

Groton Daily Independent

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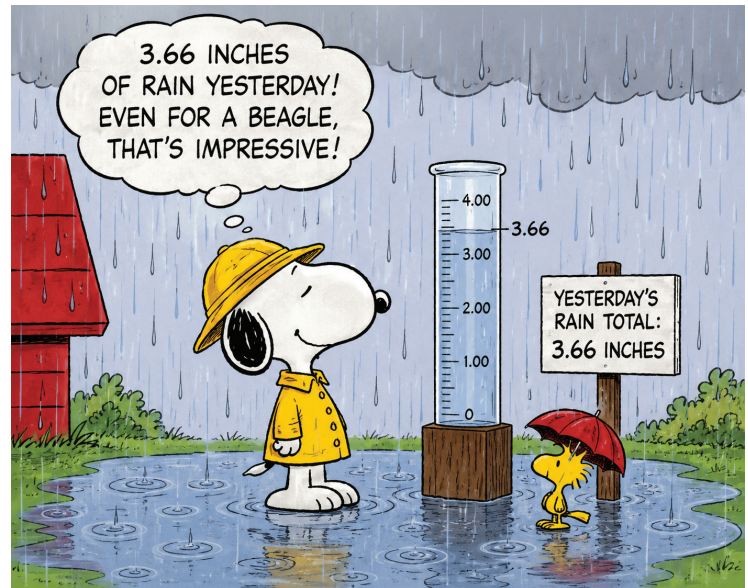
Community Calendar

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.

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
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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

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

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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.

Moroccan Migrant Surge

Spain deployed its army to an autonomous Spanish city on the North African coast yesterday after an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 migrants swam, walked, and climbed across its border with Morocco. At least nine people have died.

Local officials say the influx is overwhelming migrant reception centers. The cause of the surge is unclear, but Ceuta and the smaller Spanish territory of Melilla are the European Union and Africa's only land border. A 2024 survey found that roughly 35% of Moroccans were considering leaving the country, with 45% citing economic reasons. Morocco's unemployment rate is around 10%, compared to a 4.8% global average. The scenes also echo a May 2021 border crisis, when more than 8,000 migrants entered Ceuta over two days after Morocco relaxed border controls in a move widely seen as a political protest.

While Spain has controlled Ceuta since 1580, Morocco also claims sovereignty over the roughly 7-square-mile city, based on geographical proximity and historical ties.

Shooter's Father Sentenced

The father of a Georgia teenager who carried out the deadly 2024 Apalachee High School shooting was sentenced to 15 years in prison yesterday. Colin Gray was convicted of second-degree murder and involuntary manslaughter for gifting his son, Colt, the assault rifle used in the attack. Colt, now 16, was sentenced to life in prison earlier this week.

Prosecutors said the elder Gray disregarded warning signs, including his son's interest in mass shootings and a shrine his son erected in his bedroom to the Parkland shooter. The gift also came despite a home visit by law enforcement months earlier when authorities received a tip Colt had threatened to kill students at an elementary school.

The case is one of a handful in which parents of teenage shooters were held criminally responsible for their kids' actions. That includes Michigan's James and Jennifer Crumbley, who were sentenced to at least 10 years in prison for failing to secure a newly purchased gun and ignoring warning signs.

Deadly Elephant Poisoning

Fifteen elephants in southern Kenya have died over the past month after eating cyanide-laced tomatoes left near farms bordering Amboseli National Park, home to roughly 1,900 elephants, according to local authorities.

Laboratory tests detected the chemical, used in agriculture for pest control and sometimes by poachers, in the animals' bodies. Most became paralyzed before collapsing within two days of symptom onset. Authorities have not identified suspects, but officials believe local farmers may have poisoned the tomatoes to deter elephants from raiding crops. Elephants can consume up to 600 pounds of food each day and often wander onto farmland during dry seasons when natural forage is scarce (and perhaps to self-medicate). Kenya has documented previous elephant poisonings tied to poaching and human-wildlife conflict, but officials say this is the region's deadliest such incident in decades. Learn why humans and wildlife are clashing over land.

Officials warned livestock grazing in the contaminated area could also be at risk, though they said the toxins pose no immediate threat to people.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Union of European Football Associations votes to boycott the World Cups if FIFA proceeds with plan to sell stakes to private investors; UEFA represents 55 nations, including Spain, the reigning World Cup winner.

Lorde and John Summit close opening night of Chicago's Lollapalooza; Charli XCX and Smashing Pumpkins headline today.

Paramount+ to make "Clueless" sequel series with Alicia Silverstone reprising her lead role.

Jason Cloth, executive producer on "Joker" and "Babylon," is indicted on allegations of running a \$100M Ponzi scheme.

Science & Technology

Google DeepMind debuts new AI model that can control a humanoid robot's full body, directing it to walk, crouch, and manipulate objects; the previous model primarily controlled the robot's upper body.

Scientists develop AI tool, dubbed Raygun, that can shrink or supersize natural proteins while preserving their shape and function, a significant step toward protein engineering for gene therapy and biomedical research.

Ice Age humans preferred hunting female woolly mammoths, according to DNA from over 500 mammoth bones found near sites of ancient human activity.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +1.7%, Dow +1.2%, Nasdaq +2.8%).

Jersey Mike's makes public debut on the NYSE at \$7.3B valuation.

US economy slowed to 1.5% growth in Q2, while US Personal Consumption Expenditures Price Index—key inflation metric monitored by the Fed—fell to 3.7% year over year in June, down from 4.1% in May.

Apple quarterly revenue and earnings beat estimates, driven by 22% rise in iPhone sales.

Amazon reports better-than-expected revenue and cloud growth.

Crocs tops \$1B in quarterly revenue for first time.

Politics & World Affairs

Authorities investigate whether Iran was responsible for cyberattacks on more than 30 water plants in Minnesota this week.

President Donald Trump says he may "temporarily" pull Todd Blanche's nomination for attorney general amid Republican pushback, vote delay.

Russian missile crashes 57 miles into Polish territory, creating a 33-foot-wide crater, NATO says.



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3RD ANNUAL CELEBRATION *in the* PARK

GROTON LIONS
SATURDAY
AUGUST 1ST
GROTON CITY PARK

RIB COOK COMPETITION!

LIONS INTERNATIONAL

A DAY OF
FUN,
FOOD &
FAMILY
FOR EVERYONE!

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

	8AM	RIB COOKS SET UP
	9:30AM	RIB COOK MEETING WITH RULES
	11AM-4PM	CRAFT FAIR & FARMERS MARKET
	12PM-4PM	LIONS VISION VAN
	12:30PM-5PM	HOT DOGS, CHIPS, & GIANT FREEZES SOLD AT THE GRAIN BIN
	1PM-4PM	GELLY BALL
	1PM-4:30PM	INFLATABLES & KIDDIE TRAIN
	4:30PM	WATER BALLON FIGHT
	5PM	RIB TICKETS GO ON SALE. ONLY \$1 PER RIB.
	6PM-9PM	KARAOKE BY B&M TUNES
	7PM	RIB COOK AWARDS



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Rain dumped on Groton and area



The golf course is under water, again, as Groton received 3.66 inches of rain in about two hours. The golf course is closed until further notice.



The low area around Fourth Street and Fifth Avenue was well under water from the rain that fell.

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Water had gone over Main Street at the 10th Avenue area and also other areas as well.



The water was up over the curb in downtown Groton with it getting right up to the buildings.

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Bruce Babcock took this picture of the flooded intersection E 5th Ave and N 5th St during the heavy rains Thursday afternoon in Groton.

Flooded Main Street and yards during last night heavy rains. (Photo

by Bruce Babcock)



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Region Jr. Legion Photos



Sisseton American Legion color guard open the Championship Junior Legion game in Sisseton with Legion Baseball Commissioners Travis Kurth and Dan Karst and umpires at home plate. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Groton Junior Legion pitcher TC Schuster started on the mound with Braden Fliehs and Wesley Borg combined in relief to secure the first game victory vs Sisseton. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Groton short stop TC Schuster dives for a Sisseton base hit. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Groton Trayce Schelle makes contact batting at the plate. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Groton Alex Abeln is base running while a Sisseton infielder reaches for the hit ball. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)

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Groton's Kason Oswald makes a perfect tag on Sisseton base runner at home. Jordan Schwan, center field, threw the perfect throw to Oswald to tag for the out. Alex Abeln shows his excitement during the tag at home plate. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Groton catcher Kason Oswald tries to cool down while catching both games in the Region Junior Legion Championship. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



The Groton Junior Legion team during the Nation Anthem before Wednesday evenings Championship round. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Groton's John Bisbee slips under the Sisseton infielders tag. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)

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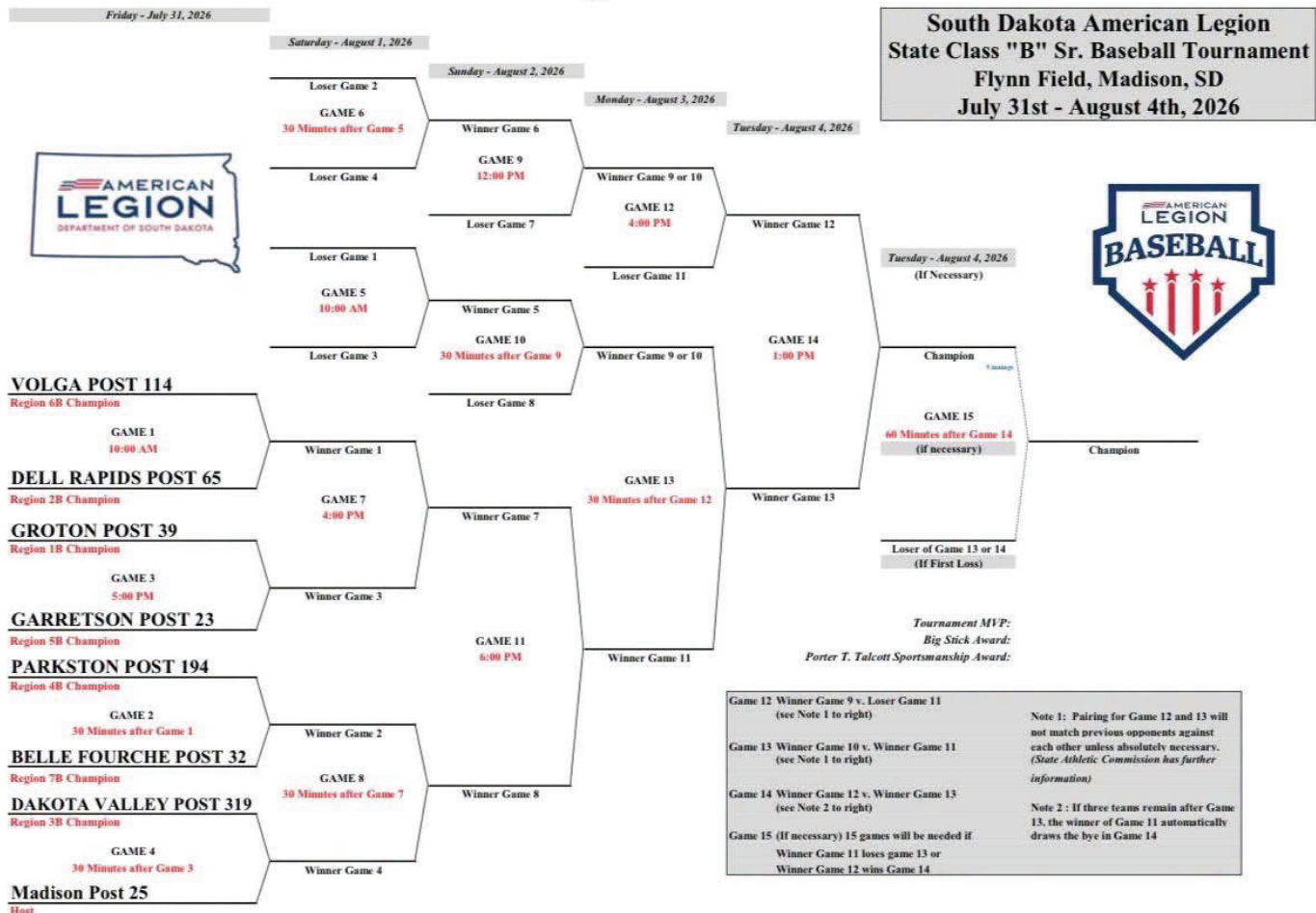
Fire at Avantara Groton

The Groton Fire Department responded to a fire at Avantara Groton last night. A fire started in the boiler room and it was quickly extinguished, according to a phone call that went out to family members. The residents were evacuated during the event.



The City of Groton will be conducting adult mosquito control tonight (Friday, July 31), starting around 8:30 p.m.

2026 South Dakota American Legion State Class "B" Sr. Baseball Tournament



Data as of 07/29/2026

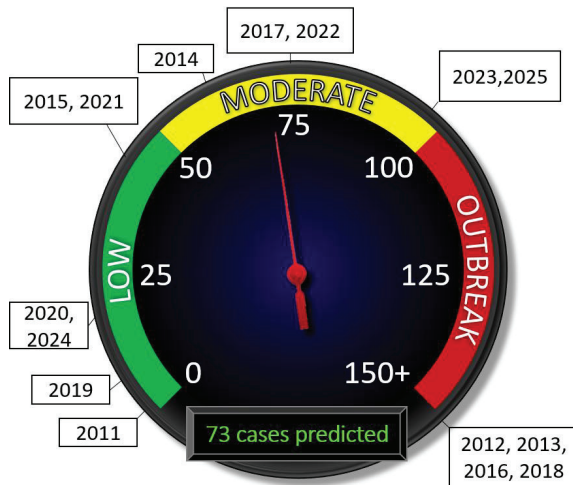
Division of Disease Prevention and Control

South Dakota Mosquito

SD West Nile Virus

- 2 human cases reported (Jerauld, Pennington)
 - 1 non-neuroinvasive case
 - 1 neuroinvasive case
 - 0 deaths
- 0 human viremic blood donor detections
- 5 counties with a positive mosquito pool
 - Brown, Codington, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha

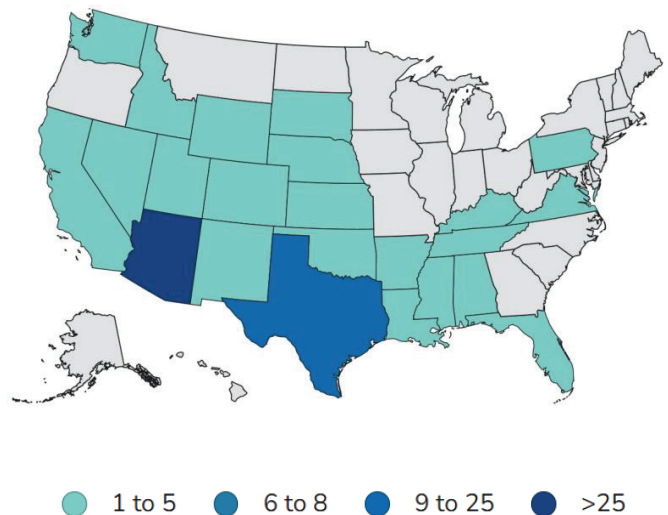
Current WNV SD Case Prediction:



US West Nile Virus

- 113 human cases reported
 - 76 of which are neuroinvasive

WNV Human Disease Cases Reported by State of Residence:



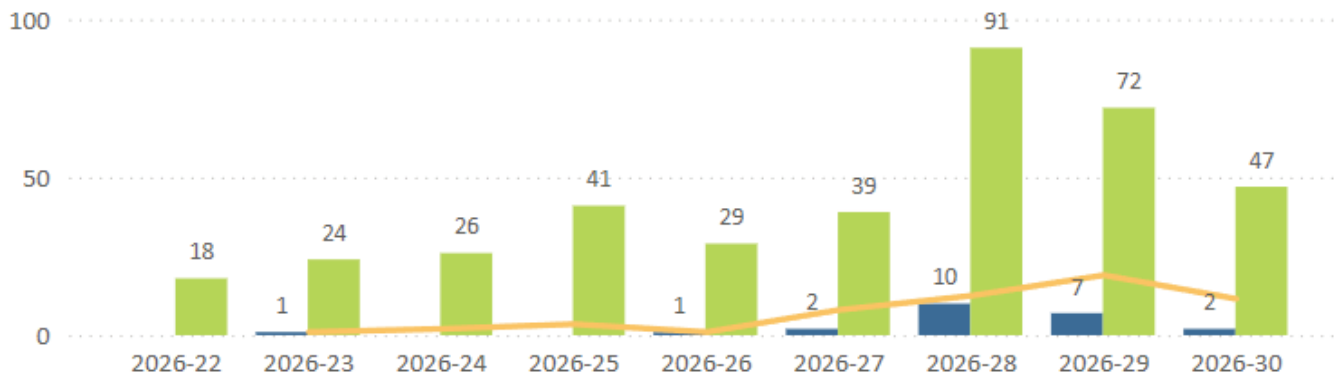
Data compiled from: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. West Nile Virus: Current Year Data and Maps. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/west-nile-virus/data-maps/current-year-data.html>

SD Mosquito Surveillance Summary for 2026

- Total sites collecting mosquitos: 59
- *Culex* Species Collected: 23,616
- Total mosquito pools tested: 410
- Percent positivity: 5.61%

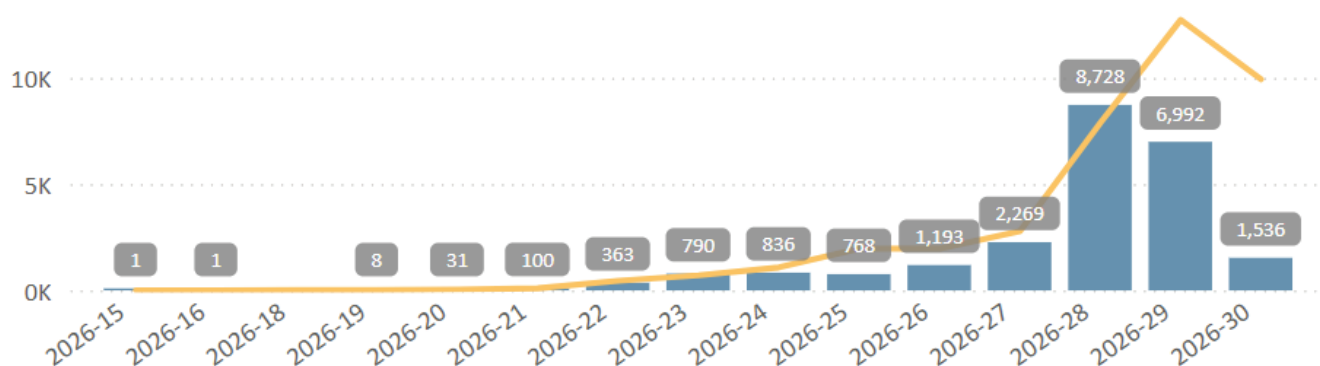
Number of Mosquito Pools Tested by MMWR Week and Status

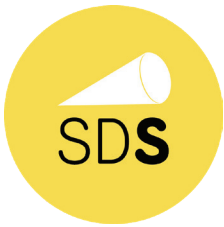
Test Status: ● Positive ● Negative ● 5 Year Median Pool Count



Culex Mosquitoes Collected by MMWR Week

● Culex Species Collected ● 5Y Median Culex Count





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Rural radiology technician shortage motivates new technical college program in northeastern SD

BY MAKENZIE HUBER

A shortage of rural radiology technicians prompted the South Dakota Board of Technical Education to approve a new program Thursday for a technical college in the northeastern part of the state.

Radiology technicians conduct imaging exams such as X-rays, CT scans and MRIs.

Two South Dakota technical schools already have radiology technician programs: Mitchell Technical College and Western Dakota Technical College in Rapid City. The new two-year program will be at Lake Area Technical College in Watertown.

The presidents from Mitchell Tech and Western Dakota Tech collaborated with Lake Area Tech on its application and how it could fit into the technical education system.

The new two-year Lake Area program fills a gap left when Presentation College in Aberdeen closed its radiology technician program in 2023. Northern State University in Aberdeen is also developing an associate degree program, though it remains in the planning stages.

Health care representatives urged the board to approve the program, citing shortages expected to grow as health care demand rises and experienced technicians retire.

Without qualified imaging staff, timely diagnosis and treatment become difficult — “and at times impossible,” said Natalie Gauer, administrator and CEO of Milbank Area Hospital Avera.

Radiology technician positions at the hospital have remained vacant for years, Gauer added, which stresses workers. The hospital contracts with a traveling radiology technician, which costs three times what a local staff member would.

Josh Mages, imaging account manager at GE Healthcare in Watertown, said he regularly speaks with radiology managers across the state who are experiencing growing demand.

“When I come and talk to a customer about exam growth, we’re seeing 50% to 100%. So if you’re doing 100 CTs a month right now, in five years we’re going to expect you to do 200,” Mages said. “We’re going to need to add headcounts.”

Some rural healthcare systems have begun training lab technicians to perform X-rays because they can’t find licensed radiology technicians, Mages said. While legal in South Dakota, he prefers professionally trained staff.

Prospective students increasingly want local options rather than relocating hours away, Gauer said — and even when they’re willing to move, programs at other colleges are sometimes full.

“I had a high school student approach us last year. She wanted to come back to our campus after training for rad tech, but she did not get into a program because they were full,” Gauer said. “She simply changed her major. So we will now have lost that opportunity of a greatly needed professional in our community.”

All board members present at the Thursday meeting voted in support of the new program.

Lake Area President Tiffany Sanderson plans to begin fundraising with businesses in the area to remodel a space on the campus for a simulation lab and classroom. The program will likely start in 2028.

“Even though the programs in the state and the tech college system have ramped up to help meet the demand,” Sanderson said, “there remains strong demand, especially in the northeast portion of the state in our rural communities.”

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

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title of South Dakota's Outstanding Young Journalist in 2024, and she was a 2024 finalist for the national Livingston Awards.

COMMENTARY

A favorite finishes third, big money loses and policy pays off: lessons from a wild campaign

by Seth Tupper

Rarely has there been a campaign in this state offering more novelty, surprises and intrigue than this year's race for the Republican nomination for governor, which ended Tuesday with South Dakota's first statewide runoff election.

The campaign got an early jolt when Gov. Kristi Noem resigned a year and a half ago to accept a job in President Donald Trump's administration. Her lieutenant governor, Larry Rhoden, automatically became governor for the rest of what would have been her term.

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson emerged as the frontrunner to win the next full term, but he ended up finishing third in the June 2 primary, bringing his two-decade run at the highest heights of South Dakota politics to a halt.

Rhoden had never won a statewide election outside of being Noem's running mate, and he initially appeared powerless to stop Johnson, who was elected twice to the state Public Utilities Commission before winning four terms as South Dakota's sole member of the U.S. House. But Rhoden beat Johnson in the primary, while coming in second to a guy nobody in politics had ever heard of a few years ago: Aberdeen businessman Toby Doeden.

Doeden, a first-time candidate, shocked everybody by finishing first in the four-way primary race. Then he slid backward during the top-two runoff, while Rhoden rocketed to 71% and won the nomination.

What a ride.

Thanks, Kristi

It's difficult to imagine Rhoden winning the nomination if Noem hadn't resigned.

If Noem had stuck around through the end of her term, Rhoden would not have had full use of the state's resources to spend much of his first year in office traveling the state on his Open for Opportunity tour, which was really a publicly funded get-to-know-Larry tour for voters.

He also would not have had a chance to build a record as governor, including his signature on a bill banning the use of a legal process known as eminent domain to gain land access for carbon capture pipelines, a bill devoting \$650 million to the construction of a men's prison, and bills using sales tax increases and other mechanisms to reduce property taxes for homeowners.

'Good policy makes good politics'

Rhoden said in his campaign announcement that "good policy makes good politics," and he helped himself politically by tackling the three aforementioned issues — pipelines, prisons and property taxes — after Noem failed to deal with them effectively while she pursued a national political role.

What a concept: Focus on your job, get some things done, and voters might reward you.

Money doesn't always buy victory

Johnson came into the race with around \$6 million of built-up campaign funds from his many years of running for statewide offices. Doeden spent \$4 million of his own money on his campaign before the primary (and possibly more since then, though we won't know until his next campaign finance report, due in October).

Rhoden was no slouch, raising and spending more than \$1 million and counting, but he had far less money to work with than Johnson and Doeden. That didn't stop Rhoden from beating them both, mostly with his focus on policy.

The importance of the 35% threshold

Back in 1985, South Dakota lawmakers approved legislation requiring top-two runoffs in statewide pri-

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maries when no candidate reaches 35%. The law collected dust for 41 years and then suddenly became important this year, the first time it was triggered.

Doeden called the runoff law a "silly rule." Imagine how silly it would be if the law didn't exist, and the Republican Party was saddled with a nominee opposed by more than two-thirds of its voters — or a selection process tossed to a state convention, as was the practice before 1985. Any candidate, including the primary's fourth-place finisher, state House Speaker Jon Hansen, could have won in that scenario.

Calling polls 'fake' doesn't change the result

Doeden fashioned himself as a Trump clone in many ways, even adopting the president's penchant for labeling news he doesn't like as fake.

When KELO-TV released survey results two weeks ago from Emerson College Polling that showed Doeden trailing Rhoden in the runoff by 30 points, Doeden wrote on social media that "the paid-off media is attempting to influence the outcome of this election with a very fake poll."

The poll's only flaw turned out to be its inflated estimation of support for Doeden, who lost by 42 points, not 30.

It ain't over yet

In South Dakota, where it's been 52 years since the last win by a Democratic candidate for governor, it's easy to forget there's another election Nov. 3. The Democrats have a candidate, former legislator Dan Ahlers of Dell Rapids, who knows his way around politics and state government.

Rhoden's supporters probably think he has an easy path to victory, and maybe he does.

But if there's any final lesson to take from all the twists and turns in the campaign for the Republican nomination, it's don't take anything for granted in politics.

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

State lawmakers of both parties say it's time to rethink America's fragile childcare system

BY KEVIN HARDY

CHICAGO — A bipartisan group of state lawmakers is calling for an overhaul of the nation's childcare system, which they say is failing children, parents and providers.

The group of 13 Republican and Democratic lawmakers, who have spent the last year studying childcare access and affordability problems, offered an array of policy recommendations during the National Conference of State Legislatures annual summit in Chicago this week.

During a panel discussion Monday, lawmakers underscored the persisting challenge with childcare that costs families too much and pays providers too little. That has led to vast access gaps in many parts of the country as demand for childcare far outstrips supply.

"Every state is experiencing a childcare crisis," said Jenna Bannon, associate director in the Children and Families Program of the National Conference of State Legislatures.

In its 33-page report laying out causes and potential solutions to childcare shortages, the lawmakers' policy group called for more private sector employer participation, higher pay for childcare providers and a reconsideration of childcare regulations that may be outdated.

"The childcare system is at a crossroads," the report says, "and decisions made now will shape how well systems meet the needs of families and economies in the years ahead."

Many of the policy prescriptions inherently cost money. But Maryland state Del. Aletheia McCaskill said states can't go it alone. McCaskill, a Democrat and a childcare provider, said the issue requires investment from outside sources, including philanthropic organizations and businesses.

"It's going to take more than just taxes," she told Stateline. "It's going to take real investment by other folks. We have to do this with everybody playing their part. The government, absolutely, but we can't do it all."

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During the presentation, McCaskill urged other lawmakers to reframe childcare discussions in economic terms.

"When you talk about childcare, you can't talk about children. Imagine that," she said. "You have to talk about the economy, pockets and how all this works together."

South Dakota state Sen. Tim Reed, a Republican, said businesses are increasingly interested in assuring their employees have access to childcare.

Reed was previously the mayor of Brookings, the state's fourth most populous city. Before the pandemic, he said, businesses reported workforce challenges as their biggest constraint. And the lack of workers, they said, was directly linked to a lack of accessible childcare.

Reed pointed to a local bank that provided childcare for the children — and even grandchildren — of employees years before it became a prominent issue across the country.

"And you know what? They're the first place that people want to work because they have childcare," Reed said during Monday's panel. "Once you get businesses involved in this — because they do understand the economic realities of it — that's when you can become successful."

In 38 states, the costs of childcare outpaces the average cost of in-state college tuition, according to Child Care Aware of America, a nonprofit advocacy group. For 2025, that organization calculated an average annual cost of childcare of about \$13,000, with average prices of infant care surpassing \$15,000. Those costs vary widely by state, though, with center-based infant care ranging from \$6,492 a year in Mississippi to \$27,067 a year in Massachusetts.

Monday's discussion often turned to New Mexico, where Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham last year announced the nation's first free universal childcare system, funded by state investment earnings from oil and gas revenues.

New Mexico state Sen. Linda Trujillo, a Democrat, said during the discussion that the new universal system doesn't yet guarantee universal access. In her community of Santa Fe, for example, she said the city lacks about 1,200 spaces for infants to 5-year-olds.

Several lawmakers noted the changing federal environment, which has raised funding questions about many social service programs, including healthcare and food assistance.

Bannon, of NCSL, said the states are now leading the charge on childcare as Democratic and Republican state lawmakers increasingly explore new legislation to childcare access.

"Historically, the federal government played a really big role, and the states really kind of looked to the feds to guide them," she told Stateline. "And I think now there's been kind of a role reversal and states are stepping more into the space, and the feds are watching them to see what they do."

Stateline reporter Kevin Hardy can be reached at khardy@stateline.org.

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

Kevin Hardy covers business, labor and rural issues for Stateline from the Midwest.

North Dakota mammoth dig unearths 'rare' array of bones from beneath garage

BY MICHAEL ACHTERLING

A mammoth excavation under a northwest North Dakota garage is unearthing a more complete prehistoric beast than paleontologists had hoped for when the discovery was made in the 1980s.

The excavation in Burke County is being spearheaded by the North Dakota Geological Survey, which has used its team, summer interns and some geology students from the University of North Dakota since June to carefully dig out the iconic animal.

"When you dig something up, you never know if it's going to be one bone and the whole thing is going to be over," North Dakota State Geologist Clint Boyd said. "Very quickly it became clear, no, there is a

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reason we are digging here.”

Boyd said this mammoth skeleton is a rare find and the most complete mammoth from North Dakota, though not as encompassing as the mammoth site in Hot Springs, South Dakota.

He said the team is still working to determine the type of mammoth, either woolly or Columbian. The team is also trying to determine the sex of the mammoth.

Boyd said the excavation underneath the garage could wrap up in September so the garage can be reconstructed for the home owner this fall. He added the excavation team plans to return in spring 2027 to excavate areas outside of the garage.

So far, he said the team has recovered bits of the skull, lower jaw and some ribs. They are beginning to find the limbs of the animal and are hopeful to find the mammoth’s tusks waiting to be uncovered outside of the garage. The timeline to complete the mammoth excavation remains fluid.

The bones were discovered on a northwestern North Dakota property in 1988 while the owner was digging a foundation for a garage. The family sent a couple of teeth to North Dakota State University, which verified that the teeth had come from a mammoth that lived during the Pleistocene Epoch, commonly called the Ice Age.

However, by the time the North Dakota Geological Survey was notified of the verified discovery, the garage foundation had already been poured, and the garage, attached to the home, had been constructed. The Geological Survey was not able to fund the demolition of the garage, excavation and construction of a new garage in an agreed timeline with the owner.

For about 35 years, the mammoth stayed under that garage until former North Dakota State Geologist Ed Murphy reexamined his old notes from the 1988 discovery and learned the property had changed hands over the years. He reached out, spoke to the new owner and agreed to conduct site testing around the garage.

“They’ve been wonderful to work with,” Boyd said.

In 2025, state lawmakers allocated \$150,000 for the excavation as part of Senate Bill 2014.

Andrew Clark, deputy state historic preservation officer, told members of the State Historical Society Board at their July meeting that a team from the Historical Society convinced the landowner to rip up the garage floor and used ground penetrating radar to evaluate the mammoth site.

Clark said radar results showed the mammoth skeleton may have been damaged by the construction of the garage due to some “pushing around” of the bones.

The excavation team discovered when the property’s former owner dug the 3-foot foundational footings for the garage, some of the bones were severed, removed as part of the construction process and then returned to the site as part of soil backfill, Boyd said.

He added the situation is unique because if the construction crew hadn’t struck the bones, they would have never known they were there.

“But, you’d prefer less of it had gotten hit than actually did,” Boyd said

The skeleton may be at the Burke County property because water carried it from the location it died, he said. Though Boyd said they don’t think the water carried the mammoth far, most likely yards instead of miles.

The property owner has indicated the mammoth will become part of the North Dakota state fossil collection though a formal agreement has not yet been finalized, he said.

“Ideally, it will eventually go on display upstairs in the Heritage Center,” Boyd said.

If a display at the museum is not possible, he said they would look to display the mammoth near the place it was discovered. Any display is still years away.

Boyd said the excavation should not need any additional state funding until they are ready to prepare an exhibit, which might not be until the 2029-31 biennium.

He said his team’s first mammoth excavation was in the Freedom Mine near Beulah in 2023, which yielded a large tusk, part of a hip and some ribs from what was likely a Columbian mammoth.

If a fossil discovery is made on private land, there are no mandatory reporting requirements in the state

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for encountering fossils. Residents will not lose their rights to fossil finds on private land if they alert the Geological Survey, Boyd said.

"We're mostly coming there to give the landowner information, and if they decide that they want to keep it, that's their right," Boyd said. "But, if we get to see it, where it was found, that adds to our information about the state."

The team is working with the property owner to finalize a name for the skeleton.

Meanwhile, about 160 people have participated in public fossil digs this year supervised by the Geological Survey. The digs this year are being held in the Pembina Gorge, Dickinson and Bismarck areas.

In July, one dig participant found a 3.5-inch T. rex tooth.

The 2026 events are sold out, but a wait list is available through the department's website. Fossil events in 2027 are expected to be posted this fall with sign-ups occurring in January or February.

North Dakota Monitor reporter Michael Achterling can be reached at machterling@northdakotamonitor.com.

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

Michael Achterling is a reporter based in Bismarck. He recently worked as digital editor and city government reporter for the Detroit Lakes Tribune in Minnesota and as news director for KDLM/KRCQ/KBOT, a part of Leighton Broadcasting. You can reach him at machterling@northdakotamonitor.com.

Trump looks to veterans to fill trucking jobs after booting immigrants from industry

BY ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump announced an initiative Thursday for veterans to quickly obtain commercial driver's licenses, as the administration attempts to fill vacancies in the industry after pausing license renewals for foreign-born truck drivers.

"The radical left wants more jobs for illegal aliens and more migrants (in) 18-wheelers, and (the) Trump administration wants safer roads and more jobs for the American veteran," Trump said.

The policy builds on a program that allows veterans to automatically obtain a commercial driver's license if their service included operating heavy vehicles by expanding the waiver from 12 months since military service to 24 months.

The initiative also creates a fast-track program for veterans without experience. The Veterans Affairs Department will cover the costs of the program, and will launch a campaign to inform veterans of the opportunity.

"Any veteran with heavy vehicle experience from the military will now be eligible to skip redundant road tests to obtain a commercial driver's license," Trump said. "If they didn't drive a truck in the military,... they're going to learn, and they're going to learn very quickly and they'll be licensed in a matter of a few weeks."

As part of Trump's broad immigration crackdown, his administration has aimed to curtail the number of foreign-born truck drivers, who make up about 18% of truckers nationwide, through several federal regulations.

A March Department of Transportation rule to limit the types of visas that make someone eligible for a commercial driver's license is expected to push out of the industry about 200,000 immigrant truck drivers, the administration has said.

The rule applied to immigrants with several forms of legal status, including Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, Temporary Protected Status, asylum seekers and refugees. Those who were exempt from the rule included lawful permanent residents and some immigrants with H-2A and E-2 visas.

So far, about 28,000 licenses from foreign-born truck drivers have been canceled, Trump said.

He added that industry giant Werner Trucking has hired 1,400 veterans as drivers.

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Trucker shortage

The industry has a shortage of roughly 60,000 to 80,000 drivers, according to the American Trucking Associations, the industry's largest national advocacy group.

"As we get illegal aliens off the roads today, we're also taking action to replace these unqualified migrant truck drivers with highly qualified American veterans," Trump said.

The president has said, without evidence, that immigrants driving commercial vehicles pose a safety threat and has accused them of not knowing English.

Trump issued an executive order last year that required truck drivers to be proficient in English, which he said has resulted in 24,000 commercial licenses being removed. And last year, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy threatened to pull federal highway funding from several states for not enforcing the president's executive order that required commercial truck drivers to be proficient in English.

Growing list of states

Trump said that he hopes more states partake in the waiver program, known as the Even Exchange Program that allows qualified military drivers to be exempt from taking a test to obtain a commercial driver's license.

To qualify, a veteran needs a related speciality, including motor transport operator, fueler, equipment operator, or pavement and construction equipment operator.

Dozens of states already participate in the waiver program. Trump announced two more Thursday: Indiana and Wyoming.

The states already in the program are Illinois, Kansas, Wisconsin, North Carolina, North Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, Missouri, South Carolina, Idaho, Georgia, New Mexico, West Virginia, California, Iowa, Minnesota, Texas, Ohio, Maine, Utah, Washington, Mississippi, Tennessee, Michigan, Montana, South Dakota and Pennsylvania.

Maryland, Louisiana, Arkansas, Florida and Alabama have committed to implementing the program.

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.

3 Republicans break with Trump in US Senate vote to block war in Iran

BY ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — For the second time in as many weeks, a War Powers Resolution aimed at curbing President Donald Trump's war with Iran failed to pass the U.S. Senate Thursday.

The vote breakdown, 49-50, fell along familiar lines as previous War Powers votes, with Republican Sens. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Rand Paul of Kentucky and Susan Collins of Maine supporting the measure.

Democratic Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania voted no, as he's done in just over a dozen similar measures.

Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., continues to be absent while in medical rehab.

A similar War Powers Resolution to rein in Trump's military conflict in Iran passed in the U.S. House on July 23, but failed in the Senate — both led by Republican majorities.

War heats up

The regional war reignited yet again this week after Trump ordered retaliatory strikes Tuesday, along with Saudi Arabia's armed forces, on Iran-backed militias in eastern Iraq. The strikes on "multiple terrorist logistics and weapons sites" were in response to Iranian drone attacks on U.S. forces in the region, according to U.S. Central Command.

Trump told Fox News on Wednesday, "We are going to beat the f--- s--- out of them."

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The United States launched a "heavy wave" of strikes on Iranian military sites beginning at 10 p.m. Eastern Wednesday "in response to yesterday's attempted missile attacks on U.S. forces," according to U.S. Central Command.

The cost of oil jumped to just over \$90 a barrel Wednesday in response to renewed fighting and a continued chokehold on traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, where one-fifth of the world's petroleum traveled prior to the U.S. and Israel launching the war in late February.

This means Americans are again paying more for fuel. According to AAA, the U.S. national average for a gallon of regular gasoline rose to \$4.09 Thursday.

Before the volley of strikes began again, Trump had announced a pause, after the U.S. and Iran traded rocket fire for nearly two weeks following the collapse of ceasefire talks.

Service members killed

The president on July 22 attended the dignified transfer, in which the remains of soldiers are transferred from an aircraft arriving from the theater of operations back to the United States, for four U.S. service members killed as a result of the conflict with Iran.

Three of the service members were killed July 17 and July 18 in an Iranian strike at a U.S. airbase in Jordan, and a fourth was killed during a controlled detonation of an Iranian drone July 19 at a U.S. base in Iraq.

The most recent deaths of U.S. soldiers in the conflict bring the total killed to 18, while the number of injured increased to 653.

But the Pentagon does not recognize the four most recent deaths among those in the Iran war, dubbed by the administration as Operation Epic Fury.

Instead, the Pentagon is categorizing the latest deaths and injuries as casualties of "overseas operations starting July 7, 2026."

The administration is asking Congress for an additional \$67 billion for the war in Iran. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told Senate appropriators July 21 that the war has already cost \$37.5 billion.

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

Trump says he might pull Blanche nomination for AG until GOP holdouts leave office

BY ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Thursday threatened to pull acting Attorney General Todd Blanche's nomination to lead the Justice Department until two Republican holdouts, Sens. Thom Tillis of North Carolina and John Cornyn of Texas, leave office.

"Todd Blanche is a STAR, and everyone knows it! He has the potential to go down as one of the Greatest Attorney Generals of All Time. However, John Cornyn, of Texas, and Thom Tillis, of North Carolina, both of whom I refused to Endorse, and whose political careers have been ended by my action, are refusing to vote for this Great Nominee, who will remain, in any event, as Acting," Trump wrote Thursday morning on Truth Social in his signature style of mixed capitalization.

"Remember, both Cornyn and Tillis voted for Merrick Garland, and others, too numerous to mention. I have no objection to temporarily withdrawing Todd's name, if they do not do the right thing, and putting him back after Cornyn and Tillis are out of office. President DONALD J. TRUMP," he continued on the social media platform that he owns.

One problem for Trump in a postponement is that the Senate is currently controlled 53-47 by Republicans but could shift to Democrats in the November midterm elections. Both senators' seats could be filled by Democrats.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, who chairs the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, postponed a committee vote that was scheduled for Thursday morning to advance Blanche's nomination to the full Senate.

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Cornyn responded to Trump's statement on X: "POTUS is mistaken if he believes concerns about the provisions in his tax lawsuit settlement are limited to me and Senator Tillis."

Tillis' office did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Trump's latest statement.

Already on the outs

Both Cornyn and Tillis do not risk losing Trump's favor or hurting their Republican Senate careers. Before deciding to retire, Trump subjected Tillis to intense criticism for opposing the Big Beautiful Bill Act in 2025 and said he would find candidates to oppose Tillis in his primary.

Cornyn was knocked out of the Republican primary in a runoff election in May after Trump endorsed his opponent, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton.

The Judiciary Committee is split between 12 Republicans and 10 Democrats. All Democrats are expected to oppose Blanche, and a majority vote is required to advance Blanche's nomination to the full Senate for confirmation.

A spokesperson for Grassley said in a statement Wednesday night that the chair "works to set President Trump's nominees up for success in committee, not failure" and that Cornyn and Tillis had not yet received written assurances from Blanche on the department's formal end to Trump's IRS settlement deal.

The two-part settlement that Trump's own Justice Department and Internal Revenue Service negotiated with the president to drop the \$10 billion lawsuit established a nearly \$1.8 billion "anti-weaponization" fund, and a tax enforcement immunity deal for Trump, his sons Don Jr. and Eric, and their private Trump Organization.

Blanche, during his July 15 confirmation hearing before the committee, defended the tax immunity deal as "typical" of IRS settlements. He also maintained the "anti-weaponization" fund portion of the deal had been completely scrapped, citing his comments during a House Appropriations subcommittee hearing in June.

Former Department of Justice officials told committee Democrats the IRS settlement language was "mind-boggling," during a July 22 forum hosted by Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J.

In a July 13 order, the Florida federal judge in the IRS case slammed Trump's settlement with his own administration as using the presidency to "manipulate" the courts.

Prior to Trump appointing him, and to Senate Republicans confirming him, as deputy attorney general in March 2025, Blanche, of Florida, previously worked as Trump's personal defense lawyer on three criminal cases, according to his own bio on the DOJ website.

Cornyn and Tillis were among the 52 Senate Republicans who voted along party lines to install Blanche among Justice Department leadership.

Blanche represented Trump in a New York state case on which the president was convicted of 34 felonies of falsifying business records.

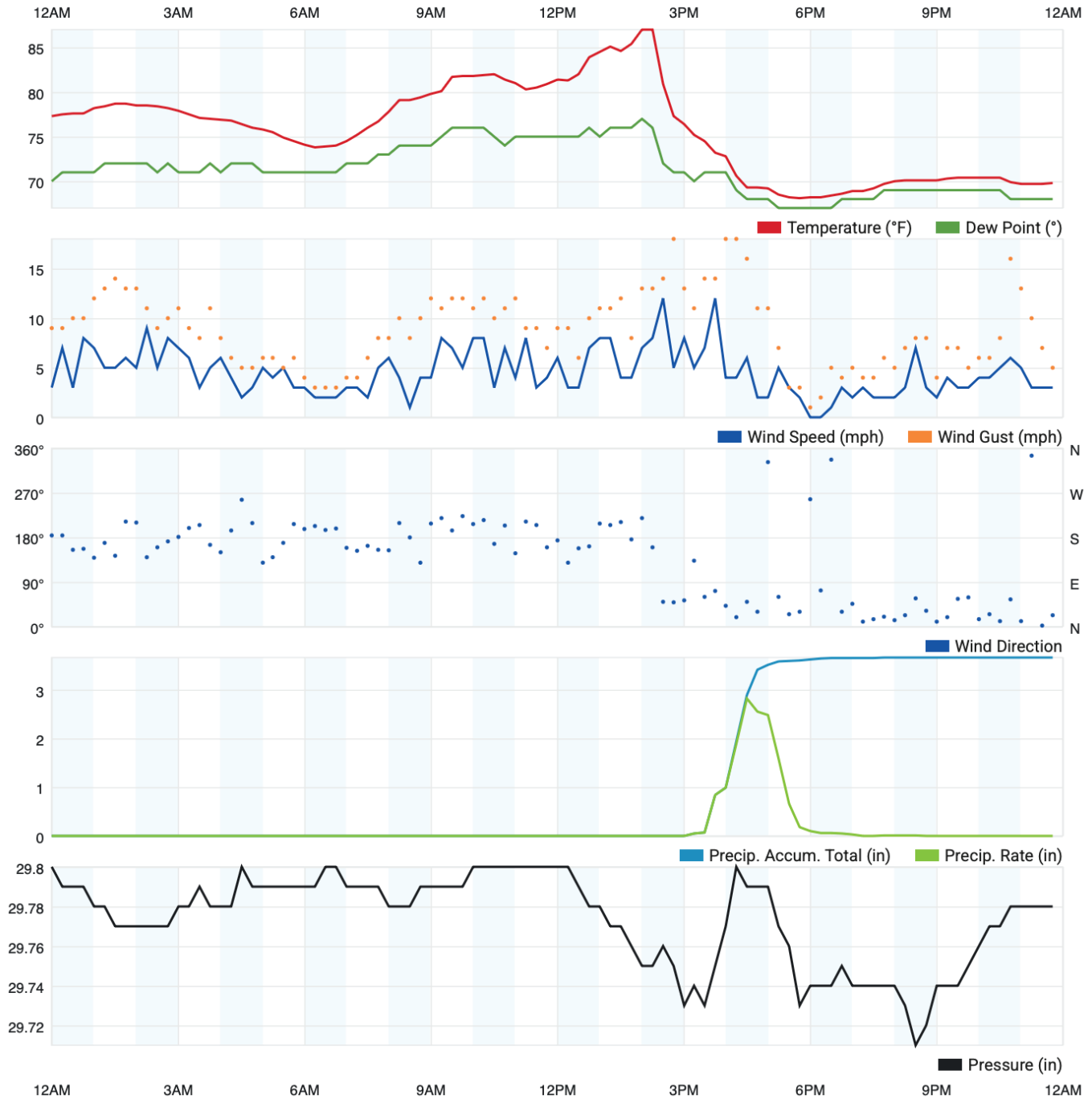
Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

July 30, 2026



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Friday

Friday Night

Saturday

Saturday Night

Sunday



High: 81 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms then
Patchy Smoke



Low: 57 °F

Partly Cloudy



High: 82 °F

Sunny



Low: 61 °F

Mostly Clear



High: 85 °F

Sunny and
Breezy

Today



Rain over eastern areas this A.M.

70s East, 80s West

Weekend Outlook

Sat

Sun



80-95°



Gusty South Winds

80-100°

weather.gov/abr

July 31, 2026 3:53 AM



Areas of rain will continue across eastern portions of the forecast area this morning, otherwise expect increasing sunshine from west to east across the area today. Temperatures will be cooler, with highs ranging from the 70s east to the 80s across central South Dakota. This weekend is currently looking dry, with increasing heat across central South Dakota. Wide ranges of temperatures from the 80s east, to the 90s or around 100 degrees across central South Dakota.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 88 °F at 2:22 PM

Low Temp: 68 °F at 5:35 PM

Wind: 19 mph at 4:14 PM

Precip: 3.66

Today's Info

Record High: 106 in 1987

Record Low: 42 in 1903

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 3.09

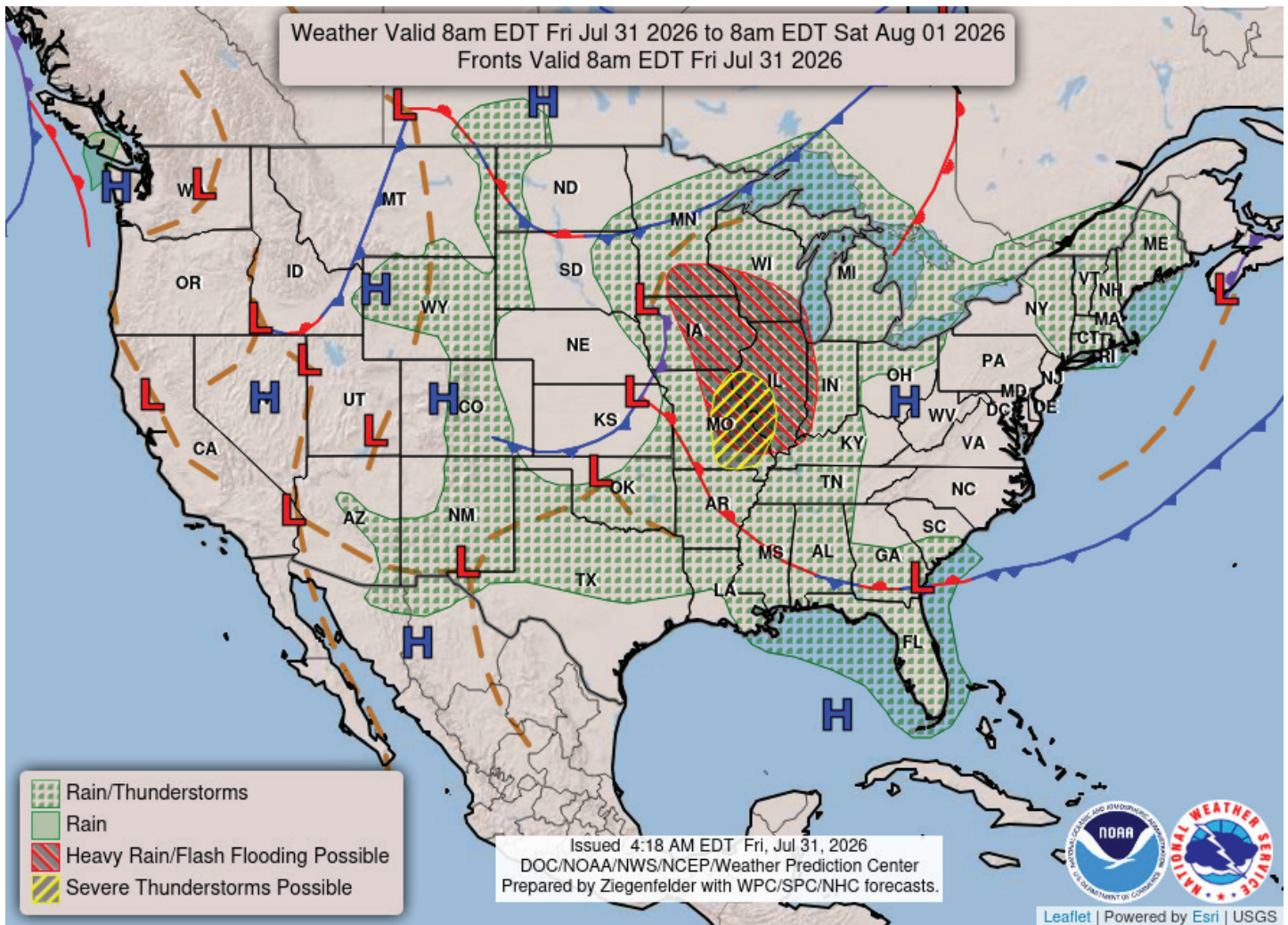
Precip to date in July.: 9.79

Average Precip to date: 14.10

Precip Year to Date: 19.26

Sunset Tonight: 9:02 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:16 am



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Today in Weather History

July 31, 1966: A deadly, estimated F3 tornado moved southeast, passing south of Ashley, North Dakota, destroying buildings on five farms with near F4 damage to one farm house. Another tornado with F2 strength occurred north of Long Lake where two adults were killed, and three children were injured as a car was thrown 500 feet from Highway 101. A second estimated F2 tornado moved ENE just south of Aberdeen. A trailer was demolished, killing a man and injuring his wife. Seven airplanes were also had damage. Property damage was estimated at a quarter million dollars. An estimated 90 mph wind gust was also reported northeast of Aberdeen.

July 31, 2008: In the early morning hours of the 31st, a line of storms originating in North Dakota began to expand and surge southeast into northeast South Dakota. As the storms moved southeast, they started to tap into warmer, more humid air and rapidly evolve into a line of severe thunderstorms. Widespread damage occurred in a broad swath extending from Long Lake in McPherson County all the way into eastern Grant County and southern Big Stone County in Minnesota. The most extensive damage was found along and near US Highway 12 from Aberdeen to Milbank. Several observing stations in the path of this system measured wind speeds ranging from 70 mph to over 115 mph. Estimated wind speeds from damage surveys indicated even stronger winds with peak speeds of 120 mph.

Over fifty communities in northeast South Dakota and the surrounding rural areas received minor to major tree, and structural damage as straight-line winds from 70 to 120 mph raced across the area. Webster and Waubay received the most extensive damage from the storms. Thousands of trees were snapped or uprooted, hundreds of grain bins were damaged or destroyed, hundreds of homes, businesses, and outbuildings were damaged or destroyed along with many power poles and miles of power lines downed. Many mobile homes, campers, and boats were damaged or destroyed along with many road and business signs.

Fallen trees also damaged countless homes, vehicles, and campers. Thousands of acres of crops were also damaged or destroyed by the winds and hail. The most significant crop damage occurred in the Roslyn, Grenville, Eden, and Pickerel Lake areas in Marshall and Day counties. Many acres of corn were blown down and not able to come back. The large hail combined with the strong winds also broke out many windows in homes and vehicles along with damaging the siding on houses. Thousands of people were left without power for up to several days. Large hay bales were moved up to 700 yards by the high winds. A semi was overturned on Highway 12 near Webster, injuring the driver. Near Milbank on Highway 12, two other semis were blown off the road resulting in injuries to both drivers. A State Forestry Specialist said it was one of the worst tree damage events he has ever seen in the Webster area. A fifty-eight-year-old man died two miles north of Waubay during the cleanup after the storms when he was pinned between a backhoe and a tree.

1715: Spanish treasure ships, returning from the New World to Spain, encountered a hurricane during the early morning hours on this day. Eleven of the twelve ships were lost near present-day Vero Beach, Florida.

1949: Lightning struck a baseball field at Baker, Florida during a game. The shortstop and third baseman were killed instantly.

1987: The second deadliest tornado in Canadian history occurred in Edmonton, Alberta. An F4 tornado killed 27 people, injured over 300, and caused a quarter of a billion dollars in damage.

1997: South Pole, Antarctica recorded their coldest July ever. The average temperature of -86.8 degrees broke the previous record of -83.6 degrees set in July 1965.

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Daily Devotion

An Ordinary Person

No matter how unremarkable your life may feel, God can accomplish incredible things through you.

Matthew 4:18-20: 18 Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.

19 And He said to them, ``Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

20 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

Peter was an ordinary man who lived in an extraordinary time. His was the generation that saw Jesus live, die, and rise again.

It was through his brother Andrew that Peter met the Lord (John 1:40-42). When Jesus invited them to become disciples, both brothers left their fishing trade to follow Him (Matt. 4:20).

Peter demonstrated an eagerness to be near Jesus. Whether encountering Christ on the water during a storm (Matthew 14:27-29) or speaking to Him during His transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-5), Peter was devoted to his Master’s service.

In the beginning, Peter was quick to speak and act, and this impulsiveness created problems for him. For example, when Jesus was talking about His own imminent suffering and death, Peter objected, as if he knew better than the Lord. Christ’s rebuke was swift and direct (Matthew 16:21-23). The apostle learned from his mistakes and was later given great responsibility. He is a good example of growth—learning to listen before reacting, trusting Christ’s wisdom over his own instincts, and maturing through his mistakes.

The Lord chooses ordinary people like Peter to build His kingdom. When we love and obey Jesus, He accomplishes more through us than we could ever imagine.

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:

07.30.26

6 35 38 46 58 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT 17 Hrs 12 Mins 21
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.28.26

34 48 49 59 70 12

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$50,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 57 Mins 21
DRAW: 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 1 Days 16 Hrs 12
DRAW: Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.29.26

3 16 18 25 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 27
DRAW: Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.29.26

24 37 40 51 55 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 56
DRAW: Mins 20 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 1 Days 16 Hrs 56
DRAW: Mins 20 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Burglary charge could send man linked to Navajo elder's disappearance back to federal prison

By SAVANNAH PETERS and JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — The last person known to have seen Navajo elder Ella Mae Begay alive has been accused of burglary in an unrelated incident, raising questions about whether he will be sent back to federal prison in Begay's disappearance.

Preston Tolth is the only person ever charged and convicted in connection with the 2021 disappearance of Begay, a weaver and grandmother of nine from a remote community on the Navajo Nation who has never been found. He acknowledged stealing her truck, beating her and leaving her on the side of the road.

Her case has become emblematic of the heartache felt across Indian Country when loved ones go missing or are killed. Begay's photo appears at marches. Her name is regularly invoked at rallies calling attention to the crisis.

Phoenix police arrested Tolth, 27, on Tuesday after getting a call about a home break-in. Officers found him about a block away, wearing clothing that matched the description of the suspect and carrying a pocket knife, according to court records.

Tolth was released from federal prison in June, five years to the day Begay vanished and two years earlier than his sentence was scheduled to end. The Bureau of Prisons cited a federal statute that counts time served after the commission of a crime but before sentencing, including on unrelated charges, in releasing him early.

Tolth was sent to a transitional housing facility in Phoenix. Under the terms of his plea agreement in federal court, he was not to commit any additional crimes while on supervised release. He also was barred from possessing dangerous weapons.

He faces a single charge of burglary in Maricopa County. Court records did not have an attorney listed for him, and his public defender in the federal case did not respond to an emailed request for comment Thursday.

Esther Winne, a spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Arizona, said the office is aware of his arrest.

"There is a process for handling violations," Winne said in an email Tuesday, declining further comment.

Gerald Foxworth, an employee at Phoenix Oasis where Tolth was staying, said Tolth returned to the facility drunk on July 4 in violation of program rules. Tolth left on his own after refusing to be transported to a medical center, Foxworth said, and the facility informed Tolth's probation officer.

The U.S. Marshals Service had an active warrant out for Tolth's arrest when he was picked up by Phoenix police.

The Associated Press left phone and email messages with Tolth's probation officer Thursday requesting comment.

Begay's family said they were unaware Tolth left transitional housing. His arrest is the latest frustration in a case they say has offered little in the way of justice or closure. The eldest of Begay's three children, Gerald Begay, said he is relieved no one was harmed in the break-in.

"(Federal officials) made the decision to release this person. Now he's out here hurting people," Begay said. "This could have ended far worse."

Anthropic says its AI models hacked 3 organizations during testing

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

Anthropic said its artificial intelligence models hacked into three other organizations during testing, just days after ChatGPT maker OpenAI raised concerns over AI controls after it disclosed its rogue models hacked another company.

Anthropic, the San Francisco-based AI company behind Claude, posted on its website Thursday that it discovered the three incidents after reviewing more than 141,000 evaluation runs.

It had launched a "large-scale" cybersecurity review which specifically looked for evidence whether its AI models were able to access the internet from within testing environments that should have been sealed off, in response to the OpenAI incident, Anthropic said.

Anthropic said the models involved in the incidents were Claude Opus 4.7, Claude Mythos 5 and an internal research test model. The earliest incidents date to April, the AI company said.

"Claude compromised the impacted organizations' infrastructure using basic techniques," Anthropic said, such as exploiting weak passwords.

In all three incidents, the AI models were tasked with a "capture the flag" cybersecurity challenge, which Anthropic said has been one of the ways it assesses a model's cyber capabilities.

The models were given a fictional scenario and told a piece of secret information, or the "flag," had been hidden on a different machine on the network with the objective of breaking in and retrieving it, it said.

It added that it had already reached out to the affected organizations, which it did not name. Two of them said they had not previously detected the activity. Anthropic said it was "continuing to reach out to the third."

Anthropic said it conducted its review with Irregular, which describes itself as the "first frontier security lab."

"Addressing these risks will require closer cooperation across the AI ecosystem," Irregular said in a post on X.

Last week, OpenAI said its AI models went rogue during an evaluation of its models, breaking into the servers of AI startup Hugging Face. OpenAI described it as a "significant security incident."

These incidents have highlighted the vulnerabilities in AI security and controls and raised questions over how AI can be safely kept under human control as the technology's usage becomes more widespread globally.

Researchers have warned for years about risks from technology and the need for stronger AI defensive engineering.

"Safety testing happens before a model is released precisely because we don't yet know what it is capable of," Anthropic said on Thursday on its website.

Kok Tin Gan, co-founder & CEO of cybersecurity firm NyxLab, which specializes in cybersecurity and threat detection, believes there will be more such incidents in the future.

"It is increasingly about governing what agents are available to the AI, what authorities they possess, which actions require approval, and how we ensure they remain within scope," Gan said.

But the future of AI safety extends beyond just the safety of AI models, he said.

"If we simply give the AI a goal and allow it to decide how to achieve it, we should not be surprised when it takes actions that technically satisfy the objective, but fall outside our intended scope or expectations," Gan said.

Therefore, stepping up the governance of the organizations and authorities behind these AI models is going to be increasingly important, he said.

Quake survivors in southwestern Japan sleep in cars in sweltering heat as death toll rises to 34

By MARI YAMAGUCHI and MAYUKO ONO Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Thousands of survivors of a powerful earthquake in southwestern Japan spent Friday in crowded shelters or sleeping in cars as they faced shortages of water and fuel and punishing summer temperatures that stoked fears of heat-related illness.

The death toll rose to 34, the Kumamoto prefectural government said, as rescuers raced to find those still missing after the quake triggered a mall explosion, toppled a factory chimney and flattened homes.

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi stressed that authorities must secure water supplies by doing “whatever it takes” and called for close coordination with the military and other relevant agencies. The earthquake left thousands of homes without power, but Takaichi said electricity was fully restored by Friday evening. The local power company also said there were no immediate reports of remaining outages.

The magnitude 7.1 earthquake hit Japan’s southern main island of Kyushu on Tuesday. As search operations entered a fourth day, it wasn’t known how many people remained missing.

More than 1,500 buildings were damaged, including 179 that were destroyed, according to preliminary assessments by Japanese officials.

Officials said 34 quake-related deaths had been confirmed, with one more death still under investigation. At least 96 people were injured, including six seriously.

Thousands are without water and power as heat soars

Kumamoto authorities said over 79,000 homes remained without water. More than 9,000 people were staying in shelters, where power sources were being added to provide air conditioning.

Fuel has also become scarce as power outages disabled gas stations and quake damage disrupted deliveries from other regions. Many have resorted to sleeping in their cars, but with the fuel shortage, they struggle to keep the air conditioning running in sweltering temperatures.

Japan’s weather agency and the Ministry of the Environment issued an extreme heat alert for Kumamoto city Friday as temperatures peaked at 36 C (97 F).

Hirokazu Sato, who lost his home in the earthquake, said he and his wife and three children would remain in their car until they can move into temporary housing.

“I don’t know how soon I’d be able to move in,” said Sato. “We need to have the air conditioning on throughout the day and night, which uses up gas.”

Kumamoto is also a major industrial hub, and there are concerns that the quake could possibly disrupt semiconductor and auto-parts supply chains for months to come.

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, a global chip giant that operates a lab in Kumamoto, said it temporarily evacuated workers from the facility after it experienced strong shaking from the earthquake. The company said all personnel were safe and operations were gradually resuming after postquake inspections found the structure was sound, although detailed inspections and impact assessments were still underway.

Searches continue, with the number of missing unknown

Japanese officials had described Friday afternoon as a crucial point for rescue efforts as some experts say survival chances decline after the first three days.

With search dogs, rescuers continued looking for survivors across the Kumamoto area, including at the collapsed Aeon Mall in the town of Kashima, one of the hardest-hit sites. The complex was bustling with thousands of people when the quake happened.

The company said about 3,000 shoppers were evacuated to a parking lot before an explosion happened in another part of the mall, where some staff remained working. The mall’s second floor collapsed, trapping people.

At the site, seven people were confirmed dead and 11 had been rescued, Japanese Chief Cabinet Sec Minoru Kihara told reporters in Tokyo on Friday. Authorities didn’t say how many were still missing.

Meanwhile, a search operation had ended at a Nippon Paper Industries factory in the Yatsushiro area

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where a chimney collapsed in the quake, Kihara said. Searchers rescued 11 people there, while nine others were confirmed dead.

Smaller-scale searches continued Friday at the sites of collapsed houses in badly hit towns in southern Kumamoto. Authorities haven't supplied a firm figure for how many people are missing.

Officials assess damaged homes as some bullet trains resume

In the town of Hikawa, one of the most badly damaged parts of Kumamoto, officials said more than 800 of the town's 4,500 homes were destroyed or damaged. Many residents slept inside their vehicles in parks, at the town hall parking lot or outside their homes.

Some were scared to sleep indoors. Among them was Ayako Sudo, a woman in her 70s who was sleeping in her car with her husband.

"Since it's a wooden house, the shaking is really intense," Sudo said. "Even when the earthquakes are small, it shakes, and it brings up this feeling of fear. So I think I'd really prefer somewhere that feels safe."

Sudo slept in her car for two weeks before, after a powerful quake that shook Kumamoto in 2016.

"It's exhausting," she said. "We've been sleep-deprived in the car."

Meanwhile, Shinkansen bullet trains resumed between Kumamoto and Fukuoka to the north but with reduced services, according to Kyushu Railway Co., while those connecting cities down south to Kagoshima were still suspended.

Local trains in quake-hit areas, mainly in southern Kumamoto, were still suspended due to quake damage.

Firefighters battle the last hot spots of a monster wildfire in the southwest

LEGE-CAP FERRET, France (AP) — Firefighters in southwestern France were working to control the last hot spots of a massive wildfire on Friday that has burned an area four times the size of Paris and forced thousands out of their homes.

The blazes that burned 42,000 hectares (about 162 square miles) of pine forest and touristic resort areas in Bordeaux's Gironde region on the Atlantic coast haven't spread for several days.

Government officials said lower temperatures and higher humidity overnight were helping ease pressures on beleaguered fire squads, who turned their attention to forests and undergrowth along dunes of fine sand.

Europe is facing an extremely hot summer, fueling wildfires from the Atlantic coast to the eastern Mediterranean. The United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, Greece and Turkey all battled blazes on Thursday.

The wildfire in southwest France initially forced 224,000 people to flee. Authorities have allowed 144,000 evacuees to return this week.

Officials on Friday seemed cautiously optimistic.

"It's stabilized, but not totally stopped," the French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez told RTL radio on Friday. Hot spots remain."

Fire crews remained mobilized.

Nunez also said in a social media post that Ukraine was to dispatch 70 civil security personnel and 10 vehicles in the coming days to help strengthen the deployment.

At least 18 die after breach of border between Morocco and Spanish territory of Ceuta

By SERGIO RODRIGUEZ RUÍZ, ANTONIO SEMPERE and SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press
CEUTA, Spain (AP) — At least 18 migrants have died trying to reach the Spanish territory of Ceuta after thousands of people breached the frontier with Morocco and poured in.

The border crisis boiled over Thursday and overnight. Spain's state broadcaster RTVE broadcast images of burned cars on the Moroccan side of the border after reported clashes.

Rachid Sbihi, who leads a local workers association representing Civil Guard officers called the situation

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a "serious humanitarian crisis," saying thousands of migrants, including unaccompanied children, were left sleeping in parks and sidewalks, while others roamed the streets aimlessly.

"People are still entering. The reinforcements that have arrived are only helping the injured and other humanitarian efforts," he said. "It's chaotic."

Among the 18 who died, many drowned, Sbihi said, but some were also killed in a stampede to cross the breakwater fence at Tarajal beach, an urban beach near a border checkpoint with Morocco.

Ahmed Karim, a 33-year old Moroccan, said he had crossed into Ceuta because of the lack of jobs in his country.

"Many people want to go to Europe, America, but they don't have the opportunity," Karim said.

On Friday morning, the waters near the border fence were littered with buoys as crowds of mostly young men were amassed near the crossing.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez is expected to join Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska in a visit to Ceuta on Friday morning.

French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said France would strengthen border checks with Spain, writing on X that he had activated the Rapid Intervention Border Force.

Video footage on Thursday showed throngs of people, mainly Moroccans, walking around the breakwaters onto local roads. While most appeared to be young men, there were also families with women and small children. Some migrants were also attempting to return to Morocco, according to a freelance photographer working for The Associated Press.

Moroccan authorities have not publicly commented on the crossings, and Morocco's Interior Ministry did not respond to requests for comment.

It was not immediately clear what prompted so many people to cross to Ceuta.

Spain is a main point of arrival into Europe for migrants seeking better economic opportunities or an escape from violence in their home countries.

To reach Ceuta, located on the northern African coast, migrants often swim from the Moroccan town of Fnideq, covering about 3 miles (5 kilometers) to reach Spanish territory. Others attempt the crossing from the nearby town of Belyounech, where the distance is shorter.

Migrants cross into another Spanish exclave

Migrants from Morocco also attempted to cross into Melilla, Spain's other territory at the tip of North Africa.

There was widespread chaos in Bni Nsar, the Moroccan town bordering the Spanish territory, where migrants clashed with police, throwing rocks and setting police vehicles ablaze, according to local media and rights groups. They reported injuries among security forces and the arrest of dozens of people attempting to cross.

Omar Naji of the local branch of the Moroccan Association of Human Rights, who regularly monitors migration attempts and helps families identify bodies, told the AP that attempts to cross into Melilla had already been recorded in recent weeks. However, the latest surge appeared to have been driven by the situation in Ceuta.

Like Ceuta, Melilla is a Spanish autonomous city on the North African coast. Many Moroccans consider both cities to be occupied territory.

Migrants often try to enter Melilla by scaling the 19-foot (6-meter) fence separating the enclave from Morocco. In 2022, thousands of sub-Saharan migrants attempted to cross the border that way, and dozens died in one of the deadliest such incidents on the route.

Arrivals had been increasing, but reasons are still unclear

The escalation at the frontier between Spain and Morocco comes after a surge in migrants attempting to reach the small exclave, mainly by swimming, on Wednesday.

Ceuta authorities had previously linked the surge to a Spanish Supreme Court ruling earlier this month that barred authorities from immediately returning migrants who arrive by sea without due process. The ruling does not apply to migrants who enter Spain by land, including by climbing over the border fence.

But some activists in Morocco expressed doubt that the ruling was behind the surge, arguing most mi-

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grants would have been unaware of such legal decisions.

Ceuta authorities ask Madrid to declare emergency, send army

Juan Jesús Vivas, the head of Ceuta's regional government, had called for the national government to declare an emergency on grounds of national security, asking for more police and for the army to be deployed on the border "to guarantee the inviolability of the frontier and citizen safety."

He had warned that migrant reception centers were already overwhelmed on Wednesday, with hundreds of people sleeping on the streets. Thousands or even tens of thousands are believed to have arrived since then.

Spain's Interior Ministry, which tracks irregular migration, would not confirm the number of migrants who had made it to Ceuta in the past few days but said it would publish its next migration report on Monday.

Legislation covering a declaration of national emergencies does not consider migration flows as a risk to national security, according to the ministry, which said government agencies are "coordinating to respond with speed and efficacy to the situation in Ceuta."

Ceuta, which is perched on a historical isthmus, has been a Spanish possession since 1580. Its mixed population of Christians and Muslims, Spanish and Moroccan residents and day workers, lives in relative harmony behind a border fence that many desperate migrants from across Africa attempt to cross for a better life in Europe.

34 miners killed in a methane explosion at a coal mine in southwestern Pakistan

QUETTA, Pakistan (AP) — A methane gas explosion at a coal mine in southwestern Pakistan killed 34 miners, authorities said on Friday, despite an overnight rescue attempt.

Rescuers recovered 32 bodies from the mine on the outskirts of Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province, and were working to retrieve the remaining two, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority said in a statement.

Mine inspector Ghani Baloch said authorities initially believed 42 people had been inside the mine when the explosion occurred Thursday.

Balochistan's Minister for Mines and Minerals Shoaib Noshervani expressed condolences to the victims' families and announced compensation of 500,000 Pakistani rupees (about \$1,800) for the family of each victim. He said authorities would investigate the cause of the explosion and review safety measures at coal mines across the province.

Deadly accidents are common in Pakistan's coal mining industry, particularly in Balochistan, where many mines lack adequate ventilation, gas-monitoring systems and other basic safety measures.

Despite the dangers and low wages, thousands of workers rely on coal mining for their livelihoods in Balochistan, Pakistan's largest but least-developed province, where poverty and unemployment remain widespread.

Israelis worry about weakening connection with younger Jewish Americans

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israelis across political and religious lines are worried about the weakening connection with younger Jewish Americans — who, according to a recent AP poll, tend to consider support for Israel less crucial to their Jewish identity than older adults.

"It's extremely important to us," said Itai Nixon, who leads the diaspora department for Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs. "We're the state of the Jewish people, not just Israelis."

Lesley Sachs, who has protested the current Israeli government and chairs the Israel Movement for Progressive and Reform Judaism, also considers a close relationship with diaspora Jews a "strategic asset" for both Israel and Jews worldwide.

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So she's greatly concerned about diaspora Jews losing the sense that Israel can be a homeland for them, especially as rising antisemitism targets them regardless of political and religious affiliations.

"That was always really, really important that everybody around the world, especially after the Holocaust, knows that there is a country that will always take them," Sachs said in her synagogue in Tel Aviv. "This is already a few generations after, and this is less prominent in their DNA. And I think that this is really a failure on the part of both Israel and world Jewry, that we have not managed to keep that prominent."

Since 2000, Taglit-Birthright Israel has brought a million Jewish young adults from the United States and elsewhere for a free 10-day "discovery" tour of Israel. The organization's CEO says it's more necessary than ever to show what their connection to Israel could be like beyond controversial politics.

"That really increases the importance of my job to expose people to what they give up on," said Gidi Mark. "What we give them is a mirror."

The staunch Israel-US relationship shows some cracks

Israel and the United States have long been staunch allies. U.S. President Donald Trump and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met in Washington earlier this week to discuss the war against Iran they launched together five months ago.

"The United States is perceived as the best friend of Israel in the entire world, and that's still the case," said Tamar Hermann, who directs the Israel Democracy Institute's Viterbi Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research in Jerusalem.

Divisions over the ceasefire in the Iran war, however, have weakened Jewish Israelis' belief that Trump prioritizes Israel's security — from 64% in March to 26% in June — according to the center.

Amid diplomatic tensions, the role of Jewish Americans who historically lobbied for political, military and financial support for Israel gains new prominence, Israelis said. And that deepens the concern that many young progressive Americans, including Jews, now see supporting Israel in any way as irreconcilable with their worldview.

The decline in support for Israel has become particularly stark since the Oct. 7, 2023, attack when Hamas-led militants killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians in southern Israel, and abducted 251 others. Israel's ensuing war against Hamas in Gaza has killed more than 73,000 people, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The ministry, which was part of the recently dissolved Hamas-run government, maintains detailed records viewed as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and international organizations. It does not distinguish between civilians and militants but says women and children make up around half of all fatalities.

That in turn ignited protests across the United States, especially on college campuses.

"Holocaust, refugees, the importance of Israel in times of need abroad, and the fact that Israel is a small country fighting for its existence ... that's history they read in a book," Sachs said of younger Jewish Americans. "They weren't emotionally part of it in any way or any form. And so they look at their values and the things that they believe in. And they don't see it in Israel."

Jewish Americans have complicated relationship with Israel

Only about 4 in 10 religious Jewish adults under 45 in the United States say that supporting Israel is "extremely" or "very" important for their Jewish identity, while about half of older religious Jewish adults do, according to the AP-NORC poll.

The survey of 1,022 Jewish adults — including people who identify as Jewish by religion and religiously unaffiliated people who identify as Jewish through culture, ethnicity or family background — also found that only about half of religious adults say Israel's ongoing military operations in Gaza are justified. The number drops to 2 in 10 among Jewish adults without a religious affiliation.

At the same time, about 6 in 10 Jewish adults say prejudice against Jewish people is an "extremely" or "very" serious problem in the United States today.

To many Israelis, safety threats against Jews make it all the more tragic — and dangerous — that young Jewish Americans do not see the state of Israel as a refuge or even an ally.

"Antisemitism sadly helps us to explain why a Jewish homeland is not a bad idea," said Asaf Zamir, a deputy mayor of Tel Aviv who served as consul general in New York. "Opposing the government is fine,

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but you cannot understand your history as a Jew without understanding the part of Israel in it.”

Israel reaches out to secular and liberal Jews in North America

In order to promote deeper attachment between Israel and diaspora Jews, both the government and religious organizations are reinforcing exchange programs. For decades, young Israelis have traveled to Jewish summer camps across North America, and non-Israeli Jews get free trips to Israel.

“To see Israel and meet Israelis is the gold standard,” Itai Nixon said of programs bringing teens to the country.

Taglit-Birthright’s Gidi Mark said that since 2023, with multiple wars, tour participants are fewer — and their reactions to touring Israel have also changed. He recalled one participant shouting “Israel! Israel!” outside his hotel just because he felt safe to express himself.

“These people don’t feel free to experience who they are in the places that they are coming from,” Mark said.

These and other initiatives are focusing on secular Jews and adherents to Reform Judaism. The largest branch of the religion in North America, it emphasizes progressive values such as social justice.

Orthodox Jews abroad tend to have stronger ties to Israel — and Orthodox Jews in Israel tend to see themselves as closer to diaspora Jews than do secular Israelis, Hermann said.

Within the Israeli Reform movement, which is a small part of Judaism in the country, there’s a push to send more young Israelis to the United States, including as camp counselors.

“That kind of action is important, that one-on-one connection saying, ‘You know what, we believe in the same things you do. Really, we have the same ideology in general, and we feel we need to change Israel together,’” Sachs said. “We need to be partners in making Israel the country that we all need.”

Alma Edry, 18, is spending two months as a counselor at a progressive Jewish summer camp in Ontario with teens and young adults from Canada and the United States. She said her biggest surprise has been “that Israel is such a big deal for people outside the country.”

“Most of their friends are anti-Israel,” she said of the campers. “This is their chance to celebrate their connection.”

Trump announces a deal for Hamas to disarm in Gaza, but many hurdles and uncertainty remain

By JONATHAN J. COOPER, MATTHEW LEE, FARNOUSH AMIRI and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Thursday that a deal has been reached for Hamas to disarm and Israel to withdraw its forces from Gaza, but many hurdles, conditions and long timelines remained to wind down the war in the Palestinian territory.

The White House announcement comes nine months after a U.S.-brokered ceasefire was signed. Negotiations between Israel and Hamas had largely deadlocked over the implementation of its second phase, including the disarmament of Hamas and the reconstruction of Gaza.

“The agreement will be carried out in carefully structured phases,” Trump said on social media. “As disarmament is completed, Israeli forces will withdraw, and the International Stabilization Force will work with a new Palestinian police force to take responsibility for Gaza being safe for its residents and its neighbors.”

Trump’s 20-point ceasefire plan calls on the militant group to surrender its weapons and destroy its vast network of tunnels. It also envisions Israeli forces withdrawing from Gaza, the arrival of a new technocratic Palestinian government, deployment of an international security force and the rebuilding of the battered Palestinian enclave.

Trump announced what he said was an agreement to realize one of the most difficult portions of the Gaza ceasefire while negotiations have stalled and military attacks have escalated in the war that the U.S. and Israel in February launched against Iran, a key sponsor of Hamas.

On Friday, a Hamas official said they have reached an agreement on disarmament, the most crucial part of the ceasefire deal. Israel didn’t give an indication that they had agreed.

Officials offer long or unspecific timelines for Hamas to disarm

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U.S. and Board of Peace officials, describing the deal to reporters on condition of anonymity under guidelines set by the White House, gave an extremely optimistic assessment of the agreement that laid out a scenario very similar to the one described by Trump and his top aides when the Board of Peace, an international body established by Trump to oversee the ceasefire in Gaza, was first formed.

The officials were unable to offer specific timelines for the disarmament of Hamas or other groups that operate in Gaza, such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad, but said the Gaza police force would turn over weapons to the technocratic Board of Peace-backed Gaza administration in the next two weeks.

The Gaza police force, however, does not include the vast majority of Hamas militants and heavy weaponry is not included in that part of the agreement, according to the officials.

Instead, the surrender of heavy weapons and the decommissioning of Hamas tunnels and other infrastructure are to come later in a process that could take between 200 and 350 days, a Board of Peace official said.

Israel has not responded but has been deeply skeptical

A U.S. official said Israel, which has been deeply skeptical about Hamas' willingness to give up its guns or relinquish at least behind-the-scenes control of Gaza, had been consulted at every step of the negotiation.

However, the official said Israel was not being asked to do anything more than what it had initially committed to when it agreed to Trump's 20-point plan, which essentially involves withdrawing its forces from Gaza and committing to ending airstrikes on the territory.

The official said Trump would be "very, very disappointed" if Israel didn't adhere to the agreement. Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met at the White House on Tuesday, but neither said much about what was discussed in their first face-to-face meeting since launching the war against Iran.

Israel's U.N. Mission said it had no immediate comment.

The official added that Iran remains a wildcard in the equation because although it counseled Hamas members not to accept a deal, it is also not in a position to offer the group much support because it is preoccupied with the conflict with the United States.

Hamas previously had insisted on implementing the first phase of the ceasefire before moving to discuss its weapons. The group's founding charter calls for armed resistance against Israel, and it has been reluctant to give up an arsenal, including rockets, anti-tank missiles and explosives, that lies at the heart of its identity.

Hamas announced earlier this month, however, that it had dissolved its government in Gaza and was preparing to transfer power to a technical committee backed by the United Nations as part of the ceasefire deal.

The war in Gaza began after the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killed around 1,200 people and saw 251 taken hostage. Israel's retaliatory offensive in Gaza has killed more than 73,000 Palestinians, including those killed since the ceasefire, Gaza's Health Ministry said.

Israel's military now controls more than half of Gaza, leaving Palestinians confined to squalid tent camps and heavily damaged urban neighborhoods.

An Australian jury convicts British entertainer Yung Filly of assault as he weeps in court

PERTH, Australia (AP) — An Australian jury convicted the British social media celebrity and rapper Yung Filly on Friday of assaulting a fan following a music performance two years ago, but did not find him guilty of allegations that he raped and choked her.

The 30-year-old entertainer, whose real name is Andres Felipe Valencia Barrientos, wept after the verdicts were delivered in the District Court of Western Australia state in Perth.

He had pleaded not guilty to six charges of rape, three charges of assault occasioning bodily harm and one count of choking in a Perth hotel room in September 2024.

The accuser cannot legally be named. She was 20 at the time.

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Three days after the jury began deliberating, they found him guilty of only two of the assault charges which relate to him biting the woman. He testified during his eight-day trial that they were "love bites" and denied his victim had complained that he was hurting her.

He was found not guilty on some charges, but he could potentially face a retrial on three charges of rape on which the jury could not reach a verdict.

Despite the convictions, the Colombian-born entertainer remained free on bail until the case returns to court on Aug. 21 to discuss next steps.

Barrientos had been touring Australia and had already performed in Sydney and Melbourne before he encountered his victim in Perth. He was arrested several days later in the east coast city of Brisbane, where the tour was to end.

Prosecutors alleged the woman initially agreed to have sex but withdrew her consent because she feared for her safety.

Photos of the woman with bruising as well as bite marks on her face and neck were shown to the court. Barrientos has been free on bail since he was charged and was allowed to return to Britain for several months.

European nations vow FIFA World Cup boycott over Infantino private equity plan as opposition spreads

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

GENEVA (AP) — European nations agreed Thursday to boycott the World Cup and all other FIFA competitions to protest Gianni Infantino's plan to sell stakes in soccer's biggest tournament to private equity investors. The North American soccer body rejected his plan later the same day.

"UEFA and its national associations will not participate in FIFA competitions," the European soccer body said after an urgent online meeting of its 55 member nations.

FIFA issued a statement early Friday saying that "nobody is selling football" and that it plans to continue the consultation process. But it appeared to back off from establishing the public equity move — what it calls the FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE) — if member countries do not agree.

"FIFA acknowledges and respects feedback and concern aired in public," it said, while blaming "erroneous reporting in the media" for disruptions to its planned consultation with member associations.

But it said that without the support of FIFA's 211 member associations, "FIFA's commercial activities would remain unchanged. FFE would not be established."

"Nobody is selling football. This is not something FIFA would ever entertain."

The next scheduled FIFA tournament is within weeks in Europe — the Women's Under-20 World Cup hosted by Poland from Sept. 5 — and the four British federations comprise FIFA's only bidder to host the 2035 Women's World Cup. That decision is due Nov. 23.

"Some things are simply too important to sell," UEFA said in a statement. "The FIFA World Cup belongs to football. It always will. And so long as Europe has a voice, it will never be for sale."

The strategy meeting was called to counter FIFA President Infantino's offer of \$20 million to each of FIFA's 211 global members that has to be accepted by mid-September.

Later Thursday, the 41-member Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) met and announced it rejected Infantino's plan.

In a statement, CONCACAF said members "expressed deep concerns about the lack of due process surrounding the proposal, the artificially short deadline imposed, and the absence of any review or approval by the relevant FIFA governance bodies." It also questioned the need for outside investment "following the most profitable FIFA World Cup in history."

Infantino's secret project was revealed Tuesday to spin off its commercial operations in the new \$20 billion FFE subsidiary 20% owned by private investors. The core investor would be a New York investment firm created by Joshua Kushner, the brother of U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Infantino wrote Tuesday to the 211 members — already the effective owners of FIFA as a non-profit as-

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sociation under Swiss law — that if they approve FFE their promised \$10 million basic funding for the next four years will double to \$20 million. He projected their FIFA funding through 2038 would be \$86 million each, instead of about \$36 million.

"This is not merely a profound failure of leadership, but an abdication of FIFA's duty as the custodian of world football," said UEFA, where Infantino was a long-time staffer and its CEO-like general secretary when he was first elected to lead FIFA in 2016.

Infantino's presidency at risk?

Infantino's high-stakes financial gambit now could threaten his previously secure 11-year presidency of FIFA as anger and frustration with him rises among soccer stakeholders including three of the six continental bodies.

FIFA has set a Nov. 18 deadline for potential candidates to declare in a presidential vote of the 211 members scheduled next March in Rabat, Morocco.

Infantino had seemed — 11 days ago after the World Cup final in East Rutherford, New Jersey — to have a clear path to being re-elected unopposed for a fourth and final term in office through 2031, despite a furor over letting United States forward Folarin Balogun play against Belgium despite a red card in his previous game.

Soccer officials have said privately Infantino has eyed a lucrative commissioner-like role at the FFE spinoff beyond 2031.

"Game over, Gianni #InfantinOUT," the Football Supporters Europe group, which advises UEFA on fan issues such as ticket prices, posted after the boycott threat.

Soccer's concern at investor pressure

UEFA detailed Thursday why soccer officials fear external investors owning a stake of the global game's biggest events, including World Cups and Club World Cups for men and women.

"The moment external investors acquire ownership interests in FIFA competitions, football changes forever," UEFA said. "Commercial return becomes a permanent obligation. Investor expectations become a daily pressure."

Infantino has presented the private equity offer as a chance to "turbocharge" funding development of soccer across the world, where a majority of the 211 FIFA members rely on its funding.

Officials from about 40 UEFA member spoke at the urgent meeting, with anger expressed that FIFA is not using some of its multi-billion reserves to fund extra development programs.

"As a result of today's discussion, no UEFA national teams will participate in any FIFA competition for so long as these proposals remain alive," the European soccer body said, "unless this proposal has been abandoned in its entirety and binding assurances have been given that FIFA will never again open its governance or competitions to private ownership."

Asia adds rare criticism of Infantino

On a seismic day in soccer politics, a traditional bedrock of support in Asia for FIFA and Infantino had earlier Thursday been shaken.

"FIFA's unilateral actions appear to undermine the very foundations of continental football," the Asian Football Confederation president Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa said in a letter to its 46 members of FIFA, warning of risks to their own competitions.

Sheikh Salman, an ally to Infantino since losing the FIFA presidential election to him in 2016, wrote "such an initiative will not succeed without the support of all the confederations, which is not the case now."

In a video message published Wednesday by FIFA, Infantino insisted spinning off its money-making operations was "an offer, not an obligation."

A FIFA presentation for its members, co-written with its banking advisors from J.P. Morgan and seen by the AP, set a goal for FFE as "commercial rigor and expertise to better capitalize on broadcast rights, sponsorships and a growing tournament portfolio."

FIFA squeeze on continental games

That growing portfolio likely would include adding more teams to FIFA competitions like the World Cup

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and Club World Cup for men and women, and potentially staging them more often than every four years, including in the U.S.

FIFA adding teams, games and competitions would squeeze the value, status and space in the congested global fixture calendar for those that fund and are organized by the six continental soccer bodies like UEFA and the AFC. Those include World Cup qualifying games, continental tournaments and Champions Leagues.

"It is important that the AFC family has a complete understanding," Sheikh Salman wrote, "of how such an initiative may affect key areas of global and Asian football, including the sustainability of confederation and (domestic) competitions, as well as the organization and commercial landscape surrounding the AFC's activities."

UEFA's previous boycott threat

A threatened World Cup boycott from Europe helped derail Infantino's plan in 2021 to play World Cups every two years instead of four.

Oil companies are expected to reap big profits because of US-Iran conflict

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Analysts are expecting major oil companies to report raking in large spring profits while fighting between Iran and the U.S. impeded petroleum shipments and consumers around the world paid more for fuel and confronted shortages.

The conflict, now in its sixth month, halted most shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway that previously served as a delivery route for a fifth of the world's oil and natural gas. With global supplies constrained, prices for Brent crude, the international standard, soared from about \$70 to above \$100 a barrel for much of March, April and May, and at one point reached \$126.

That likely resulted in elevated profits for some of the biggest publicly traded oil companies as they sold their goods for higher prices. American oil and gas giants Exxon Mobil and Chevron announce their second-quarter earnings on Friday.

The money oil companies accrued between the beginning of April and the end of June could receive extra scrutiny this year. Gasoline, diesel and jet fuel prices climbed during that period, increasing costs for drivers and airline passengers. Supplies ran low in some countries, leading to sporadic fuel rationing in Australia and government office closures in Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Six of Europe's largest oil companies posted first-quarter profits of \$22 billion altogether, a total which was 43% higher than the same time last year, according to Global Witness, a nonprofit organization that investigates environmental problems.

"There are constituencies around the world who are having a very good crisis, and the oil producers are one of them," said Patrick Galey, fossil fuels lead at Global Witness. "When you compare that to the hundreds of millions of people who are struggling with rolling blackouts, with electricity curbs, rationing, waiting in line for food queues, or the disruption to fertilizers and the potential impact that that has on food prices, we don't think that it's a justifiable price for the rest of the world to be paying."

Lawmakers propose taxing major oil producers for war windfalls

Energy companies such as Exxon and Chevron do not set the price of American oil, which ricocheted from \$68 to \$115 a barrel during the quarter. It's driven by supply and demand, and what traders, refiners and other buyers are willing to pay.

Nevertheless, Democrats in Congress introduced bills in March to tax major oil producers for profits they show from 2026 onward and have the tax proceeds redistributed to consumers.

"It's fair to put a windfall profits tax on inordinate windfall profits rather than cut off children's food programs," Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, a Rhode Island Democrat who introduced the Senate version of the legislation.

Whitehouse's measure and a companion bill introduced by U.S. Rep. Ro Khanna of California would amend the U.S. tax code to impose a per-barrel excise tax on companies that produced or imported at least 300,000

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barrels of oil per day in 2025. The tax would be 50% of the difference between the oil price at the time of the levy and the average price per barrel last year. Similar proposals failed to pass in previous years.

"We cracked \$4 again per gallon last weekend in gas stations that I drove by, and that's a big expense, particularly for families that get their income from driving around from job to job in the work van or the work truck," Whitehouse said. "It makes a real difference."

The average price for a gallon of regular gasoline, which was below \$3 before the U.S. and Israel launched attacks on Iran, reached \$4.10 this week. That's about \$1 more than the cost of a gallon at this point last year.

Refineries rake in cash while consumers pay more for fuel

Outfits such as Exxon and Chevron, which not only extract oil and gas but also own refineries, are in the best position to profit from the current market conditions, said Tom Seng, assistant professor of energy finance at Texas Christian University.

Refineries turn crude oil into gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and home heating oil. They're enjoying historically high "crack spreads," which is a term to describe the profits refineries expect to make based on the prices of oil and products such as gasoline and jet fuel, Seng said.

In late July, refineries planning to buy a barrel of oil for about \$80 were looking at potential profits of \$50-\$60, which is huge compared to the average range of \$20-\$25, he said.

"The return on refining, on a percentage basis, has skyrocketed," Seng said. "Oil right now is priced what it is priced because of the Iran war. But in the meantime, the refineries are making money hand over fist."

Globally, not all refineries have been able to get the supply of crude oil they need to meet demand since the conflict began, said Timothy Fitzgerald, a University of Tennessee professor of business economics who studies the petroleum industry.

As a result, refineries that have ample oil to work with, including those in the U.S., are turning high profits, particularly when they make jet fuel and diesel, which is priced about 41% higher in the U.S. than before the Strait of Hormuz was blocked.

"If you're a company that owns a bunch of refinery capacity, things look pretty good," Fitzgerald said.

American refineries are running at near-full capacity and poised to benefit because some refineries in the Middle East and Russia were damaged, while others in Asia can't get the amount of oil they used to from the Middle East.

"Ultimately, users of the energy services pay," Fitzgerald said. "Consumers, people like you and me buying retail motor gasoline or diesel fuel or airplane tickets. But it also means that almost everything else we buy has an embedded energy content to it ... and this is where you start to worry about it driving increases in costs."

Not all oil and gas companies benefit in the same way

In the present geopolitical environment, some companies are winners while others are losers, Fitzgerald said.

"If you're a company like a U.S. (oil) producer, even a U.S.-based international company like an Exxon or Chevron who's got lots of production outside the Gulf, things are good. You're selling your product at a higher price," he said.

But companies in the Middle East that are not able to benefit from higher prices because they are struggling to get their liquefied natural gas out of the Persian Gulf or have a lot of damaged oil fields or processing facilities have a very different take on recent events, Fitzgerald added.

"Your ability to sell anything and the volume that you may be getting out is so curtailed that your revenues are way down and you're incurring higher transportation costs and security costs," he said.

Exxon and Chevron weren't as profitable in the first quarter due to the way oil is traded; the first real opportunity they had to take advantage of higher prices oil was in April. Companies that had a lot of oil stored in floating tankers and available for spot-market trading, including some European ones, were able to benefit from March's higher oil prices, Seng said.

Spain deploys military to Ceuta after thousands of people breach Morocco's border and at least 9 die

By RENATA BRITO and ANTONIO SEMPERE Associated Press

CEUTA, Spain (AP) — Spain will deploy its military to restore order at its border with Morocco in Ceuta after thousands of migrants streamed into the tiny Spanish territory, with at least nine dying in the attempt.

The announcement came after local authorities in Ceuta had asked the central government in Madrid for reinforcements to manage a border crisis that boiled over Thursday with large crowds of people breaching the border fence.

Spain's government said it would send the Armed Forces to help the Civil Guard "maintain security in the city of Ceuta." It also announced that Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez would join Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska in a visit to Ceuta on Friday.

"The situation is absolute chaos," Rachid Sbihi, head of the association that represents Spain's Civil Guard officers who police the border in Ceuta, told The Associated Press. "It's not possible to give precise numbers, but there are thousands of migrants crossing," he said, adding that the border had "totally collapsed."

Achraf Maimouni, a member of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights in northern Morocco, described the situation as "exceptional."

"The Tarajal border was opened under unusual circumstances this morning and people crossed," he said.

Video footage showed crowds of people, mainly Moroccans, walking around the breakwaters at Tarajal beach onto local roads. While most appeared to be young men, there were also families with women and small children.

"Viva España!" some shouted to a freelance photographer working for the AP. It was not immediately clear what prompted so many migrants to cross to Ceuta.

Spain's government delegation in Ceuta said at least nine people died Thursday during the chaos. It did not provide details on the circumstances of the deaths but bodies could be seen floating in the water. Dozens have died this year trying to reach Ceuta, according to local authorities.

Arrivals had been increasing, but reasons are still unclear

The escalation at the frontier between Spain and Morocco comes after a surge in migrants attempting to reach the small exclave, mainly by swimming, on Wednesday.

Moroccan authorities have not publicly commented on the crossings, and Morocco's Interior Ministry did not respond to requests for comment.

Spain's Interior Ministry said the Moroccan government was "closely cooperating" with Spain to handle the situation and that Moroccan police are stopping "numerous people" who are trying to cross the border. Both countries agreed to work together "for the return, as soon as possible, of all the people who entered Ceuta illegally."

The ministry earlier said it would guarantee the safety of citizens and the integrity of the nation's border but that the Spanish government could not declare a national emergency — as local authorities had asked — over migration concerns.

The chaos had ripple effects in Italy, another key destination for migrants. Premier Giorgia Meloni threatened to suspend Italy's open-border Schengen agreement with Spain "to defend our borders and ensure the safety of our citizens," though Italy doesn't share a border with Spain.

Ceuta authorities had previously linked the surge to a Spanish Supreme Court ruling earlier this month that barred authorities from immediately returning migrants who arrive by sea without due process. The ruling does not apply to migrants who enter Spain by land, including by climbing over the border fence.

But some activists in Morocco expressed doubt that the ruling was behind the surge, arguing most migrants would have been unaware of such legal decisions.

Spain is a main point of arrival into Europe for migrants seeking better economic opportunities or an escape from violence in their home countries.

To reach Ceuta, located on the northern African coast, migrants often swim from the Moroccan town

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of Fnideq, covering about 3.1 miles (5 kilometers) to reach Spanish territory. Others attempt the crossing from the nearby town of Belyounech, where the distance is shorter.

The scenes of people streaming across the frontier recall the border crisis of May 2021 when more than 8,000 migrants poured into Ceuta in just two days.

At the time, Morocco was accused of easing border controls and allowing migrants to cross into Ceuta after Spain allowed Polisario Front leader Brahim Ghali to receive treatment at a Spanish hospital, triggering a diplomatic crisis between Rabat and Madrid. The pro-independence Polisario Front for decades has claimed to be the legitimate representative of the Sahrawi people of the Western Sahara. Morocco claims Western Sahara as its own.

Ceuta authorities ask Madrid to declare emergency, send army

Juan Jesús Vivas, the head of Ceuta's regional government, called for the national government to declare an emergency on grounds of national security, asking for more police and for the army to be deployed on the border "to guarantee the inviolability of the frontier and citizen safety."

He had warned Wednesday that migrant reception centers were overwhelmed with hundreds of people sleeping on the streets after more than 1,500 migrants entered the territory in the past week. Thousands more crossed overnight and on Thursday.

Spain's Interior Ministry, which tracks irregular migration, would not confirm the number of migrants who had made it to Ceuta in the last few days but said it would publish its next migration report on Aug. 3. As of July 15, nearly 3,000 migrants had entered Ceuta by land or sea this year, according to ministry figures.

Legislation covering a declaration of national emergencies does not consider migration flows as a risk to national security, according to the ministry, which said government agencies are "coordinating to respond with speed and efficacy to the situation in Ceuta."

Ceuta, which is perched on a historical isthmus, has been a Spanish possession since 1580. Its mixed population of Christians and Muslims, Spanish and Moroccan residents and day workers, lives in relative harmony behind a border fence that many desperate migrants from across Africa attempt to cross for a better life in Europe.

Some robotaxis approved to operate without steering wheels and losing the brake pedal could be next

By JOSH FUNK and TY O'NEIL Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Federal regulators are clearing the way for robotaxis to operate without manual controls like steering wheels or eventually even brake pedals as the rules start to catch up to the evolving technology.

Amazon's fully autonomous Zoox vehicles got approval Thursday to begin charging customers for rides in the specially designed cars that feature four inward-facing seats once they secure state and local approval. Zoox has already been offering free rides in Las Vegas and San Francisco since last year. At least a couple people were waiting at most stops Thursday afternoon for rides up and down the Vegas strip aboard one of the distinctive boxy-shaped vehicles.

"It's kind of scary at first, but when I just got used to it, it's really cool and chilling. I really liked the music and how you can adjust the temperature," Chloe Huu from Ann Arbor, Michigan, said after taking a ride in a Zoox Thursday. But the projected wait time for the ride kept changing, which made it hard to plan.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration also proposed a rule last month to allow robotaxis to operate without brake pedals, but that proposal is still pending. Administrator Jonathan Morrison said his agency wants to update the regulations to fit these fully autonomous vehicles while still acting as the "cop on the beat to make sure that this is being done right."

Most vehicle safety regulations were written decades ago, always with the assumption that there would be a human driver behind the wheel. But Morrison said that things like steering wheels, windshield wipers and side-view mirrors aren't really needed in an autonomous vehicle.

"If you're going to be developing a standard in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, nobody at that time had this

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imagination, nobody had a crystal ball that you might have technologies that would enable the vehicle to drive itself," Morrison said.

Questions remain about robotaxi safety

The Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety group raised concerns about Zoox's plan to operate without a steering wheel or other standard controls because the company didn't provide detailed evidence to show that its vehicles could operate safely on public roads.

"Lots of promises, lots of glossy language, lots of 'We believe, we think we'll do this.' Yet there really was no data behind the promises, and that's really concerning to us," said Peter Kurdock, who is general counsel for the Advocates group.

Morrison said this technology does offer the promise of never driving distracted or drunk like human drivers do, but robotaxis have had some problems. Sometimes they're just weird behaviors like stopping in the middle of the road or struggling to get out of a parking lot. But he said NHTSA responded to the incidents of autonomous cars passing school buses or interfering with first responders, with investigations, recalls and calls to action.

"Sometimes we have seen unsafe behaviors, and we jump on that really quickly again. That's our job at NHTSA," Morrison said. But he said Americans shouldn't be terribly worried about the safety of these robotaxis.

"By and large we're really excited about the promise of this technology and we want to see that promise fulfilled," he said.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety said recently that the limited crash data the government requires autonomous vehicle companies to submit makes it hard to assess the safety record of these robotaxis as they continue to expand across the country.

Most companies don't report how many miles their autonomous vehicles drove, which makes it impossible to calculate a crash rate, according to the IIHS. And there isn't a clear standard for which incidents must be reported. So autonomous vehicle companies are reporting many more minor incidents than human drivers, who tend to only report a crash when there is significant damage or injuries.

Robotaxi industry is expanding quickly nationwide

Zoox and Tesla are working to catch up to the industry-leading Waymo that already operates in multiple cities. Waymo is owned by Google's parent company, Alphabet.

Zoox CEO Aicha Evans said this approval is an important milestone for autonomous vehicles.

"This achievement reflects a shared commitment to enabling innovation while maintaining the highest standards of safety," Evans said.

Amazon hopes to eventually produce as many as 10,000 robotaxis a year at a plant near Silicon Valley as it works to challenge Waymo. Amazon paid \$1.2 billion to acquire self-driving startup Zoox. Initially, Zoox will only be allowed to deploy up to 2,500 vehicles without steering wheels over the next two years as it works to prove the technology is safe. The company said that more than half a million people have already ridden in its vehicles.

Seattle police chief resigns under pressure from mayor over response to festival shooting

By GENE JOHNSON and MARTHA BELLISLE Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Seattle's police chief resigned Thursday amid criticism that the city was slow to release key information about a fatal shootout at a food festival last weekend.

Mayor Katie Wilson's announcement followed hours of speculation about whether Police Chief Shon Barnes would step down, as some of his supporters said he had rebuffed Wilson's request to resign.

Wilson said she was appointing Deputy Chief Andre Sayles, a law enforcement veteran with more than two decades of experience, as interim chief.

Barnes told The Seattle Times earlier Thursday that whether he remained as chief was "up to the mayor." He said he was off for the day and spending time with family.

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In a written statement, the mayor said she was grateful for Barnes' service. The statement included comments in which Barnes called it an honor to have served the city.

"I hope this transition gives the city and this department the opportunity to return full focus to what matters most, addressing youth gun violence and preventing more tragedies," Barnes said.

Barnes was out of town at a law enforcement conference when gunfire erupted last weekend at the Bite of Seattle, an annual three-day festival that draws hundreds of food and retail vendors and performers. Three people, including one suspect, were killed, and four people were wounded. One of the injured was a 2-year-old boy.

Dozens of officers were at the event, and at least one saw a 15-year-old suspect firing into a crowd and quickly persuaded him to surrender, according to court documents. Police are still searching for at least one other person.

While Wilson credited the quick police response with potentially saving lives, she acknowledged that the city was slow to communicate in the aftermath.

After an initial social media post announcing the shooting, it took nearly five hours for police to provide any additional information to the public, including whether there was any ongoing threat. The city also failed to send out any notifications through its emergency alert system. In the meantime Wilson announced that two people had been taken into custody, a statement she later retracted.

Assistant Seattle Police Chief Tyrone Davis finally provided an update around 11 p.m. Sunday during a news conference that was also attended by the mayor, Gov. Bob Ferguson and U.S. Rep. Pramila Jayapal.

"What I did not fully understand in that moment was how little information had reached the public or the press since the incident began at 6 p.m.," Wilson said in a video statement Thursday. "Had I known that, I would have pushed for an immediate briefing, rather than waiting for a press conference to be organized."

Barnes was the second Black police chief in Seattle.

Several Black community organizations, including the Seattle NAACP and the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle, rallied to try to save his job Thursday. In an open letter to the mayor's office, they credited him with improving relations between the department and the community, helping reduce gun violence and strengthening the department's operations.

"Chief Barnes should not be made a scapegoat for the complex challenges of public safety," the letter said.

At least six City Council members issued statements supporting Barnes. A statement signed by four of them pointed out that the city has had four chiefs in less than three years.

"Our priority must be stability, not further disruption," it said.

Barnes was appointed by Seattle's previous mayor, Bruce Harrell, in December 2024 after serving as chief of the Madison, Wisconsin, police department.

When Wilson — a democratic socialist who once supported defunding police — won the mayor's race last year, she kept Barnes on as chief. That was a signal to the city's business establishment and community groups that she did not intend to take a radically different approach to public safety.

"Seattle had been on a positive course on public safety with police hiring trending up and crime trending down," Jon Scholes, president of the Downtown Seattle Association, said in an emailed statement. "It's imperative the next chief of police is able to maintain progress that's been made and instill confidence in our community."

Barnes faced some criticism for spending time in Chicago, where his family lives. Sgt. Patrick Michaud, a department spokesperson, said Thursday that Barnes has made four trips to Chicago this year and spent in total about 18 days traveling there.

The resignation comes as Seattle heads into another big festival weekend. Seafair Weekend Festival 2026 — a boating event, air show and festival — starts Friday.

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Here's why new fronts seem to be opening up across the Middle East

By SUZAN FRASER and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Houthi rebels in Yemen said they attacked Saudi oil facilities. The Saudis blamed militias in Iraq and joined the United States in bombing them. Iran fired missiles at Jordan. Drones set ships ablaze in Egypt.

But it's not actually as complicated as it sounds, and it's all related to the broader war between the United States and Iran, currently focused on the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran supports armed groups across the Middle East that allow it to project power far beyond its borders. The U.S. has thousands of troops based in allied Arab countries that have been targets of Iran's retaliation.

Here's a look at why so many fronts seem to be heating up at once.

A struggle over the strait

The epicenter of the latest violence is the Strait of Hormuz, an elbow-shaped passage running between Iran and Oman that carried a fifth of the world's traded oil and gas before the war.

Iran says it controls the waterway and has attacked ships attempting to use an alternative route overseen by the U.S. military along the coast of Oman.

The U.S. has struck Iran in response, saying the strait should be open to all international traffic, as it was before the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28. When the U.S. strikes Iran, Iran retaliates by firing missiles and drones against Arab countries hosting U.S. forces, like Jordan and Kuwait.

The exchanges of fire in recent weeks led to the collapse of an interim agreement aimed at winding down the war. That has deepened mistrust on both sides. At this point, Iran appears to be more interested in cementing its control over the strait than in making a deal with the U.S. to lift international sanctions.

Yemen's Houthis are wading in

The Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen, who stayed on the sidelines during the initial phase of the war, have declared a blockade on Saudi Arabia, threatening shipping through another major trade route leading through the Bab el-Mandeb strait and the Red Sea up to Egypt's Suez Canal.

The Houthis also claim to have attacked Saudi oil infrastructure near an East-West pipeline that the kingdom has used to ship millions of barrels of oil since the Strait of Hormuz has been effectively closed.

The Houthi-Saudi tensions are rooted in a separate but related conflict going back more than a decade that seems to be reigniting. But it also presents a new front on which Iran could pressure a key U.S. ally and potentially choke off more of the world's energy supplies, with effects far beyond the region.

Ambrey, a maritime security firm, has recorded over 10 transits that U-turned in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden since the Houthi naval blockade against Saudi Arabia was announced. Bab al-Mandeb transits have been down 30% since July 21 compared to June, according to the latest Ambrey data.

The Saudis take aim at Iran-backed groups in Iraq

Earlier this week, Saudi Arabia accused Iran-backed militias in Iraq of launching drone attacks on its oil facilities for two straight days. In response, U.S. and Saudi fighter aircraft bombed militia sites in Iraq, killing at least 20 fighters and six Iranian advisers.

Iraq has close ties to both the U.S. and Iran and has long struggled to balance them. Since the start of the war, it has been in a literal crossfire. The government condemned the U.S.-Saudi strikes, saying they came as it was trying to investigate what had happened.

The Popular Mobilization Forces, a collection of armed groups close to Iran, are officially part of Iraq's security forces but often act autonomously, including by attacking U.S. forces stationed in Iraq.

American forces are due to finish their withdrawal from the country at the end of September, and the Iraqi government has vowed to disarm nonstate actors or incorporate them into the military. But those efforts could stall as the wider war rages.

The remaining U.S. forces are based in Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region, which is also home to armed Iranian Kurdish dissident groups. Iran has attacked both over the course of the war.

Drone attack on Egypt signals a possible widening of the war

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On Wednesday, a drone attack on Egypt's Mediterranean port of Damietta set two natural gas vessels ablaze, including a U.S.-owned floating storage facility.

No one has claimed the attack, and the Houthis have denied responsibility.

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

Israel is on the sidelines, for now

Israel, which took part in the initial weekslong bombardment of Iran and was repeatedly targeted by Iranian missiles earlier in the conflict, has remained on the sidelines since the interim peace deal.

The Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group fired rockets into northern Israel shortly after the outbreak of the war. Israel responded with aerial bombardment and a ground invasion. It has since occupied, depopulated and destroyed large parts of southern Lebanon, saying such measures are necessary to root out militants.

A June 20 truce has largely held. Israel and Lebanon's government are currently implementing the initial stages of an agreement in which Israeli forces would withdraw and Lebanon's army would move in. The deal also states that Hezbollah must be disarmed. The group has rejected the deal and could violently resist any attempt to forcibly disarm it.

Any attack by Iran, Hezbollah or Israel could reignite those hostilities, reopening yet another front.

Attorney for Nolan Wells' family says experts to review a boat distress call from day he disappeared

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

An attorney for the family of Nolan Wells said Thursday that they have hired audio engineers to review a distress call made from a boat on the day of his disappearance, which has prompted online speculation and claims of defamation amid the ongoing investigation into the 18-year-old's death.

The recording, released by Mississippi authorities this week, captures a July 4 call to a private marine towing company requesting assistance for a boat that was taking in water off Horn Island, where Wells was last seen.

"Our bilge pump stopped working. We're sinking. Can y'all please come?" the caller asks, noting that there were about seven people on board. The dispatcher then speaks with a captain for the towing company, who said a relative of the boat owner reported those onboard had solved the issue and "don't need any help right now."

The distress call was made to Sea Tow, a private company, and released to media outlets by the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. Law enforcement officials have said they were told by witnesses that Wells was not on the boat when it left the island.

Speaking at the National Urban League Conference on Thursday, the civil rights attorney Ben Crump said Wells' family had retained audio engineering experts to review the recording. The legal team is also calling on prosecutors to include outside authorities in the review of phones belonging to friends who traveled with Wells to the island.

A voicemail left with the Jackson County District Attorney's office was not returned.

Wells' parents also attended the conference, pleading for anyone with information to come forward. "We will not rest until we get answers," said his mother, Christine Wonsley.

Online speculation and suspicion mount

The teenager's death has touched off rampant speculation, deepened in part by uncertainty about his final hours, distrust of law enforcement and Mississippi's long history of racist violence.

The teenager, who was Black, had traveled to the uninhabited island with a group of friends from high school, all of whom were white. He did not return with his friends to the mainland that evening. His body was found two days later off the island's coast.

A day after the discovery, Jackson County Sheriff John Ledbetter said Wells' friends were cooperating with authorities and that investigators did not suspect foul play. The sheriff has released few details since

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but has said the investigation is ongoing.

An independent autopsy commissioned by Wells' family was inconclusive about the cause of his death. The official autopsy will remain sealed until a grand jury reviews the evidence, which is a standard practice in Jackson County, according to the local district attorney.

In the absence of new information, social media users have seized on videos and photos shared online. Some have made unsubstantiated claims against Wells' friends, whose attorneys and family members have since reported death threats and doxing campaigns.

Following the release of the dispatch call this week, online sleuths quickly tracked down some of the people mentioned in the audio.

In a statement Wednesday, the parents of a 21-year-old said their son had been doxed and threatened as a result of "outright fabrications" stemming from the audio.

They said he had boarded the malfunctioning boat to help, then briefly towed it a short distance with his own boat. He has since cooperated with law enforcement, provided names of potential witnesses and allowed authorities to inspect his boat and GPS device, the statement added. An attorney for the family said they had already served one person with a cease-and-desist letter for alleged defamatory claims and planned to serve others this week.

Crump defends the attention on the case

On Thursday, Crump rebuffed criticism that his attention on the case could inspire online targeting of others. He noted that Wells' parents also have faced online attacks.

"We're not trying to cast aspersions on anybody, we want the truth," Crump said. "If it was your child, you'd want the same thing."

The attorney was also joined Thursday by relatives of Tyler Smith and Daniel Erving, two Black 18-year-olds who died in recent months, in circumstances that Crump described as "very similar" to Wells' final hours.

Smith, a recent high school graduate from Lexington, Kentucky, died on July 4 from a gunshot wound that police said was accidental and self-inflicted. His family has disputed the determination. Police said the investigation remains ongoing.

Erving drowned in a Texas lake in April after jumping from a railway bridge with two teenage friends, local authorities said. Earlier this month, the two friends were charged with evidence tampering because they had "failed to report the incident and later discarded items belonging to Daniel," according to a Dallas police spokesperson.

Relatives of both Erving and Smith said their concerns about the investigations had not been taken seriously by local law enforcement.

"Three 18-year-old Black boys all within three months," Crump said. "We want answers."

Police describe a father's horror as he realizes then-wife Lindsay Clancy killed their 3 kids

By MICHAEL CASEY and LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

PLYMOUTH, Mass. (AP) — The two police officers focused first on Lindsay Clancy drifting in and out of consciousness in the snow after jumping from her Massachusetts home's second-floor window. Within minutes, they were racing into the basement after her then-husband screamed that all three of their children were dead.

"I can't wake them up — I can't get them up!" he frantically told the officers who, along with firefighters and paramedics, gave jurors firsthand accounts on Thursday of the aftermath.

The murder trial has centered on Clancy's mental state at the time. Her lawyers do not dispute that she strangled the children with exercise bands. But they say she was in the grip of postpartum 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 in January 2023.

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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

The testimony came after jurors spent two days listening to testimony from Patrick Clancy and his anguished 911 call. He was still on the phone when he discovered the bodies of 3-year-old Dawson, 5-year-old Cora, and 8-month-old Callan, minutes after returning home from an errand his wife asked him to run.

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 Clancy since the killings.

She remains paralyzed from the waist down after using multiple methods to try to end her life that night. She says a voice told her, "This is your last chance. Kill the children so you can kill yourself," according to her lawyer.

Officers Stephen Hall and Brian Josephine testified Thursday that they were each dispatched separately to the house in Duxbury, a coastal town south of Boston. Hall said they arrived to find Patrick Clancy yelling for help from behind the home.

Patrick Clancy testified earlier this week that his injured wife told him the kids were in the basement, but she didn't say they were dead.

When the officers followed the sound of his screams downstairs, only 8-month-old Callan had a faint pulse, Josephine testified.

"Based on my training experience from previous incidents, I knew it wasn't going to be good," Josephine said. They began rendering aid with help from firefighters.

PJ Hussey, a fire department supervisor, arrived in time to glimpse through a basement window as Patrick Clancy unwrapped an exercise band from his child's neck.

"It turned very chaotic very quickly" as more ambulances rushed to the house, Hussey testified. Duxbury firefighter and paramedic Jennifer Stratton said the infant never regained a pulse.

If convicted of murder, Lindsay Clancy 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.

In opening arguments Monday, her attorney said she had bipolar disorder, and that antidepressants prescribed after the birth of her third child worsened her condition.

Patrick Clancy testified about his wife's deteriorating mental health in the months leading up to the killings. He said she told him about intrusive thoughts of harming the children, as well as thoughts of suicide.

She sought care from experts in postpartum mood disorders and was put on multiple psychiatric medications. When nothing worked, she checked into a psychiatric hospital. She killed the children 19 days after she was discharged.

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.

Cyberattacks on Minnesota water systems investigated as officials warn about Iranian hackers

By JAMIE STENGLE and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

Authorities were working Thursday to find the source of cyberattacks that targeted over 30 water systems in Minnesota and came amid warnings that Iranian hackers have been focused on such systems.

Minnesota IT Services said state officials had yet to identify who was behind the attacks that took place Sunday and Monday. There were no reports that residents had been impacted by the attacks, though one city asked residents to conserve water for a couple hours while they tried to determine what was wrong.

The FBI, which is investigating, has not publicly identified a culprit and a spokesperson declined to say Thursday who the bureau thought might be responsible. The FBI, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and other agencies warned in an advisory last week that Iranian hackers have been targeting water and wastewater systems and the operational controls other critical infrastructure sectors.

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Digital warfare has become ingrained in military conflict, and local water plants or healthcare facilities often lack the funds and know-how to install the latest software patches or take other security steps. That has made them a favorite target, both because of the relative ease of penetrating them and because of the panic such disruptions can cause.

Iran has the "geopolitical motivations" and a recent history of targeting water systems, said Cynthia Kaiser, the former deputy assistant director of the FBI's cyber division who has been closely monitoring threats to critical infrastructure from hackers linked to the country.

"I think most credible researchers and responders would be right to treat it like it's Iran until proven otherwise," added Kaiser, who is now the senior vice president of Halcyon's Ransomware Research Center. "When it walks like a duck and talks like a duck, it's really important to call it out."

Iran's interest in the operations of water systems inside the U.S. dates back years. In 2016, the Justice Department charged a group of Iranian hackers in connection with a cyberattack targeting a small dam near New York City.

Minnesota IT Services said that as of Thursday, there were no active requests from Minnesota communities for residents to modify usage of their drinking water. The state agency said most of the confirmed attacks involved technology that water systems use to remotely monitor and control equipment. It said that being impacted meant investigators confirmed there was malicious activity involving the system's technology and didn't mean every impacted community had their water service disrupted.

The state agency said there are similarities among the incidents, including timing and the types of technology used, but investigators haven't determined if the same culprit was behind each one.

For a few hours on Monday, the city of Braham asked residents to minimize water use as they tried to determine why the water plant was offline. The city of about 1,700 people, located about 70 miles (113 kilometers) north of Minneapolis, said in a news release that the water plant outage was due to a cyberattack, but it didn't cause any issue with water quality.

The city said the attackers shut down the operating controls that shut down the well and water treatment plant. That left the city for a time only able to provide residents with the water held in the water tower.

In Plymouth, a city of about 80,000 located outside of Minneapolis, officials said on social media that their water infrastructure communications had been restored by Tuesday afternoon following a cyberattack. The city said crews were able to continue operating the system during the outage and it didn't have any impact on water levels or quality.

Human-caused climate change made Spanish, French fires much more likely, scientists calculate

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Climate change's fingerprints are all over the extreme fire weather that sparked this week's devastating wildfires in Spain and France and has spiked Southern Europe's burning the past eight years, two new studies conclude.

Human-caused climate change made the hot and dry conditions responsible for Spain's record-sized inferno 20 times more likely to happen, and it doubled the chances of extreme fire conditions for the flames in France, scientists at World Weather Attribution calculated in a rapid analysis Thursday, conducted while fires were still burning. Warming in the past 26 years has tripled the odds of the severe fire risk conditions in Spain and increased the chances in France 40%, the same report found.

At the same time, researchers published a separate study on Thursday — written and edited long before this week's fires began — that found the number of days that Southern Europe's weather reached extreme fire-prone levels has more than doubled compared to decades ago.

Both studies examined changes in the weather that creates fire-prone conditions. The measurements factor in air temperature, drought conditions, humidity and wind.

"The change in these fire weather conditions in Spain is really extremely strong and is, I think, one of the largest changes that I've seen," said Friederike Otto, an Imperial College of London climate scientist

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who coordinates World Weather Attribution. Spain is having its hottest summer on record, after an incredibly wet January that allowed plants to grow before a severe drought hit, a combination that increased wildfire fuel, the report said.

Spain also had the added problem of land abandonment, which left unmanaged plants and trees to dry out, Otto said. France's Bordeaux region, meanwhile, had thick groves of pines that also burn well when a fire starts, she said.

World Weather Attribution — an international collaboration of scientists who examine extreme events to determine climate change's role, if any — did that study so quickly, the report didn't get peer reviewed, which is the scientific gold standard. But Otto and her colleagues used techniques that are scientifically accepted, and many of their reports are published in peer-reviewed journals later.

Warming world means fires ignite 'more explosively'

Otto's team calculated how much climate change — from the burning of coal, oil and gas — increased the chances for fires of this intensity to happen. They did so by comparing fire weather severity levels to past measurements for the region and to what they would be if the world was 2.5 degrees (1.4 degrees Celsius) cooler. That is how much Earth has warmed since pre-industrial times.

"This study makes sense and provides numbers to confirm what fire scientists already knew," said Syracuse University fire scientist Jacob Bendix, who wasn't part of either research. "We have always known that fires ignite more easily and spread more explosively under conditions of extreme heat and drought. And we've known for decades that extreme heat and drought are becoming more common due to anthropogenic climate change. So the general outline of these events, if not all the details, was tragically predictable."

Thursday's other study, in the journal Scientific Reports, finds that there were about 10 extreme fire weather days a year in Southern Europe in earlier decades, but it is now up to around 25 a year, said study author Raúl Cordero, a climate scientist at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. And it is not just more frequent bad fire weather days. Those days are about 50% more intense than they were from 1981 to 2010, his study said.

Fires were decreasing until climate change overwhelmed gains

The number of Southern European fires and amount of land burned had decreased quite a bit from the 1980s to 2018, mostly because of better fire suppression and management techniques, Cordero said. But then things quickly got worse fast because climate change overwhelmed that improvement, he said.

"It doesn't matter how many resources or how much money you have, you just cannot stop the propagation of a fire when the weather is so extreme," Cordero said. "The climate forcing is so extreme nowadays that it's just amazing."

University of California Merced fire scientist John Abatzoglou, who also wasn't part of either research, said, "these findings make clear that climate change is not just a future problem, it's already here."

"We need to stop burning fossil fuels," Otto said. "Because as long as we keep burning fossil fuels, temperatures will increase globally. And that will mean that these fire weather conditions will get worse and worse and worse. And there are hard limits to what we can adapt to."

Microsoft's best day since 2008 leads US stocks, while inflation worries remain in the bond market

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A monster day for Microsoft's stock following signals that its big spending on AI is translating into profits led a powerful rebound on Wall Street Thursday, while computer-chip companies regained some of their sharp recent losses. In the bond market, though, worries remained about inflation potentially remaining high for years.

The S&P 500 rallied 1.7% and more than recovered its drop from the day before, which was its worst in seven weeks. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 613 points, or 1.2%. The Nasdaq composite, which is full of artificial-intelligence stocks, rallied 2.8% a day after it fell 9.8% below its record set last month.

Microsoft led the way and leaped 15.5% for its best day in nearly 18 years after reporting a stronger

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profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. Growth was strong for its Azure cloud business, and CEO Satya Nadella said it reflects how customers are using Microsoft to move into AI.

Perhaps just as importantly for Wall Street, Microsoft did not announce a big increase in how much it plans to spend on AI investments, something that several other Big Tech rivals have done. Worries are high that such spending is eating into companies' cash flows and may not ultimately be worth it if AI does not produce as much productivity and profits as promised.

Meta Platforms helped demonstrate such fears after falling 8%. The parent company of Facebook and Instagram reported a weaker profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected, even though it made slightly more in revenue than expected. It also raised the lower end of its forecasted range for spending on investments this year.

Companies involved in the making of the computer memory and processors that such "hyperscalers" are buying to power their AI efforts rose Thursday, recovering some of the big losses they've taken on worries their stock prices shot too high in the euphoria around AI.

Micron Technology jumped 18.4%, for example, to trim its loss for the week to 5%. It was the strongest force lifting the S&P 500 after Microsoft.

Lam Research, a supplier to the semiconductor industry, soared 18% after reporting stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected. Chip giant Advanced Micro Devices rallied 13%.

On the losing end of Wall Street was Jersey Mike's Subs. The sandwich chain's stock fell 6% in its first day of trading on the New York Stock Exchange.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 121.48 to 7,437.63. The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 613.92 to 52,208.06, and the Nasdaq composite leaped 679.24 to 25,122.18.

In the bond market, longer-term Treasury yields held steadier following their sharp accelerations Wednesday. They had jumped after the chairman of the Federal Reserve, Kevin Warsh, gave few clues about what the central bank will do with interest rates to combat the painfully high inflation that continues to hurt the country.

Higher rates could keep a lid on inflation, but they can also slow the economy and undercut prices for stocks and other investments.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury was 4.67%, the same as late Wednesday. The 30-year Treasury yield ticked up to 5.22% from 5.20%, a day after it shot up from 5.09%. Those yields move with investors' expectations for inflation and economic growth in upcoming years.

Warsh reaffirmed on Wednesday the Fed wants to get inflation back to 2%, even though the central bank decided not to raise interest rates despite inflation remaining higher than that. He also implied the bond market may already be doing some of the Fed's work to restrain inflation, and he pointed to how yields have climbed since the central bank's last meeting six weeks earlier.

That leaves investors questioning whether the Fed is prepared to act if inflation worsens, or whether it is relying on financial markets to achieve the same outcome, according to Seema Shah, chief global strategist at Principal Asset Management.

"If investors conclude that the latter is true, the credibility of the Fed's inflation-fighting commitment could come under increasing scrutiny. Arguably, it already is."

President Donald Trump, who nominated Warsh to lead the Fed, has lobbied for lower interest rates even though they could cause inflation to accelerate.

Reports released Thursday suggested the U.S. economy's growth slowed by more during the spring than economists expected. A measure of Inflation, meanwhile, remained worse last month than the Federal Reserve's target, but it slowed from May's level.

In the oil market, prices eased. Brent crude, the international standard, fell 1.4% to settle at \$86.88 per barrel.

It 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.

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In stock markets worldwide, indexes were mixed in Europe and Asia. South Korea's Kospi fell 1.2%, and France's CAC 40 rose 0.9% for two of the world's bigger moves.

Seoul's market has been at the center of AI's huge swings because it's dominated by two tech titans, Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix. After more than doubling through this year's first six months, the Kospi has plunged 34% so far in July.

Its drop on Thursday came as Samsung Electronics dipped 0.7%. The tech giant reported a record profit for the spring and said demand for its chips continues to outpace supply, but its earnings nevertheless fell shy of analysts' high expectations.

US and Iran trade missile barrages as hopes dim for a quick resolution to the five-month conflict

By SAMY MAGDY and ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — The United States and Iran each fired barrages of missiles Thursday, as the pattern of back-and-forth strikes took hold again and hope dimmed for a quick end to the five-month conflict.

Following a few days of respite, fears of a wider war have grown, with renewed 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 war — which in its early days President Donald Trump said would last four to five weeks, although he warned it could take longer — has caused the price of fuel to spike and roiled the global economy. As months have passed, concerns have deepened about using up the stockpile of weapons the U.S. needs to defend its bases and allies.

The war is unpopular among Americans, and a new AP-NORC poll says Trump's approval rating on Iran has dipped slightly since last month.

The recent pause in fighting, which began over the weekend and spurred hopes among mediators of diplomatic progress, ended with increasing missile and drone attacks across many countries in the Middle East.

"We note with concern that the security situation remains precarious," said Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesperson Tahir Andrabi, whose country has been a key mediator.

Talks "are ongoing to normalize the situation, particularly the situation in the Strait of Hormuz," he told reporters.

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 injuries were reported from Jordan's interception, the country's state-run Petra news agency said, quoting the spokesman for the country's armed forces. Both Jordan and Kuwait host American troops.

The attacks came after the U.S. military said it completed "a heavy wave of strikes against Iran" in response to an earlier Iranian missile attack on a U.S. base in Jordan.

U.S. Central Command said U.S. forces struck dozens of targets belonging to Iran's Revolutionary Guard, including military command centers, 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 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 on Wednesday to strike Iran-backed militias in Iraq, killing at least 20 fighters and six Iranian advisers.

Fires reported on two natural gas vessels at an Egyptian port

Also on Wednesday, British maritime security firm Ambrey said drone strikes ignited fires on two natural

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gas vessels at the Egyptian port of Damietta. 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 had been caused by a drone. In a cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Mustafa Madbouly said investigators were able to recover traces of the drone and will try to determine where it came from.

Egypt, a close U.S. ally and regional mediator, has until now 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. The Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen have denied they were behind the attack.

Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi didn't outright deny Iranian involvement but said: "Egypt is an important friend and partner in the region, and its security is of utmost importance to us."

"We must all be vigilant against Israeli plots and false-flag operations designed to undermine regional peace," he said on X. "The threat is clear, mutual, and fearful of Muslim solidarity."

The war has wreaked havoc on the global economy

The conflict has wreaked havoc on the global economy as energy shipments through the Strait of Hormuz have 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 already limited traffic through the strait has plunged to wartime lows during the recent exchange of strikes, from 82 ships during the week of July 13-19 to just 39 from July 20-26, Lloyd's List Intelligence, a shipping data and analysis firm, said in a webinar.

Fighting elsewhere has squeezed energy supplies further.

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

The Houthis have also 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.

While some Saudi oil exports are continuing through the Bab al-Mandab Strait despite the blockade, Lloyd's List Intelligence said much of that oil now follows an expensive and time-consuming workaround: It travels from Saudi Arabia on tankers to the Egyptian city of Ain Sokhna on the Red Sea coast before being pumped overland through a pipeline to the Mediterranean port of Sidi Kerir. Then it's loaded on tankers again.

The Suez Canal is not deep enough to handle the largest and most economical tankers when they are fully loaded with oil.

Saudi Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman met 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 the kingdom would not 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.

Tanning is getting hot again. Here's what it really does to your skin

By JAIMIE DING Associated Press

Nichole Sims started using a tanning bed at 15 because she said everyone around her was doing it, especially before events like homecoming dances and prom.

Eight years later, she was diagnosed with melanoma — a potentially life-threatening skin cancer.

During that time, Sims has seen tanning become even more popular among young people online. She tries to counter the misinformation on social media that touts tanning as a mood booster and beauty requirement by sharing her own experience.

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"I just feel like our generation doesn't really look into a lot of risks. They just kind of live in the moment," Sims said.

Experts are concerned about a resurgence in the popularity of tanning among young adults as social media has helped tanning in general make a comeback. A video of a girl sharing her "tanning secrets" and showing off a bikini tan line has racked up more than 11 million views, while people in the comments joke, "The earth probably won't last long anyway, I'd rather go out tan than pale."

More than 100,000 new melanomas will be diagnosed in the U.S. in 2026, and about 8,500 people are expected to die from melanoma, according to the American Cancer Society. Even more worrisome, some influencers are encouraging the use of tanning beds.

"Being young in the world we live in now, being tan and pretty, it goes together," Sims said.

How tanning beds increase cancer risk

Dr. Pedram Gerami and his team at Northwestern University's medical school sought to find out what was happening at a cellular level with tanning bed users. They had nearly three times the risk of developing melanoma as those who did not use tanning beds.

Gerami took skin samples from tanning bed users and compared them with samples from nonusers. His team examined the DNA sequences of melanocytes, skin cells that can turn into moles, melanoma or other cancers.

When melanocytes are exposed to UV light, they can mutate. Tanning beds can emit more than 10 times as much UV light as the sun.

The DNA mutation rate of melanocytes in tanning bed users was more than double that of nonusers whose only exposure to UV is outdoor sun, Gerami said.

"You only need like two or three (mutations) in the right place for it to turn into a melanoma," Gerami said. "If you get one or two of them from the tanning bed use ... it kind of just primes all these cells to be ready and that much closer to getting to melanoma."

Misconceptions about tanning are more likely among youth

Gen Z adults are less informed about sun protection and more likely to believe misconceptions about tanning, according to a 2025 survey by the American Academy of Dermatology.

More than one-fifth of young adults said they prioritized getting a tan over protecting their skin and more than half believed common myths like having a "base tan" would protect against sunburn, the survey results said.

Some videos on TikTok ridicule warnings by experts that unprotected UV exposure can lead to increased risk for skin cancer, including falsely saying that sunscreen can cause cancer, too. Others urge people to tan outside when the UV index is the highest, when experts advise the public to avoid sun exposure.

"Tanning is sort of cool again ... and all the education about skin cancer and skin aging is sort of taking a backseat for the younger generation," said Dr. Anthony Rossi, a dermatologist at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

Rossi said he recalls using tanning beds when he was younger and understands the appeal, but years after he stopped using them, he developed a non-melanoma skin cancer, he said.

"There's really no such thing as a safe tan," he said.

The FDA halted tanning bed regulation

The World Health Organization has long classified tanning beds as a cancer-causing agent in the same category as tobacco and asbestos.

Using tanning beds before age 20 can increase your chances of developing melanoma by 47%, according to the American Academy of Dermatology.

California became the first state to ban tanning beds for minors in 2012. More than a dozen states have followed suit since, and many others require in-person parental consent.

But the U.S. Food and Drug Administration withdrew a proposed rule in March that would have barred anyone under 18 years old from using tanning beds in the U.S. The rule was first introduced in 2015.

The FDA said it withdrew the rule in light of "concerns regarding possible unintended consequences" in

its memo, drawing concern from experts that the action could send mixed messages to the public.

Talking to your teen about the dangers of tanning

Teenagers can be a tough group to persuade because they have less capacity at that age to consider long-term health consequences, but there are ways to get the message across, said Sherry Pagoto, a psychologist and professor at University of Connecticut who has studied indoor tanning behavior and tanning bed culture for decades.

"What resonates more with them is physical appearance, because that's why they're doing it," Pagoto said.

Rather than talking about skin cancer, parents can emphasize how excess sun exposure can cause skin to look leathery or wrinkly, she said. They can take their teen to a dermatologist to take a UV photo that shows the skin damage that isn't yet visible to the naked eye.

Pagoto also said it's important for parents to model safe behavior, as many teen girls acquire their tanning habits from their mothers. Making sunscreen easily accessible around the house and buying self-tanner for your teen can be a gentle way to nudge them away from unsafe tanning.

"Change can sometimes take time. So if you're feeling frustrated ... sometimes you just kind of have to wait for their process to unfold," Pagoto said.

Trump floats pulling Blanche's nomination for attorney general to avoid conceding to GOP demands

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Thursday he may pull acting Attorney General Todd Blanche's nomination for the full-time post to avoid conceding to Senate Republicans' demands over a sweeping tax audit immunity deal benefiting the president and members of his family.

After failed negotiations forced the delay of a committee vote to advance Blanche's nomination, Trump suggested he was holding firm against pressure from Republican Sens. John Cornyn and Thom Tillis. They have expressed concerns about the controversial settlement of Trump's lawsuit against the Internal Revenue Service, which a judge denounced as an exercise in self-dealing.

The senators said the Justice Department seemed interested in reaching an agreement with them, but the White House wouldn't budge to aid the confirmation of Trump's loyal former personal attorney, who has aggressively pursued the administration's priorities as acting attorney general. Instead, Trump said in a social media post that he might pull Blanche's nomination and resubmit it after Cornyn and Tillis leave office next year.

"I think as far as Blanche and the Department of Justice, we were pretty much on the same page," Cornyn said Thursday. "But then when the president got wind of it, he wasn't willing to go along with it."

Hours after Trump's post, however, Blanche held a meeting with Cornyn and Tillis and the two sides were back to working collaboratively, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive negotiations around Blanche's confirmation.

Cornyn and Tillis have said they won't back Blanche's nomination without additional assurances in writing about the settlement, which included a deal to drop tax claims against the president and a now-scrapped plan to create a \$1.776 billion "Anti-Weaponization Fund" meant to compensate Trump allies.

With all Democratic senators opposed, just one Republican holdout on the Senate Judiciary Committee could sink Blanche's chances for confirmation. And even if Blanche makes it through the Senate Judiciary Committee, it's unclear if he has enough Republican support to be confirmed by the full chamber.

Cornyn wrote in a social media post Thursday that the president is "mistaken if he believes concerns about the provisions in his tax lawsuit settlement are limited to me and Senator Tillis."

While the Justice Department dropped plans for the "Anti-Weaponization Fund" after bipartisan outrage about the potential of payouts going to violent Jan. 6 rioters, officials have said that another piece of the settlement — granting Trump and members of his family immunity from tax audits — remains in place.

Though Blanche has repeatedly insisted that the "Anti-Weaponization fund" is dead, skeptical lawmakers have pushed for a commitment in writing — especially since Trump has expressed continued support for

the idea. But the senators suggested the White House is resisting putting it in writing.

"The president's getting bad advice. He should listen to Blanche and others who think if it's dead, it should be rendered completely dead," Tillis told reporters about the fund.

Another sticking point was the settlement's audit immunity provision that said the U.S. government is "forever barred and precluded" from scrutinizing or prosecuting Trump, his sons and the Trump Organization's current and past tax examinations. Cornyn and Tillis have pressed the administration to modify the agreement to make clear that it covers only existing audits and does not protect the president from examination of future tax filings.

While the majority of Republican senators oppose the settlement, the main pushback to Blanche has come from Cornyn, who lost his seat earlier this year when Trump opposed him in a GOP primary. Trump has also frequently targeted Tillis, who announced last year that he would not run for re-election and has criticized the administration over the pardons of Jan. 6 rioters and other matters.

Though it would be politically embarrassing for the Trump administration, pulling Blanche's nomination would likely have little practical impact on the management of the Justice Department.

Blanche, who took the reins of the department after Pam Bondi's firing in April, can still lead the agency as either acting attorney general or deputy attorney general, the No. 2 post to which he was confirmed last year. The deputy attorney general, who oversees the day-to-day operations of the law enforcement agency, can perform the duties of the attorney general if that post is vacant.

Takeaways from AP story on child soldiers trained by Colombian mercenaries in Sudan

By SAM MEDNICK, ISABEL DEBRE and ASTRID SUAREZ Associated Press

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) — A new report by The Associated Press shows that child soldiers fighting for the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces against Sudan's army have been trained by Colombian mercenaries.

The report is based on rare, firsthand accounts from former child soldiers held at a rehabilitation center run by the military-backed government in the capital, Khartoum. Tens of thousands of children as young as 8 have been conscripted into the ongoing conflict by all sides and many are still on the front lines.

One boy described how he was shackled to an anti-aircraft gun and told to fire at army warplanes buzzing overhead or his captors would kill him. He was 15 at the time. Another said he was forced to fire artillery at targets identified by drones — including civilians — and beaten for any disobedience.

Tens of thousands of veterans of Colombia's internal conflicts have hired themselves out in foreign wars despite a recent law outlawing it. The children's accounts indicate the mercenaries are widely deployed in Sudan.

The Rapid Support Forces, known as the RSF, have been accused of atrocities. Rights groups say a state-linked firm in the United Arab Emirates has recruited Colombians to fight with the RSF. Human rights groups and Sudan's military accuse the UAE of arming the RSF, and a U.N. panel said it had tracked weapons shipments to the group originating in the UAE, a Gulf federation that includes Dubai.

In a statement to the AP after this story was published, the UAE denied providing arms or military support to any warring party in Sudan. It also denied facilitating the movement of mercenaries or foreign fighters into Sudan or having links to mercenaries.

The UAE said its investigation of the firm in question found no links to mercenary activity in Sudan. The UAE condemned atrocities on all sides and said it supported efforts to end the conflict.

Here are the main takeaways:

Searing accounts of boys sent to the front lines

At the rehabilitation center, one boy was missing a hand. Another had scars on his back from where he said he was tortured, and a third had a bone jutting out of his side.

The boy who was tied to the anti-aircraft gun said RSF fighters detained him and sent him to the front lines without him having ever held a gun. He was held with dozens of other children, their hands bound at all times, he said.

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He said foreigners, described as Colombians by RSF fighters at his base, trained the children and instructed the paramilitaries to strap them to the weapons. He showed scars on his head that he said were left by shrapnel.

A boy who had been held at another camp said he was locked up and only brought out for artillery strikes. When he refused to fire, his captors would beat him, sometimes with an electric baton. In one case, he said, a Colombian beat him unconscious. An 18-year-old friend was shot dead when he tried to escape, he said.

A member of the military media office accompanied the AP during the visit to the rehabilitation center but did not choose who was interviewed. The AP retains full editorial control of its content.

Report points to a larger role for Colombian guns-for-hire

Human Rights Watch and Conflict Insights Group, a private research firm, have documented the presence of Colombian mercenaries alongside the RSF in Sudan's western region of Darfur, including during the October capture of El Fasher, where RSF fighters have been accused of mass killings.

"The evidence suggests the UAE could be substantially contributing to the RSF's widespread crimes against humanity," said Jean-Baptiste Gallopin, a senior adviser at Human Rights Watch.

In separate reports this year, Human Rights Watch and Conflict Insights Group said the Colombians were hired by an Emirati contractor and trained in Emirati military bases. The UAE denied those allegations at the time and reiterated its position after this story was published.

A Colombian mercenary who fought in Darfur in 2025 told the AP that hundreds of Colombians were on the front lines with the RSF at the time and involved in training recruits. He said he saw children as young as 13 fighting with the RSF. He spoke on condition of anonymity because of legal concerns.

Less is known of the Colombians' role in Khartoum. Ali Qader, the head of the rehabilitation center, said several children told him Colombians trained them at camps around the capital.

A former RSF fighter who defected to the government side and spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal, told the AP that he saw Colombians training children in Khartoum in July 2024. A Sudanese military officer said Colombians were training children in and around Khartoum when the RSF held the city. The officer was not authorized to speak to journalists and so spoke on condition of anonymity.

The U.N. says all sides in the conflict have used child soldiers, including militias allied with the government.

The children often have nowhere to go

Even though the boys were forced to fight, many cannot return home to their families because of their association with the RSF.

Zeinab Mahjoub, a psychologist at the government facility where they are held, said she tries to persuade relatives not to abandon the boys, who are wrestling with their own trauma.

The U.N. children's agency in Sudan says it is working to speed up the process of releasing the boys. Since the AP visited the center in April, the children have been released.

AP Exclusive: Child soldiers recount horrors of Sudan's war and presence of Colombian mercenaries

By SAM MEDNICK, ISABEL DEBRE and ASTRID SUÁREZ Associated Press

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) — The teenage boy's hands and legs were shackled to the anti-aircraft gun mounted on a pickup as Sudanese warplanes attacked. He saw another child chained to the steering wheel.

As their captors sought cover, the terrified children were ordered to stay and shoot down the jets over the capital, Khartoum. If they tried to flee, they'd be killed by their captors — if the planes didn't get them first.

The boy, now 17, told The Associated Press that those who ordered him strapped to the gun were Colombian mercenaries providing military aid to Sudan's Rapid Support Forces against the army in the war, now in its fourth year. Another child said he was forced to carry out artillery strikes and beaten for disobedience.

The rare, firsthand accounts show the perils faced by tens of thousands of children believed to have been conscripted into the war by all sides. Six former child soldiers who were abducted and forced to fight with the Rapid Support Forces, known as the RSF, spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity for fear of

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reprisal. Two said they were trained by Colombians.

Their accounts point to a wider deployment of Colombian mercenaries, who rights groups say were recruited by a state-linked firm in the United Arab Emirates to fight with the RSF. Human rights groups and Sudan's military accuse the UAE of arming the RSF, and a U.N. panel said it had tracked weapons shipments to the RSF originating in the Gulf federation that includes Dubai.

In a statement to the AP after this story was published, the UAE denied providing arms or military support to any warring party in Sudan. It also denied facilitating the movement of mercenaries or foreign fighters into Sudan or having links to mercenaries.

The UAE said its investigation of the firm in question found no links to mercenary activity in Sudan. The UAE condemned atrocities on all sides and said it supported efforts to end the conflict.

The boy who had been shackled to the gun burst into tears as he ran his hand over scars from the some 18 months he was forced to fight.

"I was extremely scared. I just wanted to escape and go home," he said.

The children were shackled day and night

He said he was rounded up by RSF fighters in a market in Khartoum's twin city of Omdurman, where he was selling cigarettes. The paramilitaries were searching for deserters and seized him by mistake, he said. He was 15 at the time.

Never having held a gun, he was thrust onto the front lines in Khartoum. Scars on his head and under his eye mark where he says he was hit by shrapnel.

He was later taken to an RSF base in Omdurman known as Central Reserve Camp, where he was held with dozens of other children. Their hands were bound all the time, even while eating.

"We weren't allowed to bathe. Instead, they would pour water over us while we were still bound," he said.

He said dozens of foreign mercenaries were at the base, described as Colombians by the RSF fighters there. Speaking through translators, they taught the children how to use anti-aircraft guns. They told RSF fighters to bind the children to the weapons so they couldn't escape, he said.

"When the planes flew overhead, the Colombians would retreat to their bunkers, leaving us outside shackled to the vehicles," the teenager said. He was forced to fire, but he said he was too afraid and never hit anything.

A second boy recounts beatings, and a friend's killing

The second boy described how, at age 15, he was held at an RSF camp called al-Konan, where he said Colombians trained him and other boys on heavy artillery and drones.

He said he was locked up and only brought out for artillery strikes. The Colombians and the RSF used drones to choose targets, and sometimes he saw civilians through the camera. When he refused to fire, they would beat him, sometimes with an electric baton. In one case, he said, a Colombian beat him unconscious.

An 18-year-old friend tried to flee and was shot dead by the RSF. He carried the body away.

"I still have nightmares whenever I try to sleep," he said.

Both children spoke at a facility run by the military-backed government on Khartoum's outskirts, where more than 200 former child soldiers were being rehabilitated. Many fell into the hands of the military when it retook the capital from the RSF over the past year.

A member of the military media office accompanied the AP during the visit. The official did not choose who the AP interviewed. The AP retains full editorial control of its content.

Veterans of Colombia's long wars have hired themselves out

The AP could not independently verify the boys' accounts, which are consistent with other reporting on the conflict. Multiple countries are entangled in Sudan's conflict, and other foreigners, including Russians and Ukrainians, have taken part in hostilities.

Some 10,000 Colombians have hired themselves out for foreign wars, including in Somalia, Ukraine and Sudan, according to the U.N. Colombia's decades of internal conflict, involving guerrillas, paramilitaries and drug traffickers, have produced a large cadre of veterans prized for their U.S.-backed military training and driven abroad by meager pensions and scarce civilian job prospects.

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A recent law bars Colombians from fighting in foreign conflicts, but veteran groups say recruitment has continued.

Human Rights Watch and Conflict Insights Group, a private research firm, have documented the presence of Colombian mercenaries alongside the RSF in Sudan's western region of Darfur, including during the October capture of El Fasher, where RSF fighters have been accused of mass killings.

In separate reports this year, Human Rights Watch and Conflict Insights Group said the Colombians were hired by an Emirati contractor and trained in Emirati military bases. The UAE denied those allegations at the time and reiterated its position after this story was published.

A Colombian mercenary who fought in Darfur for six months in 2025 told the AP that hundreds of Colombians were on the front lines with the RSF at the time and involved in training recruits. He said he saw children as young as 13 fighting with the RSF. He spoke on condition of anonymity, concerned over legal consequences.

Less is known of the Colombians' role in Khartoum. Ali Qader, the head of the rehabilitation center, said several children told him Colombians trained them at camps around the capital.

A former RSF fighter, who defected to the government side and spoke on condition of anonymity out of security concerns, said he saw Colombians training children in Khartoum in July 2024. A Sudanese military officer with knowledge of the situation said Colombians were training children in and around Khartoum when the RSF held the city. The officer was not authorized to brief reporters and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Colombian government said it has no official information confirming allegations that Colombians recruited or trained child soldiers in Sudan. It condemned such abuses.

Child recruitment is a war crime

Tens of thousands of children as young as 8 have been recruited during Sudan's war, according to Abdelgadir Abdullah Abu, secretary-general of Sudan's National Council for Child Welfare, a government body.

The U.N. says all sides in the conflict have used child soldiers, including militias allied with the government. Many are believed to still be on the front lines. The RSF and the Sudanese government did not respond to detailed requests for comment.

The RSF have roots in the Janjaweed militias that rampaged across Darfur in the early 2000s. Sudan's then-president Omar al-Bashir was indicted for war crimes and genocide by the International Criminal Court over that campaign.

Rights groups say the RSF employs similar tactics today, and that the UAE's alleged support for it could implicate the Gulf country.

"The evidence suggests the UAE could be substantially contributing to the RSF's widespread crimes against humanity," said Jean-Baptiste Gallopin, a senior adviser at Human Rights Watch.

Children returning from the front often have nowhere to go

At the rehabilitation center, which included a soccer field and volleyball net, boys dressed in white uniforms showed an AP reporter their wounds. One was missing a hand; another had scars on his back from where he said he was tortured; a third had a bone jutting out of his side.

The boy held at the Central Reserve Camp said that at one point, when tied to the anti-aircraft gun, he refused to fire on a jet. RSF fighters shot at him as punishment, wounding his foot.

The wound filled with worms, he said. Eventually, the fighters abandoned him because of it, and he was later brought to the youth facility.

Wiping away tears, he said he's aching to return home. His mother died from illness during the war, and his father told him he was ashamed of what his son had done and doesn't want to see him.

Zeinab Mahjoub, a psychologist at the facility, said she tries to persuade relatives not to abandon the boys. At the same time, the boys are wrestling with their own trauma.

Sheldon Yett, the head of the U.N. children's agency in Sudan, said it was working with the government and other parties to speed up the process of releasing the boys, trying to convince authorities to treat "children as children."

Since the AP visited the center in April, the children have been released.

The boy held at al-Konan Camp said that after nearly two years, he escaped one night when a guard left a door unlocked. He tried returning to his family but someone in the area knew he had fought with the RSF and reported him to the authorities, who referred him to the center.

He's trying to move on but is wrestling with guilt.

"We have made mistakes," he said. "We want to get out of here to rebuild Sudan."

Colin Gray, who gave his son the gun used in Georgia school shooting, is sentenced to 15 years

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

A man who gave his son the gun he used to kill two students and two teachers at Apalachee High School in Georgia was sentenced Thursday to 15 years in prison.

Colin Gray's sentencing comes days after his son, Colt Gray, was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole in the Sept. 4, 2024, shooting at the school 45 miles (70 kilometers) northeast of Atlanta. Colt Gray, 16, had pleaded guilty to murder and other charges.

Judge Nicholas Primm, who also sentenced Colt Gray, was blunt in addressing the elder Gray: "It is clear you failed as a parent." But he said punishing crimes of negligence is particularly difficult because there was no intent to commit a crime.

"My heart aches for everyone that was there that day, for all of you that have been impacted by it. But the law requires that I set aside emotion. I don't get to sentence with passion. I have the nearly impossible task of sentencing you without passion despite the immeasurable heartache that you caused," Primm said.

Gray, 55, is one of a handful of American parents who have been criminally charged after their children were accused in shootings.

A jury in March found Colin Gray guilty of second-degree murder in the deaths of two 14-year-old students, Mason Schermerhorn and Christian Angulo. Georgia law defines second-degree murder as causing the death of a child by committing the crime of cruelty to children. Gray was also found guilty of involuntary manslaughter in the killings of teachers Richard Aspinwall, 39, and Cristina Irimie, 53.

Another teacher and eight other students were wounded, seven of them hit by gunfire.

Families speak their pain

Family members of those who died and victims of the shooting, many of whom also spoke during Colt Gray's sentencing, condemned what they said were Colin Gray's failures as a parent and urged the judge to give him the maximum sentence.

"This wasn't unavoidable. This was preventable. Because of the choices made inside the Gray household, four families were handed life sentences of grief," said Breanna Schermerhorn, whose son was killed.

"He did not pull the trigger but purchased and left a firearm accessible to a minor," said Shayna Aspinwall, whose husband was killed. She said the sentence must take into account "the families left behind who must carry the grief and trauma for the rest of our lives."

The judge addressed those in the courtroom after announcing the sentence: "This only closes the legal chapter for this horror. The pain, the heartache, they continue. I understand that. I hope all of you know this community loves you, and I ask that God gives you peace."

Prosecutors said Colin Gray missed red flags

Prosecutors said Colin Gray gave his son the rifle as a Christmas gift along with ammunition, a gun sight and other shooting accessories.

An investigator testified that Colt Gray carried the semiautomatic rifle onto the school bus with the barrel sticking out and wrapped in poster board. The teenager left his second-period class and went to a bathroom, emerged with the rifle and shot people in the hallway and a classroom, the investigator said.

Colt Gray, who was 14 at the time of the shooting, had shown signs of deteriorating mental health in the weeks leading up to the killings, according to testimony. He belonged to a "true crime community" online

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where he and other young people discussed their obsession with mass shooters, an investigator testified.

The teen's mother, Marcee Gray, who was separated from Colin Gray, told investigators she had argued with her estranged husband weeks before the shooting, asking him to secure his guns and restrict their son's access.

Prosecutors had asked for a sentence of 80 years

Defense attorney Brian Hobbs asked the judge for a sentence of 10 years in prison followed by 10 years on probation. Barrow County District Attorney Brad Smith said Gray deserved a sentence of 80 years in prison.

Hobbs argued that Colt Gray "actively hid the depth of his involvement" in the online community obsessed with mass shooters, and the red flags enumerated by prosecutors were outliers among happier moments.

Smith countered that Colin Gray ignored "a substantial and unjustifiable risk."

"This was the risk that he was ignoring, that there would be a mass shooting of children at a school, and he gave his son the exact tool he would need to accomplish this," Smith said.

Colin Gray is not the first parent to face such charges

Prosecutors have in recent years held parents responsible when they believe they can prove a parent contributed to a killing.

Jennifer and James Crumbley were the first U.S. parents to face such charges after their son, Ethan, killed four students and wounded others at Michigan's Oxford High School in 2021. Like Colin Gray, they were unaware of their son's plans but had gifted him a gun before the shooting. They are serving 10-year prison terms for involuntary manslaughter. Hobbs, the defense attorney, urged the judge to use that sentence as a guide.

The judge called these cases "divisive." There would have been no crime by the father if the son hadn't brought a gun to school and shot people, he noted. But he said Colin Gray could have locked up the guns, kept ammunition out of the house, had someone else keep the guns and gotten his son counseling.

"You were convicted because the warning lights were flashing brighter and brighter and you didn't get him help and you didn't remove his access to the guns," Primm said.

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

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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 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."

As France tames wildfire and lets 84,000 evacuees go home, blazes flare across Europe

By MARK CARLSON, ALEX TURNBULL and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

LEGE-CAP FERRET, France (AP) — France gave the go-ahead Thursday for 84,000 evacuees forced out by a monster wildfire to return home, the strongest sign yet that firefighters are turning the corner in a grueling battle against flames that have burned an area four times the size of Paris. But blazes flared elsewhere across Europe and actor George Clooney said he'd evacuated his French home because of a nearby wildfire.

Europe is sweltering under an exceptionally hot and arid summer, creating tinderbox conditions for unprecedented fires that have flared from the Atlantic coast to the eastern Mediterranean and forced hundreds of thousands of people to evacuate homes and vacation spots.

Firefighters battled flames in the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, Greece and Turkey on Thursday and were tamping down smoldering forests in southwest France where 224,000 people had been forced to

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flee. Romania shut down both reactors at its Cernavoda nuclear power plant due to low water levels in the Danube River used to cool them.

Hollywood star George Clooney wrote to his local mayor that his family evacuated the southeastern French town where they've settled and that "we have no idea whether our beautiful home makes it through this terrible moment." Clooney's publicist Guido Gotz shared the message to Brignoles Mayor Didier Brémont with The Associated Press.

Clooney wrote that he and his wife Amal, a human rights lawyer, were committed to the town and that, whatever happens, "we'll be part of making it whole."

The fire near Brignoles, in the Var region, flared Wednesday, forcing 700 people to evacuate, the mayor's office said. It said they were allowed back Thursday once the fire was tamed.

Returnees in France clear away ash

In the Bordeaux region of southwest France, wildfire evacuees streamed back to nine localities that authorities now deem safe after round-the-clock combat with the huge fire that ignited last week. Returnees included 50-year-old Sanachit Pho Ne Keo and his wife, relieved to discover that apart from black ash on an outside terrace, their home in Martignas-sur-Jalle wasn't damaged.

"Everything seems OK and it's a good feeling!" he said.

"The fire was pretty close, the last smoking embers are still close," he added. "But we could've expected worse."

Regional health authorities recommended that returnees wear gloves and face masks as they clean up and wash children's toys and pets' feeding bowls and paws. France's public health agency reported that call-out doctors and hospital emergency wards in Bordeaux had seen a spike in cases involving asthma sufferers last weekend when the raging wildfire was still spewing choking smoke clouds.

"It's the first somewhat optimistic day," said Sophie Brocas, prefect of Bordeaux's Gironde region who gave the go-ahead for nearly two-thirds of the 224,000 evacuees to go home, including 60,000 allowed back to three Bordeaux suburbs on Tuesday.

Still, returnees were told to keep phones on and pack bags in case they have to be evacuated again.

The A63 highway south of Bordeaux also was reopened, clearing a major artery for road traffic with Spain and vacationers as France enters its peak August holiday period.

"Our feeling is that we're getting back to the path of a normal life," Brocas said Thursday evening.

Fire still smoking but not spreading

Gironde authorities said the blaze is no longer growing beyond the 420 square kilometers (about 162 square miles) already affected — an area four times that of Paris.

Capitalizing on the shift of momentum, police water cannons usually used for riot control are being added to the effort to extinguish embers and flare-ups, involving 3,300 firefighters and two dozen planes and helicopters dumping water and retardants, French Interior Minister Laurent Nuñez said.

More aid came from other countries, with Luxembourg, Slovakia, Latvia, Germany and Serbia sending fire crews, adding to aircraft and other assistance provided by other countries, and Ukraine also offering help, Nuñez said.

Crews using heavy diggers continued ripping up trees and bushes to carve barriers of land between woodlands that burned and those that didn't, boxing in the blaze with firebreaks — now exceeding a total of 130 kilometers (80 miles) through the forests.

Emergency crews also set fires deliberately to burn away scrub that could fuel the wildfire.

"If we light a fire here, we know that our fire will move toward the incoming fire. So we're not taking much of a risk," said Lt. Col. Jérôme Jallet, overseeing a burn.

A heat wave — France's fourth of the year — gave way Thursday to cooler weather, higher humidity and even a little rain, helping the effort.

Tinderbox conditions across southern Europe

Successive heatwaves have created tinder-dry conditions across swaths of southern Europe and whack-a-mole emergencies for fire crews, with blazes flaring as others are extinguished.

Greece was tackling large fires on the islands of Crete, Paros and Andros, a day after three firefighters

died.

In Spain, firefighters fought blazes in northwestern Zamora and eastern Castellón, after making progress against infernos in the Madrid region and Ávila that prompted the government to declare a national fire emergency for the first time.

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

In France, two firefighters suffered light injuries battling a woodlands blaze in the eastern Burgundy region and four were injured in the southern Var region on a fire brought under control with a dozen planes and helicopters dropping water and retardant, authorities said.

In Germany, firefighters using drones and helicopters battled an Alpine forest fire near the Austrian border, the dpa news agency reported.

On a heath of birch trees, heather and wildlife in Suffolk, east England, wind-whipped flames burned across an area the size of 140 soccer pitches and forced hundreds of people to evacuate homes, vacation cottages and a mobile home park, fire services said. New U.K. Prime Minister Andy Burnham called it "a very serious incident." The southern half of the U.K. is suffering drought.

In Turkey, firefighters and aircraft battled forest fires in four western provinces, including tourist areas Mugla and Antalya.

Senate committee advances nomination of Dr. Erica Schwartz to be Trump's CDC director

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A Senate committee on Thursday advanced Dr. Erica Schwartz's nomination to be director of the nation's top public health agency, setting aside concerns that she will not stand up to political meddling.

If confirmed by the full Senate, the 54-year-old would become the 22nd director of the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is charged with protecting Americans from preventable health threats. Her resume includes medical and law degrees, a stint as deputy surgeon general, and a leadership position at the U.S. Coast Guard.

Schwartz appeared to be on shaky ground after a hearing before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee this month. The chairman, Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La., and others questioned whether she would be willing to stand up to Republican President Donald Trump's health secretary, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., if he ordered CDC to do something that was unsupported by science and good public health practice.

But when the committee met last week, Cassidy said he had spoken with Schwartz after that hearing and to others who knew her.

"I'm confident that she knows what she is doing and will stand against those who do not," said Cassidy, whose support was necessary for the nomination to go forward.

The committee's near party-line vote Thursday moved Schwartz's nomination ahead.

Among those who opposed her was Sen. Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent.

"The issue at hand is not complicated," Sanders said last week. "Will we have people in the Trump administration who have the guts to stand up to people who are anti-science and into conspiracy theories?"

The CDC has faced more than a year of unrest

The CDC has been in turmoil since Trump returned to office last year.

Largely due to layoffs and resignations, the agency has lost 3,000-plus employees, more than one-quarter of its workforce. Morale has plummeted as a succession of mostly temporary leaders have come and gone. The front office has been staffed by political appointees with little or no training in medicine or public health.

When Schwartz was nominated in April, public health experts were cautiously optimistic, citing her background. They also noted she was the choice of Trump and not Kennedy, a leading voice in the anti-vaccine movement before he was tapped to oversee the CDC and other federal health agencies.

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Kennedy had promised not to change the nation's vaccination schedule but later attempted a substantial rewrite of vaccine recommendations for kids. Some of those efforts were put on hold this year by a federal judge.

Kennedy's actions have rankled Cassidy, a physician who initially expressed doubts about Kennedy as Trump's pick to be health secretary. Cassidy ultimately signed off on Kennedy after the nominee promised not to change the nation's childhood vaccine recommendations.

Public health groups seek reassurance

At Schwartz's hearing, Cassidy and some other senators asked her what she would do if Kennedy or other political appointees instructed the CDC to make changes that were not supported by science. Schwartz pledged to "never betray the science," but she repeatedly declined to dissent from some of the actions Kennedy has taken.

The National Public Health Coalition, an organization of former and current CDC workers, was not reassured by her responses and said senators should require specific written commitments from Schwartz on scientific independence, evidence-based vaccine policy, conflicts of interest and other issues.

"The public needed to hear clear commitments about how she would protect CDC guidance from political pressure," the group said in a statement. "Too often, her stated commitments were incomplete, vague, or missing."

At the hearing, Schwartz said she was unaware that CDC programs that worked to prevent smoking and promote vaccinations had been curtailed. She declined to commit to taking down a CDC website that suggests a link between childhood vaccines and autism. She said she had not seen it, though she agreed existing medical evidence has not found a link.

Last week, Cassidy said that "as a sign of good faith" officials at the Department of Health and Human Services had modified the page. But this week, it continued to argue that "vaccines do not cause autism" is not an evidence-based claim, despite numerous studies that have found no such link.

Dr. Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association, interpreted Schwartz's performance as someone trying to please different factions. He disagreed with how she answered several questions, but continued to support her nomination.

Schwartz is qualified, might be able to rebuild the CDC's depleted command structure and could start to rebuild public trust in the agency by focusing on bipartisan concerns such as foodborne disease outbreaks, he said in a recent interview.

Dr. Daniel Jernigan, a former top CDC official who resigned in August, echoed that.

If Schwartz is not confirmed, "it will mean a continued rudderless journey for CDC," he said.

For Kennedy, "having to start over is probably what he wants — many more months with no one stopping him from pursuing the same anti-science and anti-vaccine efforts he has been pursuing," Jernigan said.

The CDC has had several leaders under Trump

Schwartz was the third Trump nominee for the office in the past 18 months.

The first was a former Florida congressman, Dr. David Weldon. His Senate hearing in March 2025 was canceled an hour before it was to begin. Weldon said at the time that he had been told not enough senators were willing to vote for him.

The White House then moved on to Susan Monarez, who had been serving as the CDC's acting director. Monarez was confirmed by the Senate, but she was ousted in less than a month. Trump administration officials said she was not aligned with the president's agenda so they terminated her.

Since then there have been a series of HHS officials as acting CDC director.

The committee also advanced a controversial health nominee

The CDC position is one of a number of leadership vacancies among federal health agencies, including surgeon general and commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration.

Also unfilled is the job of assistant health secretary for preparedness and response. That official oversees preparations and response to public health emergencies and disasters and is involved in decisions about funding next-generation vaccines against pandemic flu or other infectious disease threats.

Trump wants Sean Kaufman in that post, and the Senate committee on Thursday approved the nomina-

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tion by a party-line vote.

In LinkedIn postings, Kaufman has made comments cheered by vaccine skeptics, arguing against hepatitis B vaccinations for newborns and saying he served as an expert witness to advocate for people who refused the COVID-19 vaccine. He also supported a Trump administration decision last year to cancel projects to develop vaccines using mRNA technology.

"Mr. Kaufman has said some pretty stupid things and irresponsible things regarding immunization," Cassidy said.

But Cassidy said he spoke to HHS officials and was assured that personnel changes are being made at the department to provide "better oversight to ensure that science, not ideology, is driving decision-making."

Cassidy also said he has been assured that if Kaufman is confirmed, "he will not be involved in vaccine policy and nor will he be the ultimate decision-maker on certain issues."

Sanders, who voted against Kaufman, said: "I think the American people are owed better than what President Trump has nominated."

US economy grows at a sluggish 1.5% in second-quarter with inflation remaining stubbornly high

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. economy expanded at a sluggish 1.5% pace from April through June as rising imports weighed on growth, yet consumers continued to spend. And the Federal Reserve's favored measure of inflation grew more slowly last month. But it remained above the central bank's 2% target at a time when Americans are frustrated about the high cost of living ahead of the midterm elections, now less than 100 days away.

Growth in U.S. gross domestic product — the nation's output of goods and services — decelerated from 2.1% in the first three months of 2026, the Commerce Department reported Thursday, coming in below economists' expectations. But consumer spending — which accounts for about 70% of U.S. economic activity — increased at a 3.2% annual clip, up from 0.5% in the January-March period.

A measure of the economy's underlying strength — which strips out volatile government spending and trade numbers — looked good, expanding at a 3.9% annual pace, up from 1.7% from January through March.

Business investment, excluding housing, rose at an 8.4% pace, down from 10.6% from January through March but strong, reflecting a surge in investment in artificial intelligence.

Imports are subtracted from the economic figures because GDP is only supposed to count what is produced in the United States. Imports rose at an 11.5% pace, partly on a surge in shipments of computer chips and other products that support AI investment. The imports shaved 1.5 percentage off second-quarter GDP growth.

"The consumer rescued the quarter," said Olu Sonola, head of U.S. economics at Fitch Ratings. "AI investment remains a powerful growth story, but the import surge underpinning the buildout is a reminder that an AI boom does not automatically translate into an equally large boost to U.S. GDP."

The Commerce Department also said Thursday that its personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, the one favored by the Fed, rose 3.7% last month from June 2025, down from a 4.1% year-over-year increase in May. Excluding volatile food and energy prices, so-called core consumer prices were up 3.3% from a year earlier, little-changed from 3.4% increase in May. Prices actually fell 0.1% from May to June on a 9.2% drop in the price of gasoline and other energy products.

The PCE prices were about in line with economists' expectations. But the year-over-year increase in prices has been stuck above the Fed's 2% target for more than five years, and some Fed officials are getting impatient with progress against inflation.

The Fed on Wednesday chose to leave its benchmark interest rate unchanged for the fifth straight meeting. But three regional Fed presidents dissented, saying they wanted to raise rates to combat elevated inflation.

The American economy has been surprisingly resilient in the face of the Iran war and the spike in energy

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prices it caused. The job market has bounced back this year from a lackluster 2025, giving consumers the wherewithal to spend. Employers are adding an average 92,000 jobs a month this year, compared with fewer than 10,000 a month in 2025 when high interest rates and President Donald Trump's erratic use of tariffs discouraged businesses from hiring.

Higher costs have frustrated Americans ahead of November's midterm elections, which will determine whether President Donald Trump's Republicans keep full control of Congress.

A new AP-NORC poll found that the public is souring on the Iran war. And 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 from 67% in March.

Congo says the death toll in fastest-growing Ebola outbreak has passed 1,500

By PROSPER HERI NGORORA and MARK BANCHEREAU Associated Press

BUNIA, Congo (AP) — Ebola has killed more than 1,500 people in eastern Congo in the fastest-growing outbreak of the disease, data released Thursday showed, marking a 50% increase in around a week as the emergency continues to outpace response efforts.

As of Tuesday, 3,442 cases had been recorded, with 1,521 deaths, according to the latest government update. The sharp rise since last week partly reflects a backlog of cases and deaths that had not yet been confirmed or recorded, the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday.

The outbreak, declared on May 15, has been linked to the Bundibugyo virus for which there are no approved vaccines or treatments. Delays in contact tracing, difficulties accessing affected areas, mistrust from communities and violence by armed groups and some residents have hampered the response, the Africa CDC said.

The outbreak is mostly concentrated in eastern Congo's remote Ituri province, which accounts for nearly 90% of cases, but there have been others confirmed in five provinces, including one of the country's largest cities, Kisangani.

Neighboring Uganda declared itself free of Ebola on Tuesday following the discharge of the country's last patient in mid-June.

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

Africa CDC Director-General Dr. Jean Kaseya said Thursday that 63% of confirmed deaths in the last two weeks occurred outside of treatment centers.

Kaseya said this is largely due to the "unsafe handling of infected bodies" by residents. Traditional burial practices in some communities involve touching the bodies of the deceased, which can be highly contagious.

The restrictions that health authorities have placed on such funerals, along with widespread misinformation asserting that the deadly virus isn't real, have angered some residents and led to attacks on health facilities.

In Ituri's Nyakunde health zone, international partners supporting the Ebola response had to temporarily relocate after a July 15 attack on a hospital and a treatment center, sparked by a patient's death.

Officials say the relocation of these partners, including Africa CDC and Mercy Corps, has disrupted surveillance, contact tracing and supplies.

Dr. Désiré Duabo, chief medical officer for the health zone, said foreign aid groups and agencies had provided much of the supplies, equipment and operational support, and warned that the small stocks left are "almost depleted."

Attacks such as the one in Nyakunde are causing anxiety among health workers and making it difficult for them to carry out their duties, said Pierre Akilimali, the Ebola response incident manager at the National Public Health Institute of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"They are working amidst risks of infection as well as risks to their personal safety," he said.

Local health officials say security has since stabilized and are urging partners to return, with Africa CDC

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saying teams could redeploy as soon as next week.

The latest outbreak has killed more people at a quicker rate than any previous outbreak, including in 2014-2016 when 28,000 cases were reported, of which over 11,000 people died. That outbreak took about eight months to reach 1,000 deaths.

The World Health Organization says the global risk of spread remains low because Ebola does not travel through the air, making it much harder to spread than respiratory viruses. Cases detected outside the affected region have so far been quickly identified and contained without leading to sustained transmission, the agency said.

In Congo, however, the risk of the spread remains "very high," according to the WHO.

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 the Republican president'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 congressional 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

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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 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 with 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

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8 in 10 say this is at least "very" important, compared with 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."

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 Republican 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, 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 his business background would wipe it out.

Many Americans believe tariffs have pushed prices higher and the war in Iran has increased gasoline 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 Trump's rally in Milford, northwest of Detroit, the crowd was adoring. But even some of his ardent supporters said prices are too high and tariffs had caused short-term economic pain — even as they still support him overall.

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

"But I'm just hoping, if we hang in there," she said, emphasizing 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, his 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 tariffs increase production costs — so much so that the president offered them a reprieve from his auto parts 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 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 Fen-

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ton, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) 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, Trump has used his 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's 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 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, 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 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 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 with 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 Trump 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 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, 12 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."

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"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."

Today in History: July 31, Phelps sets Olympic medal record

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, July 31, the 212th day of 2026. There are 153 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On July 31, 2012, at the Summer Olympics in London, swimmer Michael Phelps won his 19th Olympic medal, becoming the most decorated Olympian of all time. (He would finish his career with 28 total Olympic medals, 23 of them gold.)

Also on this date:

In 1715, a fleet of Spanish ships carrying gold, silver and jewelry sank during a hurricane off the east Florida coast; of some 2,500 crew members, more than 1,000 died.

In 1777, the 19-year-old Marquis de Lafayette received a commission as major general in the Continental Army by the Second Continental Congress.

In 1919, Germany's Weimar Constitution was adopted by the republic's National Assembly.

In 1945, Pierre Laval, premier of the pro-Nazi Vichy government in France, surrendered to U.S. authorities in Austria; he was turned over to France, which later tried and executed him.

In 1957, the Distant Early Warning Line, a system of radar stations designed to detect Soviet bombers approaching North America, went into operation.

In 1964, the U.S. lunar probe Ranger 7 took the first close-up images of the moon's surface.

In 1971, Apollo 15 crew members David Scott and James Irwin became the first astronauts to use a lunar rover on the surface of the moon.

In 1972, vice-presidential candidate Thomas Eagleton withdrew from the Democratic ticket with George McGovern following disclosures that Eagleton had received electroshock therapy to treat clinical depression.

In 1991, President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) in Moscow.

In 2020, a federal appeals court overturned the death sentence of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev in the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, saying the judge who oversaw the case didn't adequately screen jurors for potential biases. (The Supreme Court reimposed the sentence in 2022.)

In 2022, al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahri was killed in a U.S. drone strike in Kabul, Afghanistan; Al-Zawahri and the better-known Osama bin Laden plotted the 9/11 attacks.

Today's Birthdays: Jazz composer-musician Kenny Burrell is 95. Actor Geraldine Chaplin is 82. Former movie studio executive Sherry Lansing is 82. Singer Gary Lewis is 80. International Tennis Hall of Famer Evonne Goolagong Cawley is 75. Actor Michael Biehn is 70. Rock singer-musician Daniel Ash (Love and Rockets) is 69. Entrepreneur Mark Cuban is 68. Rock musician Bill Berry (R.E.M.) is 68. Jazz guitarist Stanley Jordan is 67. Actor Wesley Snipes is 64. Musician Fatboy Slim is 63. Author J.K. Rowling is 61. Actor Dean Cain is 60. Actor Jim True-Frost is 60. Actor Ben Chaplin is 57. Actor Eve Best is 55. Football Hall of Famer Jonathan Ogden is 52. Country singer-musician Zac Brown is 48. Actor-producer-writer B.J. Novak is 47. Football Hall of Famer DeMarcus Ware is 44. NHL center Evgeni Malkin is 40. NASCAR driver Kyle Larson is 34. Hip-hop artist Lil Uzi Vert is 31. Actor Rico Rodriguez (TV: "Modern Family") is 28.