attack failed.

In 1916, German saboteurs blew up a munitions plant on Black Tom, an island near Jersey City, New Jersey, killing about a dozen people.

In 1930, Uruguay won the first FIFA World Cup, defeating Argentina 4-2.

In 1945, the heavy cruiser USS Indianapolis, having just delivered components of the atomic bomb to Tinian in the Mariana Islands during World War II, was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine; only 316 out of nearly 1,200 service members survived.

In 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a measure making "In God We Trust" the national motto, replacing "E Pluribus Unum."

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Social Security Amendments of 1965, which led to the creation of Medicare and Medicaid.

In 2008, ex-Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic (RA'-doh-van KA'-ra-jich) was extradited to The Hague to face genocide charges after nearly 13 years on the run. (He was sentenced by a U.N. court in 2019 to life imprisonment after being convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.)

In 2012, three electric grids in India collapsed in a cascade, cutting power to 620 million people in the world's biggest blackout.

In 2013, U.S. Army Pfc. Chelsea Manning was acquitted of aiding the enemy — the most serious charge she faced — but was convicted of espionage, theft and other charges at Fort Meade, Maryland, more than three years after she'd spilled secrets to WikiLeaks. (The former intelligence analyst was later sentenced to up to 35 years in prison, but the sentence was commuted by President Barack Obama.)

In 2016, 16 people died when a hot-air balloon caught fire and exploded after hitting high-tension power lines before crashing into a pasture near Lockhart, Texas, northeast of San Antonio.

In 2020, NASA launched its Perseverance rover and Ingenuity helicopter to Mars aboard an Atlas V rocket; the helicopter's initial flight on Mars was in April 2021.

Today's Birthdays: Former Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig is 92. Blues musician Buddy Guy is 90. Singer Paul Anka is 85. Actor and former California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is 79. Actor Jean Reno is 78. Actor Ken Olin is 72. Actor Delta Burke is 70. Law professor Anita Hill is 70. Singer-songwriter Kate Bush is 68. Film director Richard Linklater is 66. Actor Laurence Fishburne is 65. TV personality Alton Brown is 64. Actor Lisa Kudrow is 63. Basketball Hall of Famer Chris Mullin is 63. Actor Vivica A. Fox is 62. Actor Terry Crews is 58. Actor Simon Baker is 57. Film director Christopher Nolan is 56. Actor Tom Green is 55. Actor Christine Taylor is 55. Actor Hilary Swank is 52. Olympic gold medal beach volleyball player Misty May-Treanor is 49. Actor Jaime Pressly is 49. Alt-country singer-musician Seth Avett (AY'-veht) is 46. Former soccer player Hope Solo is 45. Actor Yvonne Strahovski is 44. Actor Martin Starr is 44. Actor Gina Rodriguez is 42. Actor Nico Tortorella is 37. Actor Joey King is 27.