

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 1 of 69

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [4- Special School Board Meeting Agenda](#)
- [5- Highway Patrol Sturgis Rally Daily Information](#)
- [6- Fact brief: Is it legal to wear only body paint as clothing at the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally?](#)
- [7- SD News Watch: Ahlers announces Lt. gov. pick, finalizing November ballot for SD Democrats](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: State commission accepts \\$290 million bid for Platte-Winner Bridge, \\$40 million above estimate](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: South Dakota board approves nearly \\$500,000 in state loans and grants for business projects](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: DOJ targets 3 more states in effort to axe in-state tuition for immigrants](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: Schools spend billions on AI, but struggle to figure out what's worth buying](#)
- [15- Weather Pages](#)
- [16- Daily Devotional](#)
- [20- Subscription Form](#)
- [21- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [22- News from the Associated Press](#)

Community Calendar

Friday, Aug. 14

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

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

Boys Soccer at NSU vs. Hot Springs, 5 p.m.

Saturday, Aug. 15

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

Sunday, Aug. 16

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.

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

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.;

Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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

© 2026 Groton Daily Independent



at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.

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

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

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

Monday, Aug. 17

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

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

Groton Area Staff Development Day

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

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

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

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 2 of 69

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.

Flock Changes Course

Flock Safety announced new privacy restrictions yesterday for its automated license plate readers following scrutiny over privacy and police misuse. The company will require automated audits and case codes for searches and reduce its default data retention period from 30 days to seven.

The changes follow reports of officers using the AI-powered system for personal surveillance, including stalking romantic partners. An investigation identified at least 50 officers accused of misusing plate-reader systems, 46 involving Flock. The company operates roughly 120,000 cameras across 49 states, capturing about 20 billion plate scans monthly. Flock says 90% of searches occur within a week, though a new "Evidence Mode" will let agencies preserve specific data longer for active investigations.

Flock says its technology was involved in more than 1 million investigations and helped locate more than 10,000 missing people last year. The network extends beyond law enforcement, with cameras operated by businesses, schools, homeowner associations, and other private groups.

West Bank Siege

Israeli troops yesterday said they dismantled two illegal outposts erected by Israeli settlers who have trapped three Palestinian families in their homes since Sunday.

Dozens of settlers surrounded three homes near Qusra, a West Bank village of about 5,000 people. The settlers cut off water and power and blocked an access road, reportedly forcing residents to ration food. At least one home is owned by an American, prompting the US to issue a rebuke. The Israeli military said it deployed an additional infantry battalion to Qusra this week as it responds to an uptick in settler attacks; the United Nations reported an average of 190 attacks per month during the first four months of 2026, putting the West Bank on track to surpass the 1,835 attacks recorded last year.

The standoff comes after a clash near Qusra last month that killed two Israelis and four Palestinians. Two mosques were subsequently set on fire.

 Humankind: "Baywatch" cast celebrates 16-year-old lifeguard who rescued a young boy caught in rip currents and 8-foot waves off the coast of California.

Instagram Logo Redesign

Instagram has updated its wordmark—the text version of its logo—for the first time in a decade, the company revealed yesterday.

The latest, wider typeface combines sans serif and cursive lettering, unlike the 2010 wordmark, which was exclusively in cursive. Critics have characterized the redesign as an example of "blanding," a move toward more muted colors and simplified logos. It also follows the trend of cursive logos falling out of favor, with Johnson & Johnson and Eddie Bauer turning to sans serif fonts in recent years.

While rebrands can keep a company looking modern, they also risk alienating loyal customers; a study of sports team logo redesigns found color changes reduced fan loyalty more than shape redesigns.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 3 of 69

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Kennedy Center Board votes to add President Donald Trump's name to the facade and temporarily close the main building for renovations; both decisions are subject to scrutiny by a federal judge.

Eurovision Song Contest to be held in Burgas, Bulgaria, next year; the Balkan country won the contest for the first time in May.

Katie Ledecky extends her 16-year winning streak in the 1,500-meter freestyle at the Pan Pacific Swimming Championships, but it was her closest finish in 13 years.

Science & Technology

OpenAI introduces "Ultrafast," a new mode it says makes ChatGPT's latest, most powerful model work 14 times faster.

Mammal ancestors may have given birth 90 million to 95 million years earlier than previously believed, according to fossils from a dog-sized carnivore.

Physicists discover how glue-like particles called gluons may help protons maintain their identity, potentially reshaping our understanding of what keeps visible matter stable.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.7%, Dow +0.1%, Nasdaq +0.8%); S&P 500 reaches record high amid cooler-than-expected inflation data.

Wholesale prices were unchanged in July, defying forecasts for an increase.

Workday shares jump 20% intraday before trading is halted on report that private equity firm Silver Lake is in talks to buy the HR software provider.

Data analytics company Databricks closes \$5B funding round at \$190B valuation, says it has crossed \$7B revenue run rate.

Politics & World Affairs

US military is sending USS George Washington to the Middle East to relieve the USS Abraham Lincoln amid reports of deteriorating conditions and supplies; the ship has gone over 200 consecutive days without a port call, a modern record.

Navy denies there has been an increase in suicide attempts on the ship.

Luigi Mangione will enter plea today on federal charges of stalking resulting in the death of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson; case is separate from the state murder trial, due to begin next month.

El Niño weather pattern is more than 90% likely to be a super El Niño in the fall and winter, likely bringing above-average precipitation to southern third of the US.

GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

Special School Board Meeting

August 18, 2026 – 6:00 PM – GHS Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Continued Discussion on Middle/High School Building Project and Bond Election
 - a. Hausmann Construction
 - b. Tom Grimmond, Colliers Securities

ADJOURN

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 5 of 69

Highway Patrol Sturgis Rally Daily Information Compiled from 6 a.m. Saturday, August 8, 2026, to 6 a.m. Thursday, August 13, 2026

Item	Sturgis	Rapid City District	District Total	Last Year to Date
DUI Arrests	62	20	82	87
Misd Drug Arrests	117	32	149	169
Felony Drug Arrests	54	11	65	67
Custodial Arrests	118	39	157	N/A
Total Citations	573	560	1,133	1024
Total Warnings	2,058	1,166	3,224	3,063
Cash Seized	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Vehicles Seized	0	0	0	0
For Drug Poss.	0	0	0	0
For Serial No.	0	0	0	0
Non-Injury Accidents	9	5*	14*	20
Injury Accidents	10	16	26	50
Fatal Accidents	1	2	3	3
# of Fatalities	1	2	3	3

*The change in numbers is due to the removal of accidents that occurred during severe weather conditions. These incidents are not included because, under current guidelines, accidents caused by cataclysmic events are considered non-reportable.

Fatal Crashes:

None

Injury Crashes:

At 11:28 a.m. Wednesday, Wildlife Loop, mile marker 5, Custer State Park: A 2004 Harley-Davidson motorcycle, operated by a 71-year-old male (Unit 1), was northbound on Wildlife Loop near mile marker 5. A 2019 Harley-Davidson motorcycle, operated by a 69-year-old male (Unit 2), was southbound at the same location. Unit 2 was entering a corner at the center of the roadway. Unit 1 entered the southbound lane stating he was trying to avoid collision. Driver 2 swerved to the right stating he was trying to avoid collision. Both units overturned and both drivers sustained non-life-threatening injuries and were transported to Monument Health in Custer.

At 1:05 p.m. Wednesday, U.S. Highway 16A, mile marker 31: A 2015 Harley-Davidson motorcycle, operated by a 62-year-old male, was traveling eastbound near U.S. 16A mile marker 31. The driver lost control of the motorcycle in the left curve. The driver was wearing a helmet and sustained minor injuries. He declined transport and rode the motorcycle from the scene.

At 12:45 a.m. Thursday, Interstate 90, mile marker 45: A 1993 Harley-Davidson motorcycle, operated by a 58-year-old male, was driving eastbound near mile marker 45 on Interstate 90 during rainy conditions. Unit 1 lost control and left the roadway into the median. The driver was wearing a helmet and was transported to Monument Health in Rapid City with minor injuries.

All information released so far is only preliminary.

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



Fact brief: Is it legal to wear only body paint as clothing at the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally?

The rally started Aug. 7 and runs through Aug. 16 in the Black Hills town.

No.

Body paint does not count as clothing at the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally or anywhere else in South Dakota.

According to the City of Sturgis Code of Ordinances, people cannot appear in public with his or her genitals or the female breast showing without a full opaque covering, such as bandaids or pasties.

"Paint or any similar substance does not qualify as a full opaque covering," the ordinance says.

A Meade County Ordinance revised in 2009 requires bars and campgrounds to obtain a special license if they allow partial or full nudity.

Two of the rally's biggest campgrounds, Sturgis Buffalo Chip and Pappy Hoel Campground and Resort, have resources on how to follow the law while at the rally.

"Nudity — as well as any open sexual acts — are not allowed. That said, we still get pretty wild. ... We want YOU to continue to come back," the Pappy Hoel website says.



**SOUTH DAKOTA
NEWS WATCH**

Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

Ahlers announces lt. gov. pick, finalizing November ballot for SD Democrats

By Molly Wetsch, South Dakota News Watch

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. – Dan Ahlers, the Democratic candidate for South Dakota governor, has selected Steven McCleerey as his running mate, he announced Wednesday morning. The announcement comes after the Secretary of State's website posted the filing revealing Ahlers' pick on Tuesday.

McCleerey is a former state lawmaker and farmer from Sisseton. He represented District 1 in the state House for three terms from 2015 to 2021, when he was succeeded by Jennifer Healy Kintz.

During his announcement at the Old Courthouse Museum on Wednesday, McCleerey spoke at length about rural health care, an issue which he also focused on in the legislature. McCleerey serves as vice president of the Coteau des Prairies Health Care Systems board of directors. He cited his time on the board as crucial to his understanding and mentioned maternal health services – which the hospital no longer provides – as a priority.

He also spoke about agriculture and rural communities, citing his experience as the owner of a thousand-acre cow/calf operation as crucial to his understanding of the state, and as an asset to a Democratic party that has found the majority of its success in the state's urban areas and reservations.

"There's things that I bring to this campaign, especially with agriculture and property rights," McCleerey said. "I have property. ... That affects me. I don't care if you've got a thousand acres like we do, or 10,000 acres. We cherish that. That's my business. And it's a risk business, which most people don't understand."

Ahlers and McCleerey will face Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden and Lt. Gov. Tony Venhuizen in November. That pair has a similar urban-rural tilt, with Venhuizen from Sioux Falls and Rhoden a rancher from Union Center. Ahlers is a small business owner from Dell Rapids, a community 20 miles north of Sioux Falls.

McCleerey pushed back at concerns that he and Ahlers, two candidates from east of the Missouri River, may not be able to capture the attention of West River voters. He said that his father was born near Isabel and that ranchers, which is the dominant industry in that region, and farmers have much in common when it comes to policy issues.

"Don't try to come and ask me 'what are you going to do about West River.' I know West River," McCleerey said.



Dan Ahlers (left) and Steven McCleerey (right) as Ahlers' announces McCleerey as his lieutenant governor pick on Aug. 12, 2026 in Sioux Falls, S.D. (Photo:

Molly Wetsch/South Dakota News Watch)

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 8 of 69

Democratic ballot finalized, with some holes

Ahlers' pick marks the finalization of South Dakota Democrats' November ballot, which will notably lack both an attorney general and U.S. Senate nominee.

Julian Beaudion, a former highway patrolman and small business owner, ended his year-long campaign for a U.S. Senate seat last week. He cited personal financial hardship and a house fire as part of his choice to withdraw from the race. The ballot is now narrowed down to Brian Bengs, an Independent, and incumbent U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, a Republican. Beaudion said in a statement after his withdrawal he would not endorse or support Bengs for the office but also "cannot support" Rounds.

The other federal spot up for election, South Dakota's lone U.S. House of Representatives seat, is being battled over by Attorney General Marty Jackley and Democrat Nikki Gronli.

The Democrats also did not nominate an attorney general pick at the party's annual convention in June – the second cycle in a row that no Democrat stepped forward for the job.

A governor from the Democratic Party has not been elected to office in 50 years, and Democrat voter registration has not recovered from a drop in numbers this year – and indeed, declining registration has been a problem for the party for decades. But party registration numbers are generally inconsequential in the general election, as voters are not required to vote for the party for which they are registered.

Ahlers and McCleerey addressed the stark gap in Republican and Democratic politicians in the state – including in the state legislature, where Republican lawmakers outnumber Democrats 97 to eight – by saying that voters are looking for change and will be inclined to go to the polls for candidates who listen to them.

Ahlers criticized the Republican Party's dominance in the state and Rhoden's approach to the campaign, saying that calling him a "Biden-endorsed Democrat" with "Minnesota policies" was a "cheap tactic by candidates who don't have fresh ideas."

"They think that they're entitled to your vote," Ahlers said. "That's what happens when 50 years of one-party rule happens."

But both candidates also spoke about the importance of setting aside differences in party politics, acknowledging the need to work with Republicans in Pierre. McCleerey said that it would be his priority to work as a "team" with Ahlers. Ahlers cited the often-difficult task of getting Democratic bills approved in the legislature as proof of his ability to work with the other side.

"We actually had to work across party lines to make things happen. We could not get bills passed, we could not help the people in our district unless we were able to get Republicans to join us," Ahlers said. "I think it's time for a change. I think it would be healthy for all of South Dakota, for Democrats, Republicans, Independents, whatever other flavor you are, to have a government that is balanced and ready to work for you."

Ahlers and Rhoden will meet in two debates before the November general election, at the South Dakota State Fair in Huron and on Sept. 28 in Sioux Falls, hosted by South Dakota News Watch and South Dakota Public Broadcasting.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

State commission accepts \$290 million bid for Platte-Winner Bridge, \$40 million above estimate

Department leader expresses confidence in ability to fund project but concern for future funding

BY JOSHUA HAIAR

The South Dakota Transportation Commission on Thursday approved a nearly \$290 million bid — about \$40 million above the state's estimate — to replace the Platte-Winner Bridge.

The vote means the state is moving forward with what Department of Transportation Secretary Joel Jundt called "the largest project that the DOT has ever led."

The commission accepted Ames Construction's \$289.99 million bid to replace the state Highway 44 bridge over the Missouri River in the southeast part of the state. The bid is about \$39.25 million, or 15.7%, above the state's estimate of \$250.74 million.

Ames Construction is headquartered in Burnsville, Minnesota. Three other companies submitted higher bids ranging from \$306 million to \$450 million.

Ames also submitted a \$652,125 bid for a smaller bridge project in Douglas County that was bundled with the Platte-Winner project. That bid was about \$64,500 below the state's estimate.

Jundt told commissioners the state has enough money to proceed despite the Platte-Winner bid coming in substantially higher than anticipated.

"Do we have the money to afford the project?" Jundt said. "We would answer the question as a positive yes."

Jundt said the department has spent years planning how to pay for it without overstressing the federal funding the state relies on for major highway projects.

Beyond that, the Platte-Winner project has received a \$65 million Federal Highway Administration Competitive Highway Bridge Program grant and \$25 million secured by the state's congressional delegation.

Jundt said the department is also awaiting a decision on another federal grant application and will continue pursuing other federal funding.

Jundt told commissioners the higher cost can be covered with the department's regular federal funding. Because construction will take several years, the department will not pay the entire contract at once. Contractors are reimbursed as work is completed and accepted by the state.

Department staff attributed the higher bids to complexities with building in deep water, specialized equipment, the bridge's size, market conditions and the remote location, which creates logistical costs.

The new bridge will be about 5,770 feet long and built just north of the existing bridge, allowing traffic to continue using the old structure during construction. Work could begin this fall.

The department hopes the bridge will be open to traffic by June 2030, with final completion, including removal of the existing bridge, scheduled for November 2031.

The existing bridge opened in 1966 and, at 5,655 feet, is South Dakota's longest. The department has said deterioration and long-term structural concerns require a replacement.

While Jundt said the state can afford the Platte-Winner Bridge project, he cautioned commissioners the same cannot yet be said about the state's next major bridge replacement.

"I do not feel comfortable moving forward," Jundt said.

The next bridge is the U.S. Highway 212 Forest City Bridge over the Missouri River, west of Gettysburg

in the north-central part of the state. The existing bridge opened in 1958, and the department has said landslides along its southern approach have resulted in millions of dollars in repairs and mitigation work.

Jundt told commissioners the project is expected to be even more expensive.

"The funding is not there for that project, nor the other projects in the future," he said.

Jundt said the state will have to determine how to finance those projects in coming years, depending in part on future federal funding.

"We'll cross that bridge, pun intended, here in the next few years," he said.

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

South Dakota board approves nearly \$500,000 in state loans and grants for business projects

Companies in Rapid City and De Smet receive funding

BY JOSHUA HAIAR

A South Dakota board approved a total of \$481,199 in state loans and grants Wednesday for businesses in Rapid City and De Smet.

The Board of Economic Development approved a \$300,000 loan for Chemistry Distilling, a Rapid City company founded in 2024. The money will help the company purchase and renovate an industrial facility to manufacture and store high-purity ethanol.

The company's Sam Papendick said in a statement to South Dakota Searchlight that Chemistry Distilling is taking existing ethanol and putting it through an additional purification process to "remove trace impurities and water to produce very high-purity, 200-proof ethanol that can meet specifications for higher-value markets."

Papendick said those markets include pharmaceutical and laboratory applications, food and flavor processing, personal care products, extraction and other specialty chemical uses.

"We also have a beverage side of the business, where high-purity neutral spirits can become the base for products like vodka and other distilled beverages," he said in the statement.

The loan comes from the SD Works Program, which provides low-interest financing for eligible business projects. The Governor's Office of Economic Development said the project is expected to create seven full-time jobs over five years.

Dakota Evergreen received a \$90,000 loan from the same program to purchase a chiropractic clinic in De Smet. The loan is expected to help retain four full-time jobs and keep the clinic operating. A press release from the Governor's Office of Economic Development said it is the only chiropractic provider in a 35-mile radius.

"These projects strengthen local communities, support good-paying jobs, and build a strong, diverse economy that is 'Open for Opportunity,'" said Gov. Larry Rhoden in the release.

The board also approved a grant of up to \$91,199 through the South Dakota Jobs Program for Innovative Materials & Processes to expand its Rapid City operation with a new building and manufacturing and warehouse equipment. The jobs program provides grants tied to qualifying business investments and job creation.

The defense contractor and research firm was founded in 1999, and researches and manufactures explosives, pyrotechnics and more for the U.S. Army and Navy. The state release said the expansion is expected to create 18 to 24 jobs.

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

DOJ targets 3 more states in effort to axe in-state tuition for immigrants

BY SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Justice has sued New York, Connecticut and Vermont over laws that allow immigrants in the country without permanent legal status to pay in-state college tuition in the states where they live.

The suits, filed Aug. 10, are part of a larger push from the Trump administration to go after states with such policies, as the administration seeks to curb any benefits that could be extended to people without permanent legal status.

Since President Donald Trump re-took office, the DOJ has sued 17 states over laws that allow noncitizen students who meet certain requirements access to in-state tuition at public colleges and universities, regardless of their immigration status.

In five of those lawsuits the DOJ filed — targeting Texas, Kentucky, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Illinois — courts have already struck down the laws. All of those states, except for Illinois, had joined with the federal government rather than defend their laws.

Beyond New York, Connecticut and Vermont, lawsuits are also pending in California, Colorado, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Rhode Island and Virginia.

The lawsuits argue that the policies allow students without permanent legal status to pay drastically lower tuition for public education than U.S. citizens from other states.

"This is a simple matter of federal law: colleges cannot provide benefits to illegal aliens that they do not provide to U.S. citizens," Assistant Attorney General Brett Shumate of the DOJ's Civil Division said in a statement regarding the New York, Connecticut and Vermont lawsuits.

"This Department of Justice will not tolerate American students being treated like second-class citizens in their own country," Shumate said.

Landscape of state laws

At least 20 states and Washington, D.C., offer in-state tuition to "the states' undocumented students," according to the Higher Ed Immigration Portal, a project of the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization.

Roughly 525,000 "undocumented students" are enrolled in colleges and universities across the U.S., according to the Portal. An estimated 129,900 "undocumented students" are eligible for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.

DACA is intended to help people brought into the country without legal documentation as children. The program, created by the Obama administration in 2012, protects participants from deportation and allows them to receive work permits and obtain driver's licenses.

Five states, Arkansas, Idaho, Maine, Ohio and Texas, limit in-state tuition access to DACA recipients, according to the Portal.

Ongoing court battles threaten DACA recipients in Texas with the possibility of losing their ability to obtain a work permit.

'Unprecedented'

Diego Sánchez, vice president of policy and strategy at the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, said the DOJ's efforts to pursue states that offer in-state tuition benefits to students without permanent legal status is "unprecedented."

"It's a coordinated federal effort to dismantle state tuition equity policies that have existed for decades," Sánchez told States Newsroom.

Sánchez added that the policies "do not provide free college or special tuition discounts — they generally allow students who attended and graduated from high school in the state and meet additional state requirements to pay the same in-state tuition rate as the classmates they grew up with."

The students "still have to apply, they still have to be admitted, pay tuition and meet the same academic

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 12 of 69

requirements as everyone else," he said. "The state has already invested in these students ... these are benefits that don't only apply (to) undocumented students."

DOJ goes after Texas first

The DOJ's lawsuits came after Trump signed an executive order in April 2025 that calls on the U.S. attorney general to stop the enforcement of state laws and policies "favoring aliens over any groups of American citizens that are unlawful, preempted by Federal law, or otherwise unenforceable, including State laws that provide in-State higher education tuition to aliens but not to out-of-State American citizens."

Texas was the first state the DOJ pursued over such policies.

The Justice Department challenged in June 2025 the Lone Star State's 2001 law — the first of its kind in the country — signed by former Gov. Rick Perry, a Republican.

Rather than defend the law, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, a Trump-aligned Republican, sided with the DOJ to try to permanently block the state law and signed an agreement the same day the DOJ filed suit. A federal judge then blocked the Texas law.

A federal appeals court in July rejected an attempt from two advocacy groups, a Texas community college and a student to intervene in the case and defend the Texas law. The appeals effort came after the federal judge had earlier rejected the groups' attempt to intervene.

"It's not the end of the road yet, but it's been an uphill battle," said Efrén Olivares, vice president of litigation and legal strategy at the National Immigration Law Center, one of several public interest groups that sought to intervene on behalf of one of the advocacy groups, the Texas community college and the student.

"It's a shame because for the last year, thousands of kids who, all they're doing is trying to get a college education to better themselves and their families, are now prevented from doing so by exorbitant tuition."

Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom's Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

Schools spend billions on AI, but struggle to figure out what's worth buying

BY ROBBIE SEQUEIRA

As a new school year begins, some classrooms may use artificial intelligence tools to flag a student struggling with classwork, track attendance or try to raise reading scores.

But as school districts make decisions on which tools are safe and worth spending thousands or millions of dollars on, some officials feel overwhelmed by the array of choices. Some states and districts have begun offering guidance for vetting AI purchases, but educators and experts say districts are still carrying much of the burden on their own.

While school districts have long wrestled with education technology purchases, AI is different because the industry is moving faster than districts and states can keep up with, said Mark Schneider, a nonresident senior fellow at the conservative-leaning think tank the American Enterprise Institute.

"There's always an asymmetry between what the providers know and what the districts know," Schneider told Stateline. "And the question is, can we set up mechanisms for helping the districts understand what's going on and choosing better."

Billions of dollars are at stake. The overall U.S. education technology market, which includes computers, software and digital content, generated almost \$48 billion in revenue in 2024 and is expected to reach more than \$90 billion by 2030, according to Grand View Research. The AI in education market in the United States generated about \$2.5 billion in revenue last year and is expected to exceed \$15 billion by 2033, the group said.

Scott Langford, superintendent of Sumner County Schools in Tennessee, said his district decided to test AI to address plateauing middle school reading scores. Langford said the district wanted to know whether AI could give students immediate feedback and help teachers see, in real time, where students struggled

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 13 of 69

during regular classroom instruction.

"You have to identify what you need," Langford said. "The (AI edtech) market is so overwhelming for districts and for vendors. ... Most of them don't really do much that drives any kind of change for students."

Sumner first tried Coursemojo — an AI-powered literacy tool used to support classroom instruction and provide real-time feedback to students and teachers — in a five-day micro-pilot in a sixth grade classroom, then piloted the tool in half of its sixth grade classrooms. Langford said the strongest tools are not the ones that replace teachers, but the ones that "help them see student understanding more quickly."

Sumner has continued using Coursemojo after the pilot, Langford said.

The Allentown School District, a large, urban district in Pennsylvania, uses a two-phase review process for AI programs that Superintendent Carol Birks said includes non-negotiables such as student safety and data security. Vendors must ensure that all user-generated data and chat logs remain the exclusive property of the district, and vendors must explicitly state that student data will not be sold or used to train AI models.

Birks said that while districts are making these decisions on AI tools, state and federal guidance would be helpful. In addition to Coursemojo, the district also uses other AI platforms like Google's Gemini.

"A significant challenge is that the onus of making these decisions is placed entirely back on the individual school district," said Birks. "Although Allentown has built strong internal capacity to handle these responsibilities, guidance from the state level on artificial intelligence vetting or protections would greatly assist school districts."

What vetting looks like

In most cases, vendors must sign a data processing agreement, complete a security questionnaire and pass legal, privacy and security reviews before a tool can be approved for use in schools. And some states already have laws governing traditional education technology purchases and student data protections. But many districts haven't laid out best practices or recommendations for how school districts enter contracts with vendors or even bidding processes for certain tools.

And some AI use in classrooms has drawn criticism and legal action. Students and parents in Arizona and Kansas have filed federal lawsuits challenging school districts' use of Gagle — a student-safety monitoring platform that scans activity on school-issued accounts and devices — saying it violated their constitutional rights. In Los Angeles, the superintendent of public schools resigned after the district paid \$3 million for an AI chatbot from a company called AllHere, which later filed for bankruptcy and whose founder was charged with fraud.

State education boards and agencies, which already regulate contracts for textbooks, transportation and student data systems, have filled in some gaps with vetting and procurement guidance for districts.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education instructs schools to understand who controls the data entered into any AI tool, examine third-party data-sharing practices, limit data collection to what is necessary, keep a human "in the loop" if the tool is being used for grading and discipline, and assess whether it improves student performance.

New York City Public Schools updated its privacy and security review process to include standards for AI, require vendors to disclose what their AI tools are capable of, prohibit the use of student data to train AI models and meet transparency requirements so tools can be explained to families and students.

Chicago Public Schools released an AI Guidebook governing the use of AI software and models and in December began blocking unapproved third-party AI products from its network.

"Chicago Public Schools welcomes the promising innovation of artificial intelligence in teaching and learning, while safeguarding the development of students' foundational skills and critical thinking," a Chicago Public Schools spokesperson wrote to Stateline.

The U.S. Department of Education has provided little guidance to districts about AI purchases.

The Southern Regional Education Board — a consortium of 16 Southern states that provides guidance on school issues — published an AI procurement and evaluation checklist last year for K-12 schools.

Leslie Eaves, program director of project-based learning at the board who co-led the AI commission, said districts should first let adults test AI tools before placing them in front of students. She cautions

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 14 of 69

that teachers should review AI-generated material before using it in the classroom and they need to trust their experience and expertise.

"Anything with AI is a risky click," she said. "There's a lot of tool makers out there that are going to sell you their product and they're going to say it's the biggest and best in everything ... At the end of the day, humans are the ones who will know what's best for their schools and students."

Janice Mak, an associate director of curriculum and pedagogy at Arizona State University's Learning Engineering Institute, says districts should evaluate whether an edtech tool is accessible, explainable, grounded in learning science and solving a real educational need.

"State level policy or guidance only goes so far, and there's also a research gap and there's also a policy gap," Mak told Stateline.

Mak said she heard from a middle school teacher piloting an AI tool who noticed English learners were being unfairly penalized or misread by the system. The students noticed the bias, she said, and the teacher used it to teach them about algorithmic bias and how AI systems are trained.

'A tall order for districts'

Still, districts are being asked to do too much on their own, said Sue Thotz, director of outreach for Common Sense Education at Common Sense Media, a nonprofit that researches and evaluates media and technology used by children and schools.

Thotz points to a California data privacy agreement, which districts can use to ensure vendors comply with the state's student data privacy laws, as a way to take some burden off districts by creating a blanket agreement vendors sign onto. The California Student Privacy Alliance, which developed the agreement, gives school systems a searchable database of vendors that have signed, reducing the need for each district to negotiate privacy terms from scratch.

"Placing the burden upon a district to make sure that every single vendor they're working with is in full compliance with their state and federal laws when it comes to privacy," she said. "That's a tall order for districts that are already stretched very, very thin."

Districts may also be sorting an accumulation of a decade's worth of technology purchases, said Tracy Weeks, senior director of education policy and strategy at Instructure, the education technology company that makes the Canvas learning management system.

An Instructure report found districts had access to an average of 3,001 digital tools, while students and educators used only four of those tools on average. The report, based on Canvas launch data from more than 12.6 million K-12 users, said the volume of available tools has teachers navigating too many platforms and districts overseeing student data across vendors.

"What I think has happened is that I think we did a lot of digital hoarding," Weeks said. Now, she said, districts are asking, "What are the things we should actually keep? What do we need to use? What can actually move the needle?"

Shrinking budgets and the expiration of federal pandemic-era funding has also forced districts to scrutinize purchases.

Dacia Toll, co-founder of Coursemojo, the software used by Sumner County and Allentown, said districts should first ask whether an AI product aligns with what is known about cognitive science and strong teaching methods.

"Education has had a long-standing issue with vetting edtech for safety, usability and efficacy, and I just think AI is making that more pronounced," she told Stateline. "There are a handful of additional risks, and there's so much hype right now that I think some districts are feeling like they're behind if they're not actively implementing AI."

Stateline reporter Robbie Sequeira can be reached at rsequeira@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.

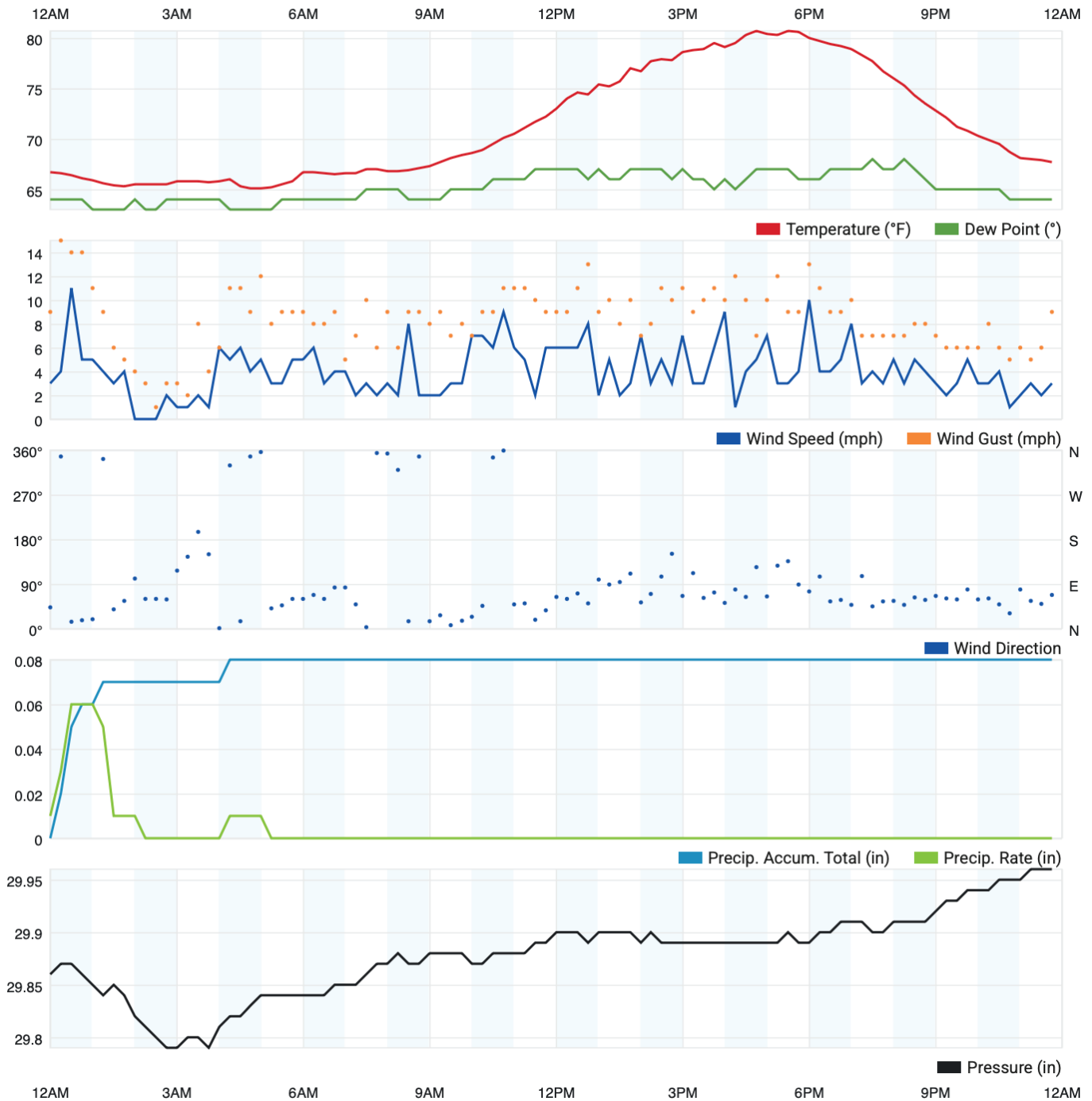
Robbie Sequeira is a staff writer covering housing and social services for Stateline.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 15 of 69

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

August 13, 2026



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 16 of 69

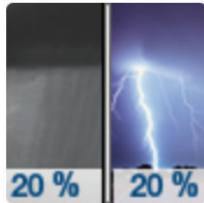
Today



High: 80 °F

Partly Sunny
then Slight
Chance
Showers

Tonight



Low: 63 °F

Slight Chance
Showers then
Slight Chance
T-storms

Saturday



High: 81 °F

Gradual
Clearing

Saturday Night



Low: 56 °F

Mostly Clear

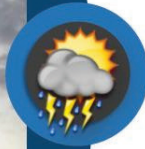
Sunday



High: 79 °F

Sunny

What's Ahead



TODAY

Mostly cloudy. 20-40% chance
of showers and storms.
Southeast wind 15-25 mph

Highs: 74-82°



SATURDAY

Partly-mostly cloudy. 20-30%
chance of morning showers.
West-Northwest wind 15-25 mph

Highs: 76-82°



SUNDAY

Partly cloudy. 20-30% chance
showers and storms across central
SD late.

Highs: 73-81°



MONDAY

Partly cloudy and warmer.

Highs: 77-87°



NWS Aberdeen, SD
Fri Aug 14, 2026 3:29 AM

The outlook for the next few days calls for on again/off again showers and a few thunderstorms, none of which are expected to be severe. A breeze from the southeast turns gusty at times this afternoon before switching around to the west to northwest on Saturday. Temperatures will remain slightly below normal the next couple days before returning closer to average early next week.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 17 of 69

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 81 °F at 5:41 PM

Low Temp: 65 °F at 4:51 AM

Wind: 15 mph at 12:14 AM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 104 in 1952

Record Low: 38 in 1968

Average High: 83

Average Low: 57

Average Precip in Aug.: 1.01

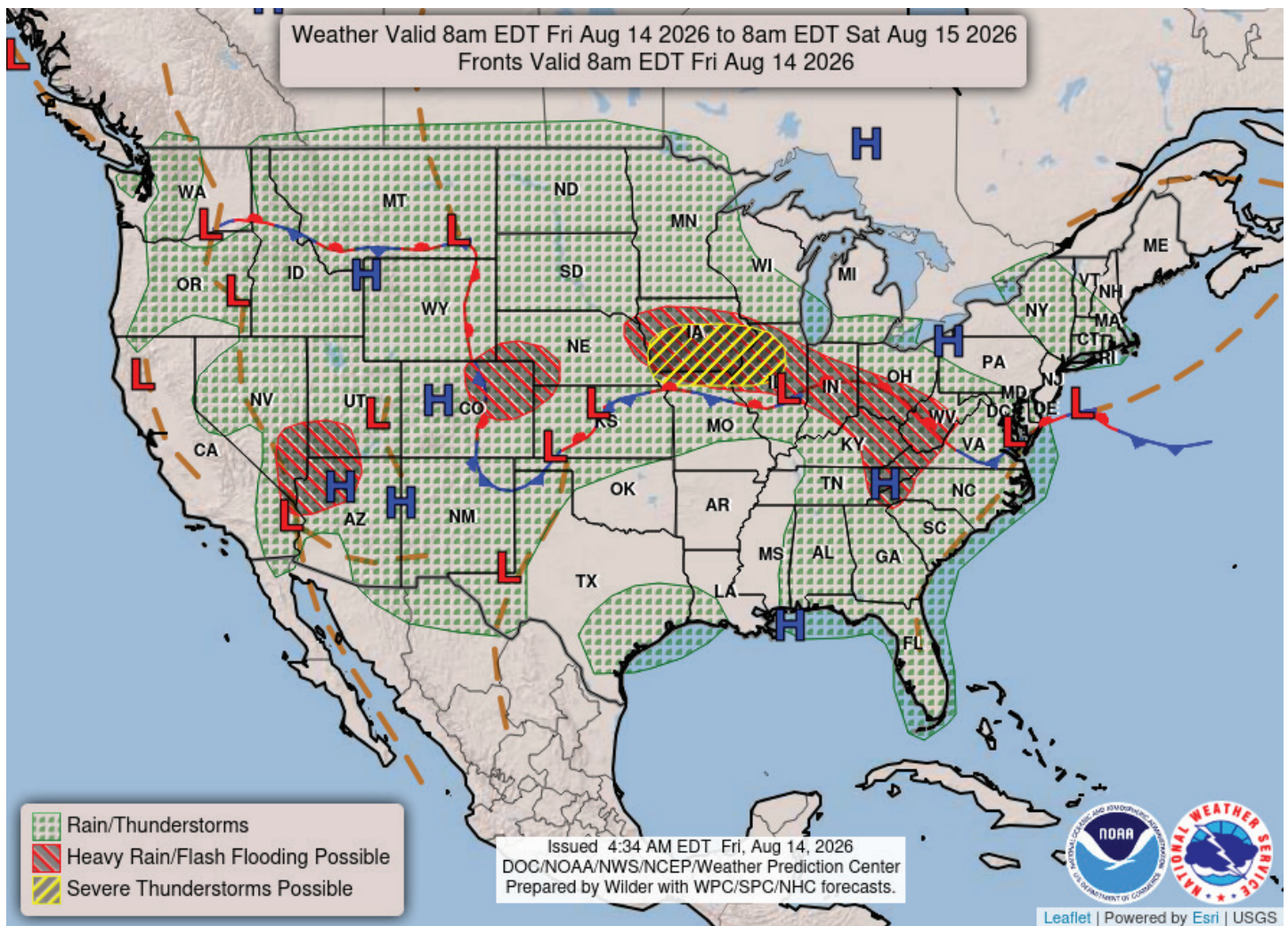
Precip to date in Aug.: 10.14

Average Precip to date: 15.11

Precip Year to Date: 19.61

Sunset Tonight: 8:42 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:33 am



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 18 of 69

Today in Weather History

August 14, 1898: A deadly, estimated F4 tornado moved southeast from 12 miles northwest of Clear Lake, passing 7 miles north of town and ending about 4 miles west of Gary. Deaths occurred on two farms. One man was killed when the kitchen of his farm house was torn off. Five members of one family were killed along with two labors on another farm as every building was swept away. Buildings suffered massive damage on eight farms. This tornado was one of the earliest, estimated F4 tornadoes on record for South Dakota.

August 14, 2008: Several severe thunderstorms developed along a cold front across parts of central and northeast South Dakota. Large hail, some flash flooding, and a couple of weak tornadoes occurred with these storms. An EF0 tornado touched down briefly at the Brown County Fairgrounds, blowing over several tents and awnings. Another EF0 tornado touched down briefly in an open field causing no damage north of Stephan in Hyde County.

August 14, 2009: A warm front brought severe thunderstorms with large hail up to the size of golf balls along with sixty mph winds to parts of north central and northeast South Dakota. Also, very heavy rain fell across western Brown County with 2 to 4 inches of rain reported. This heavy rain brought flash flooding conditions. Numerous county roads and area fields were overrun with flowing water. The water level on Richmond Lake rose nearly a foot the next day after the event from high inflows. This rapid rise in the lake level resulted in numerous boat and fishing docks being submerged. Several boats were also trapped under lift canopies due to the high water. There were reports of several boats breaking free of their mooring and floating toward the spillway.

1898 — A deadly, estimated F4 tornado moved southeast from 12 miles northwest of Clear Lake, South Dakota, passing 7 miles north of town and ending about 4 miles west of Gary. Deaths occurred on two farms. One man was killed when the kitchen of his farm house was torn off. Five members of one family were killed along with two labors on another farm as every building was swept away. Buildings suffered massive damage on eight farms. This tornado was one of the earliest, estimated F4 tornadoes on record for South Dakota.

1936 — Temperatures across much of eastern Kansas soared above 110 degrees. Kansas City MO hit an all-time record high of 113 degrees. It was one of sixteen consecutive days of 100 degree heat for Kansas City. During that summer there were a record 53 days of 100 degree heat, and during the three summer months Kansas City received just 1.12 inches of rain. (The Kansas City Weather Almanac)

1953: Hurricane Barbara hits North Carolina as a Category 2 hurricane. Damage from the storm was relatively minor, totaling around \$1.3 million (1953 USD). Most of it occurred in North Carolina and Virginia from crop damage. The hurricane left several injuries, some traffic accidents, as well as seven fatalities in the eastern United States; at least two were due to electrocution from downed power lines. Offshore Atlantic Canada, a small boat sunk, killing its crew of two.

1969: Hurricane Camille, a powerful, deadly, and destructive hurricane formed just west of the Cayman Islands on this day. It rapidly intensified, and by the time it reached western Cuba the next day, it was a Category 3 hurricane. Hurricane Camille was spawned on August 5th by a tropical wave off the coast of Africa. The storm became a tropical disturbance four days later on the 9th and a tropical storm on the 14th with a 999-millibar pressure center and 55 mph surface winds.

1975: In London, England, a localized torrential downpour known as The Hampstead Storm, drops 6.72 inches of rain in 155 minutes at Hampstead Heath. One died in the storm. The water floods the Underground and forces sewer covers up.

1987 — Slow moving thunderstorms deluged northern and western suburbs of Chicago IL with torrential rains. O'Hare Airport reported 9.35 inches in 18 hours, easily exceeding the previous 24 hour record of 6.24 inches. Flooding over a five day period resulted in 221 million dollars damage. It was Chicago's worst flash flood event, particularly for northern and western sections of the city. Kennedy Expressway became a footpath for thousands of travelers to O'Hare Airport as roads were closed. The heavy rains swelled the Des Plaines River above flood stage, and many persons had to be rescued from stalled vehicles on flooded roads. (13th- 14th) (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data) (The Weather Channel)



Overcoming Obstacles

Difficulty does not diminish God's power—instead, He displays His power through it.

Matthew 17:14-21: 14 When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying,

15 "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water.

16 "I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him."

17 And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me."

18 And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once.

19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?"

20 And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.

21 ["But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."]

Nothing is impossible for God. No obstacle confuses Him or poses any kind of challenge. Though we know He is sovereign over all, we have trouble maintaining this perspective, just like the disciples in today's passage. When difficulties arise, we all too often ...

Experience a shift in focus. During trials, we tend to take our eyes off the Lord and instead see only our problems. The longer we look at our circumstance, the larger it seems. As we dwell on it in thought and conversation, our mindset can become negative.

Develop an incorrect assessment of resources. In times of trouble, we start taking inventory of our own strength and abilities. The truth is that we don't have what is needed for life's trials—Jesus Himself told us that. (See John 16:33.) But God's capabilities are unlimited, His power is never-ending, and His wisdom is complete.

View obstacles as barriers. The Lord can demonstrate His awesome power through our difficulties. (See 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.) At such times, we grow in our faith and learn more about our Father. If we view hardships simply as troubles, then we can miss demonstrations of God's love, power, and wisdom.

May we start each day committed to a Christ-centered focus, be dependent on His resources, and trust that God is in control.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 20 of 69

The Groton Independent

Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.2% Sales Tax

- ☐ Black & White.....\$52.00/year
- ☐ Colored.....\$80.00/year
- ☐ Colored.....\$49.00/6 months
- ☐ E-Weekly*.....\$35.00/year

* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

E-mail _____

Phone Number _____

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to paperpaul@grotonsd.net

Groton Daily Independent

www.397news.com

Subscription Form

This option will grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

- ☐ 1 Month.....\$16.00
- ☐ 3 Months.....\$28.00
- ☐ 6 Months.....\$38.00
- ☐ 9 Months.....\$52.00
- ☐ 12 Months.....\$60.00

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

The following will be used for your log-in information.

E-mail _____

Password _____

Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

paypal.me/paperpaul

Pay with Venmo: @paperpaul Phone Number to Confirm: 7460



WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.13.26

7 16 25 35 42 2

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 43 Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.11.26

1 20 30 46 68 17

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$90,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 28 Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.12.26

1 9 27 32 36 2

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,550,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 43 Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.12.26

1 5 6 27 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$28,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 58 Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.12.26

3 4 19 21 58 8

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 27 Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.12.26

4 26 66 67 69 9

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 27 Mins 44 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Hurricane warning is issued for the Big Island of Hawaii as Tropical Storm Lala approaches

HONOLULU (AP) — Tropical Storm Lala formed Thursday in the Pacific Ocean and is expected to become a hurricane while approaching the Big Island of Hawaii, where it could bring heavy rain and flooding this weekend, forecasters said.

The storm is forecast to bring rain to the Hawaiian Islands starting late Friday as well as high winds and dangerous surf, the National Hurricane Center said.

A hurricane warning is in effect for Hawaii County and a tropical storm watch is in place for Maui County including the islands of Maui, Lanai, Molokai and Kahoolawe, forecasters said.

Lala was about 455 miles (735 kilometers) east-southeast of Hilo, Hawaii, and about 670 miles (1,075 kilometers) east-southeast of Honolulu with maximum sustained winds of 60 mph (95 kph) while moving west-northwest, the Miami-based center said.

Lala is forecast to strengthen into a hurricane as it approaches the Big Island. It's expected to be near the island Saturday. A hurricane warning means hurricane conditions are expected, and it is typically issued 36 hours before potential tropical-storm-force winds.

The system could bring rainfall totals of 8 inches to a foot (up to about 30 centimeters) across Maui and the Big Island, with as much as 25 inches (nearly 64 centimeters) possible across the Big Island, forecasters said. That could produce life-threatening flooding and mudslides, the center said.

Also in the Pacific, Tropical Storm Hernan formed Thursday but wasn't threatening land and was weakening while moving south.

Hernan was about 1,505 miles (2,420 kilometers) west-southwest of the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula of Mexico with maximum sustained winds around 40 mph (65 kph), the center said.

In the Atlantic Ocean, former Tropical Storm Cristobal weakened and degenerated into a post-tropical remnant low on Thursday, the center said. It was about 500 miles (805 kilometers) west of the Azores and didn't threaten land.

2 UAE tankers attacked while transiting Strait of Hormuz, and other news from the Middle East

By The Associated Press undefined

The United Arab Emirates is blaming Iran for firing drones at two tankers operated by a state-owned oil company as they sailed through the Strait of Hormuz, saying Friday that the attacks were acts of piracy. The attacks caused no casualties but underlined the dangers faced by vessels seeking to move cargo through the critical waterway that leads from the Persian Gulf to the open oceans as Iran keeps a firm grip on the passage.

Here's a look at the latest developments in the Iran war and the wider Middle East. Full coverage can be found here.

2 oil tankers hit by drones as they transited Strait of Hormuz

Two tankers owned by Abu Dhabi's state-owned oil and gas company ADNOC were attacked Thursday evening while transiting the Strait of Hormuz, the company said. It added that the attack caused no injuries and that "the situation has been brought under control."

The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations Center said two vessels were reported to have suffered minor damage when attacked by drones while transiting the Strait of Hormuz. It did not identify them as the ADNOC ships but it appeared to be the same incident.

The UAE's Foreign Ministry blamed the attacks on Iran and said they were a "flagrant violation" of the United Nations' principles of freedom of navigation.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 23 of 69

"Targeting commercial shipping and using the Strait of Hormuz as a tool of economic coercion or black-mail represents acts of piracy by Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, and constitutes a direct threat to the stability of the region, its peoples, and global energy security," the Foreign Ministry said.

There was no immediate response from Iran.

Kushner will head to Middle East for talks on Gaza

President Donald Trump's son-in-law and negotiator Jared Kushner will travel to the Middle East next week to try to advance plans for an end to the conflict in Gaza after a deal recently announced by the Trump administration ran into Israeli opposition.

An official with the Board of Peace, the body Trump established to oversee the fragile ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war, said Kushner, board high representative Nickolay Mladenov, and executive board member and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair would arrive in Israel on Sunday.

The group will then travel to Cairo, where meetings of a Palestinian technocratic group set to assume control of Gaza under a U.S.-brokered ceasefire deal have been taking place for the past several months, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because planning for details of the trip has not yet been finalized,

The trip was reported earlier by Axios.

France and England battle multiple wildfires as record heat grips Europe

PARIS (AP) — Firefighters across France and in central England struggled against multiple fires Friday as a new wave of record-breaking heat baked a swath of Europe, their task further complicated by exceptionally parched landscapes.

With France experiencing its driest year ever, a new fire raced through woodlands overnight in the Landes region on the southwest coast. The blaze forced more than 500 people to evacuate their homes in the town of Luglon as hundreds of firefighters deployed to the area, the regional administration said Friday.

It's one of several fires scorching forests around France this week, including in normally cooler and wetter regions in the north and Brittany. A historic fire devoured forests near Bordeaux last month and pushed a quarter of a million people from their homes.

After the U.K. recorded its hottest day of the year, wildfires raced across the West Midlands and saw several houses burned to the ground. They have been "one of the most significant" incidents the region's fire service has ever dealt with, chief fire officer Simon Tuhill said.

Some 1,017 wildfires have been recorded in England and Wales this year, according to data from the National Fire Chiefs Council.

The fires came on the hottest day of the year, when temperatures reached 38.1 degrees Celsius (100.6 degrees Fahrenheit) in west London.

In France, temperatures Thursday approached 41 C (106 F) in several areas, from Aquitaine in the southwest to the Rhone River valley in the east, according to the national weather service. They were forecast to reach similar levels Friday before dropping over the weekend.

The historic temperatures are linked to human-caused climate change, and are hitting countries more designed for long cold seasons and ill-equipped for this sort of heat, with limited air conditioning.

In Croatia, seven people remained in life-threatening condition early Friday from a fire that raged overnight by the coastal town of Omis and forced more than 1,000 people to evacuate their homes.

The fire erupted late Thursday in an Omis suburb and quickly spread because of strong wind. Public broadcaster HRT said the blaze came close to the town's center, and parts of Omis were left without electricity while many cars were burned.

Croatian media published photos from a crowded sports hall in Omis where people crammed on beds and on the floor. Witnesses told HRT that people were jumping into the sea after boats also caught fire.

Firefighters put out the blaze by Friday morning as other crews in planes headed further south toward the Peljesac peninsula where another wildfire broke out overnight.

Altogether, 36 people from Omis sought medical care. Fourteen were hospitalized, including the seven with life-threatening injuries.

Meanwhile, in northern Greece, more than 300 vacationers and residents were evacuated by sea Thursday after a wildfire swept through a pine forest and threatened seaside homes, authorities said.

Israel's Christians rely on faith and allies as they fear rising harassment

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

MOUNT TABOR, Israel (AP) — Sister Mayela wears her black veil and habit as she walks to work near where another Catholic nun was violently attacked in Jerusalem's Old City — but she's now accompanied by a Jewish volunteer for protection.

Many Christians in Israel, who make up less than 2% of the country's population, are worried visible signs of their faith will draw harassment, which has increased as multiple conflicts grip the region.

"I'm scared after the sister was beat up," said Sister Mayela, a Mexican nun who's lived in Jerusalem on and off for more than two decades. "Before, one could live with more confidence. Some people spat, some said hi. Now we have to live trusting in God."

She finds resilience in her faith — and in support from Israelis like the volunteers. Even that, though, didn't prevent a teen from spitting right behind her as they passed a group of ultra-Orthodox Jews recently. The teen said she was only clearing her throat, but the volunteer reported it to police.

Incidents like that are among the challenges for Christians in Israel, particularly since the Hamas-led attack on Oct. 7, 2023, plunged the country back into war and polarization. But interfaith leaders and researchers are encouraged by better policing and prosecution as well as the recent appointment of a government envoy to the Christian world, who is Greek Orthodox.

In northern Israel, many Christians say they feel the state isn't doing enough to protect them from crime because they're not Jewish. But those concerns didn't stop groups of Catholics from joining a recent joyous pilgrimage on Mount Tabor, where the Gospels say Jesus appeared transfigured alongside the Jewish prophets Moses and Elijah.

"In a world where darkness is filling the hearts of people, we need to diffuse God's light to other people," said Sister Muna, the nun who led one youth group.

For many Christians and Jews, protecting coexistence in the Holy Land is a moral imperative after their own long histories of religious persecution.

"I don't want Christians to go out of their house in Jerusalem ... and have fear," said Yisca Harani, the Jewish Israeli educator and activist who escorted Sister Mayela. "I've gone through this 2,000 years in my Jewish history. I'm not going to let that happen."

Occasional flare-ups occur in multifaith Old City

In the Old City, Jewish men in black hats and tzitzit tassels, Muslim women in hijabs and Christian priests in flowing robes walk past each other daily in the maze of stone alleyways. Many are headed to pray at the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre or the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. These are some of the most sacred sites respectively for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and they are close to each other.

"If you stroll around in your habit, sooner or later you'll get some spitting next to you," said the Rev. Alberto Pari, who leads interfaith dialogue and Christian-Jewish relations as secretary to the Custody of the Holy Land, the Catholic order ministering to holy sites across the region. "But it's important not to generalize, because that unleashes antisemitism."

Religious Freedom Data Center, the organization that Harani founded to track harassment of Christians, has recorded a near-tripling of incidents in Jerusalem from four years ago to the last three months recorded — about one a day now — virtually all by Jewish religious nationalists.

A Jewish man from a settlement in the occupied West Bank was indicted in the violent attack on the nun in April. The French Biblical and Archeological School of Jerusalem where the nun is a researcher expects "effective prosecution at the criminal and civil levels," said the school's director, Friar Olivier Poquillon.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 25 of 69

Israel's government tackles anti-Christian incidents

Among those reaching out to Catholic leaders to denounce the attack and offer support was Ambassador George Deek, Israel's new envoy tasked with building what he calls the "special relationship" between Christians and the country, to both keep Christians safe and partner on issues like fighting antisemitism.

"We believe that every incident against Christians is immoral, illegal and should be prosecuted. That's exactly what we are going to do," Deek told The Associated Press. "We want to make sure that Israel continues to prosper and grow as a place where Christians can not only survive, but they can thrive."

Around the time that the nun was attacked, two other incidents drew global condemnation. An Israeli soldier smashed a crucifix in a family garden and another stuck a cigarette in the mouth of a statue of the Virgin Mary in southern Lebanon, where the military is fighting Hezbollah militants. The soldiers involved received military prison sentences.

Most Israelis find harassment unacceptable. But Jewish religious nationalists, particularly uneducated young men, remain a threat, said John Munayer of the Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue, an interreligious organization in Jerusalem.

Their hostility to Christians is grounded in the history of persecution of Jews in Christian-majority European countries, in faith practices they see as idol-worshipping, and in a "general intolerance" for anyone who's not Jewish near sacred areas like the Western Wall, Munayer said.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict spills over in Christian-Jewish tensions

Then there's the overhanging trauma of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, since most local Christians in Israel and the occupied West Bank are Palestinian.

In Taybeh, the last entirely Christian village in the West Bank, Jewish settlers recently cut through house fences and destroyed fruit and vegetable gardens, said the Rev. Bashar Fawadleh, parish priest of Christ the Redeemer Catholic Church.

"All the people here are afraid," he said. "Settlers come and go every day."

Israel's army declared the village a closed military zone earlier this week to curb the attacks. But concerns about Israel's ability and willingness to rein in the settlers remain even among evangelicals, who are among the staunchest Christian supporters of Israel.

"What happens in Taybeh is really troubling," said David Parsons, spokesperson for International Christian Embassy Jerusalem. "Israeli leaders have realized for some time that Christian support for their nation is not only vital, it's a strategic interest."

And yet since the Oct. 7, 2023, attack, "generalized fear and skepticism" pervaded all interreligious work, Pari said. The interfaith music institute he directs, Magnificat, was invited to play at a peace march in Jerusalem. But when the Palestinian members saw that the stage had been set up by an Old City gate flanked by Israeli flags, they refused to play.

"I felt a real failure," Pari said. "We think that as Christians, we have a very important role to patch things back together. ... It will be difficult, but we can do it."

Israeli Christians hold tight to faith and identity

That faith-grounded resilience prevailed among the Mount Tabor pilgrims, who gathered on the mountain to celebrate the feast of the Transfiguration last week. Rising interfaith tensions and crime have driven many of the area's Christians to emigrate, several said.

"It's very difficult that we keep our identity as Christians in the Middle East, but it's the most important," said John Akleh, 20, who came with Sister Muna's group.

Ten pilgrims from nearby Nazareth — where Jesus grew up — started the climb at 4:15 a.m. led by the Rev. Fadi Shallufi in a yearly tradition they've maintained even in wartime.

"We will have a lot of sacrifice, but you will be sure in this land something will change," Shallufi told them as he celebrated Mass in the mountaintop basilica.

Reform UK leader Nigel Farage beats Count Binface in widely mocked British election

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Nigel Farage beat trash-can wearing comic candidate Count Binface to regain the seat in Parliament he quit a month ago to trigger the widely mocked special election.

Farage, leader of the anti-immigration Reform UK party who some see as a possible next prime minister, abruptly quit his seat in July amid an investigation into whether he failed to report a 5 million pound (\$6.7 million) gift from a crypto billionaire overseas.

He said he would run for the open seat to prove he had voters' support, and regained it with 63% of Thursday's vote. Binface, who finished in second, won about 27%, according to the results announced Friday. The election, held on the hottest day of the year so far, had turnout of 44%.

Binface, a serial candidate who has challenged prime ministers past and present, became the default challenger in a field of 34 candidates after the major parties boycotted the campaign as a political stunt by Farage.

Farage hailed the result as an "overwhelming win" with 1,000 more votes than he earned when first elected two years ago with 46% of the vote share. Turnout during the 2024 general election was nearly 60% and he faced a more robust field of mainstream candidates.

"Today the voters in Clacton have stuck up two fingers to the entire political establishment," Farage said, referring to the British equivalent of a crude gesture that employs the middle finger in other cultures.

The victory by Farage showed his strong support in his conservative constituency on the east coast of England but it doesn't ensure he'll be able to keep the seat. An investigation by a parliamentary watchdog that was suspended when he stepped down is likely to resume and could still lead to Farage being forced out of Parliament to face yet another election.

Farage is a no-show at vote count

Farage declared victory in the early morning and did not attend the official declaration where he would have had to stand alongside the other candidates, many of them running joke campaigns.

"I'm damned if I'm going to stand on a stage, having won a resounding victory ... and be demeaned and humiliated by nobodies," Farage told supporters at a victory party.

Farage said he didn't attend because police told him about an "organized campaign to disrupt and degrade the result." A spokesperson for Reform said there was a credible threat against him, though police disputed that.

Binface, who ran on a wacky platform that included a vow to "cut your taxes, and raise everyone else's," build one affordable home and nationalize singer Adele, celebrated his best-ever result. It was a massive increase from the votes he received in a special election two months ago against now-Prime Minister Andy Burnham, in which he won 95 votes.

"So against Nigel Farage compared to Andy Burnham, I am 1,000 times more popular," he quipped. "Does that have anything to do with why he isn't here tonight?"

Farage still faces investigation over undeclared donation

Labour Party chairwoman Bridget Phillipson said the election was no victory for Farage and he needs to come clean over his finances and relationship with a convicted fraudster.

"The mountain of sleaze and scandal he and Reform are now engulfed in has grown and grown while he's been trying to distract the public by fighting a by-election against a bin," Phillipson said. "Farage's distraction by-election doesn't clear his name — it just shows he likely has so much more to hide."

Parliament's standards watchdog is investigating an undeclared donation to Farage in 2024 from Christopher Harborne, a Thailand-based cryptocurrency billionaire. Farage says he didn't need to declare the money because it was a personal gift he used to fund his security and was made before he was elected.

However, newly elected lawmakers must declare gifts worth more than 300 pounds (\$400) received in the previous year if they are related to political activities.

When he resigned on July 7, he described the scrutiny as an "establishment hit job" and a media-driven

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 27 of 69

"witch-hunt."

Farage also faces an investigation into his financial relationship with George Cottrell, an aristocratic crypto-gambling entrepreneur who served eight months in a U.S. prison for fraud a decade ago after offering to launder money for undercover agents posing as drug traffickers.

Cottrell, 32, remains close to Farage and has reportedly given him money for security and staff.

Farage, who was a major player in getting Britain to vote to leave the European Union a decade ago, has had strong polling nationally though his numbers have slipped during months of scrutiny of his finances.

Binface led a pack of comedy candidates

Farage's gambit to resign and run again backfired when other parties refused to participate and he was left facing a massive field of independent and small-party candidates, including novelty acts such as Howling Laud Hope of The Official Monster Raving Loony Party and Marcus White from the Everyone is God Party.

Binface, who was already a running joke in British elections, drew the most attention because of his satirical spin on politics and persona as a space alien from the planet Sigma IX.

By winning at least 5% of the vote, he's earned a refund of the deposit of 500 pounds (\$675) candidates pay to run.

Under the black cape, trash can helmet and ample body armor straight out of a low-budget sci-fi film, Binface's alter-ego is Jon Harvey, a middle-aged comedian who has spent much of the campaign trying to keep his cool during a sweltering summer.

He said his repeated candidacies were aimed at promoting the beauty of Britain's centuries-old democracy where even the most high-profile politicians are above no one — including someone from outer space.

Trump set to highlight violent crime reduction during a visit to New York police academy

By COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump plans to highlight his record on crime and safety during a visit to New York on Friday, pivoting to one of his strongest issues as he looks to boost Republicans in battleground races ahead of the November midterms.

Trump is visiting the Nassau County Police Academy in suburban Long Island, where the White House said he will release new FBI crime statistics showing a decrease in violent crime for 2025.

"President Trump promised to make America safe again and the data proves he has done just that," White House spokesperson Lauren Bis said. "Unlike Defund-the-Police Democrats, President Trump will always stand with our law enforcement officers and deliver safer American neighborhoods."

Trump's visit is aimed at boosting Republican candidates in closely contested races across his home state, but just how much his presence will help is in question as he faces lagging approval ratings and a deeply unpopular war in Iran with no end in sight.

Trump narrowly won Nassau County in 2024, flipping it for Republicans for the first time in more than two decades. It's home to two Democratic House seats that Republicans now see as winnable this fall, and it's home turf for Nassau County executive Bruce Blakeman, the Trump-endorsed Republican challenging Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul.

Trump will be joined by Attorney General Todd Blanche and FBI Director Kash Patel in Nassau County, which has one of the largest police forces in the nation.

Crime becoming a theme in New York races

It's the second time this year Trump has visited New York in support of Blakeman and other Republicans. He stopped by the Hudson Valley area in May for a speech in which he said Blakeman would curb "out of control" crime.

Crime has emerged as a significant issue in the governor's race, with both candidates claiming to have the better track record of making New Yorkers safe. Hochul visited a different Long Island police department in July to announce a statewide investment in policing technology.

A statement from Blakeman said he's grateful Trump is visiting "to tour our outstanding, state-of-the-art

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 28 of 69

law enforcement facilities” and pay tribute to law enforcement workers.

In a Fox Business interview Thursday, Blakeman played down concerns that Trump’s visit would be unpopular with voters in New York City.

“When the most powerful person in the world comes to visit you and shows that you have a relationship together, I think that’s a very good thing,” Blakeman said, adding that even voters who disagree with Trump might appreciate a governor with a direct line to the president.

Hochul campaign spokesperson Ryan Radulovacki said the governor “has invested billions in public safety to protect New Yorkers — ‘MAGA all the way’ Bruce Blakeman is bringing Donald Trump to tour the county where he let violent crime spike to decade highs and Trump’s unaccountable ICE agents abuse their power.”

For GOP, safety is seen as a winning issue

Matt Gorman, a Republican strategist, said Trump’s visit stands to boost Blakeman along with Republican challengers looking to unseat a pair of Democratic incumbents in Nassau County districts. Michael LiPetri Jr. is challenging Rep. Tom Suozzi in New York’s 3rd Congressional District, while Jeanine Driscoll is opposing Rep. Lauren Gillen in the 4th Congressional District.

The focus on crime is seen as a cornerstone issue for Republicans that appeals to Trump’s base along with suburban swing voters, Gorman said.

“On the strategic level, crime is an issue that Republicans feel comfortable going on offense with, where the country kind of broadly agrees with them,” he said.

Trump is touting the issue as he faces low approval ratings on a number of other issues, including the economy and the Iran war. An AP-NORC poll from August 2025 found that Trump’s handling of crime was among his strongest issues, though his approval on the issue had fallen by 10 points by December 2025.

Trump lashes out over report finding he hasn’t reduced crime

While many of Trump’s recent swing-state speeches have focused on his tax breaks and economic policies, Trump often mentions his effort to curb crime by deploying the National Guard in Washington, New Orleans and other Democrat-led cities.

This week, Trump lashed out at the Center for American Progress and threatened to sue the liberal think tank over a report finding that the National Guard deployments failed to reduce crime. Without giving evidence, Trump said in a social media post that “crime is way down since I took Office, and they know it.”

For Trump, talking about crime reduction during his trip to New York offers a chance to reach voters across political and class divisions, said Jesse Hunt, a Republican strategist.

“The issue of crime and safety is a massive winner for Republicans,” Hunt said. “What we’ve seen from the Trump administration and Republicans in general is a real focus on that issue. And they should highlight the successes.”

The White House said the new FBI statistics will show year-over-year decreases in murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault. Crime experts often caution against drawing too much from single-year changes and encourage a focus on long-term patterns.

Luigi Mangione set to appear in court for expected guilty plea in killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, LARRY NEUMEISTER and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Luigi Mangione is scheduled to be in federal court Friday for a hearing at which he’s expected to plead guilty in connection with the 2024 killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Mangione could still change his mind about the plea, said the person, who was not authorized to talk publicly about the case and spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity. Previous plea talks in June broke down.

Lawyers for Mangione and the Justice Department declined comment prior to the late-morning court hearing, which was hastily requested by prosecutors and defense lawyers earlier this week.

Mangione, 28, was charged by both federal and state prosecutors with ambushing Thompson, 50, out-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 29 of 69

side a New York City hotel on Dec. 4, 2024, as the insurance executive walked to UnitedHealth Group's annual investor conference.

A trial on state murder charges is scheduled to start next month. It is unclear whether that trial would go forward if Mangione pleaded guilty in the federal case.

Mangione faces two federal charges that he stalked Thompson to cause his death. Both the federal and state cases could lead to a life prison sentence. A federal judge earlier this year tossed out additional charges that could have exposed Mangione to a potential death penalty.

Mangione had complained about the prospect of two trials, telling a judge in February: "It's the same trial twice. One plus one is two. Double jeopardy by any commonsense definition."

Under New York law, a state prosecution could potentially be barred if the federal case is resolved first. The state's double jeopardy protections kick in if a jury has been sworn in a prior prosecution, such as a federal case, or if that prosecution ends in a guilty plea. Mangione's cases involve different charges arising from the same course of conduct.

In a letter last month, state prosecutors objected to the possibility of a guilty plea in the federal case wiping out the state case.

U.S. District Judge Margaret M. Garnett has delivered some setbacks to the defense, including ruling in January that prosecutors could use items collected from Mangione's backpack during his arrest as evidence against him.

They included a 3D-printed pistol that investigators said matched the one used to kill Thompson and a notebook in which authorities say Mangione described his intent to kill an insurance executive.

In June, Mangione's lawyers said they would pursue a psychiatric defense in the state case but reversed course a day later. The defense, involving claims that he was suffering from extreme emotional disturbance at the time of the killing, isn't allowed in federal court.

Surveillance video of the killing showed a masked gunman shooting Thompson from behind. Police say "delay," "deny" and "depose" were written on the ammunition, mimicking a phrase used to describe how insurers avoid paying claims.

Mangione, a University of Pennsylvania graduate from a wealthy Maryland family, was arrested five days later at a McDonald's in Altoona, Pennsylvania, about 230 miles (370 kilometers) west of Manhattan.

He has become a cause célèbre for some people upset with the health insurance industry.

Crew of Yemeni vessel recount their chaotic rescue after Houthis' deadly attack

By ABDULNASSER ALSEDDIK and TOQA EZZIDIN Associated Press

MOKHA, Yemen (AP) — Crew members of a Yemeni commercial ship who survived a deadly attack by Houthi rebels earlier this week said a second missile struck the vessel just as rescue efforts from the initial strike were underway, causing even more chaos and casualties.

In all, three ballistic missiles fired by the Iran-backed Houthis struck the ship in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, just off Yemen's coast, as it was coming into port, killing six people and injuring at least nine others, according to Yemeni authorities.

It was part of an escalating campaign by the Houthis and their first deadly attack this year on a vessel navigating the strait, which connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and accounts for roughly 12% of global trade.

"People were burning ... it was a strange scene of doomsday," said Zaheer Ahmed, a Pakistani crew member recovering at a hospital in the port city of Mokha.

"I shouted for help and a Yemeni soldier came to my aid," said Ahmed, who was injured in both legs.

All three of the crew members The Associated Press interviewed Wednesday at the hospital described intense fire, panic and damage aboard the ship, which was struck before dawn on Tuesday.

Muhammad Alteno, an Indonesian crew member, said he was in "complete shock" after witnessing another Indonesian crew member — a friend — die in the attack. Alteno said he had tried to rescue his

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 30 of 69

friend, who was trapped inside the room they shared, after the first missile strike.

"But the flames were so intense that I couldn't breathe," Altano said. "I managed to escape with some of the (other) crew members."

Two members of Yemen's government-allied National Resistance Forces were killed in the attack, as were three crew members from Pakistan.

The attack was one of many in recent weeks by the Houthis, who have killed government forces and civilians in an escalating campaign on the government-held city of Mokha and other areas, according to the Yemeni military. The rebel group has also intensified its attacks on troops and oil facilities in neighboring Saudi Arabia, which supports the Yemeni government.

The attacks risk reigniting Yemen's civil war following a 2022 U.N.-brokered truce, and could open a new front in the Middle East war.

The Houthis declared a blockade several weeks ago on Saudi-linked ships leaving the Bab al-Mandeb strait in retaliation for a yearslong Saudi siege on Yemen and recent attacks on the Houthi-controlled capital, Sanaa. The Houthis had said they would only stop vessels connected to Saudi Arabia or going in and out of its Red Sea ports.

During a similar blockade it announced during the war in Gaza, the Houthis attacked over 100 vessels before a punishing U.S. and Israeli air campaign put an end to the attacks in early 2025.

UK firefighters out in force to tackle fires on hottest day of the year

By PAN PYLAS and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Firefighters were tackling multiple fires in central England on Thursday after the U.K. recorded its hottest day of the year as an intense stretch of hot weather continued to grip Europe.

The wildfires across the West Midlands, which saw several houses burned to the ground, have been "one of the most significant" incidents the region's fire service has ever dealt with, chief fire officer Simon Tuhill said.

A child and three firefighters were taken to the hospital following the wildfire in Stourbridge.

West Midlands mayor Richard Parker described the "multiple fires across our region" as an "extremely worrying and fast-moving situation."

British Prime Minister Andy Burnham has been kept abreast of the situation and has, according to Parker, pledged to support fire and rescue services in the West Midlands with any additional resources they need.

The fires, the cause of which has yet to be determined and which could take days to put out, came on the hottest day of the year, when the mercury struck 38.1 degrees Celsius (100.6 degrees Fahrenheit) in west London, a tenth of a degree higher than the previous high set on June 28.

Britain is experiencing its fifth heat wave of the year, with the first recorded in May. The latest extreme heat means 2026 has now had a record four days with temperatures of 36 C (96.8 F) or higher. It also has matched 2022 with two days reaching 38 C.

These are historic temperatures as a result of human-caused climate change.

Nearby France has also endured its fifth heat wave this year and, if anything, the situation is worse. Temperatures in France approached 41 C (106 F) in several areas, from Aquitaine in the southwest to the Rhone River valley in the east, according to the national weather service.

Britain and France ill-equipped for this sort of heat

This summer has shown that both Britain and France are ill-equipped to deal with these levels of heat. Air conditioning is a rarity outside of shops and offices, for example.

In Britain, nurses have collapsed from heat exhaustion while working in hospitals, many housed in aging buildings that lack adequate cooling, the Royal College of Nursing said Thursday.

"When nursing staff are collapsing, feeling dizzy, sick or even being admitted to the very hospitals they work in because their workplaces cannot handle the heat, it shows just how badly they are being failed,"

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 31 of 69

said Nicola Ranger, the college's chief executive and general secretary.

Wildfire fears remain a clear and present danger

With the land parched and no sign of any meaningful rain coming, authorities across Europe remain on high alert for wildfires.

French firefighters were back in action after a desperate summer and are threatening to go on strike to demand more staff and resources to cope with increasingly extreme weather events.

One broke out late Wednesday in the northern Pas-de-Calais region, and another in Brittany, far from the hotter, drier and more fire-prone regions in southern France. A historic fire devoured forests near Bordeaux last month and pushed a quarter of a million people from their homes.

In northern Greece, more than 300 vacationers and residents were evacuated by sea Thursday after a wildfire swept through a pine forest and threatened seaside homes, authorities said.

The Fire Service said nine water-dropping planes and seven helicopters were assisting 250 firefighters around the Siviri resort on the popular Halkidiki peninsula. There were no initial reports of injuries or serious property damage.

In Britain, which is increasingly looking sandy brown rather than its traditional luscious green, firefighters have been out in force this week trying to contain a wildfire in the New Forest in southern England.

Some 1,017 wildfires have been recorded in England and Wales this year, according to data from the National Fire Chiefs Council, the same as last year's record-breaking total.

Though not on the same level as those witnessed in France, Greece and Spain, they provide ample evidence of the need for the U.K. to adjust to a new reality.

Unsurprisingly, drought conditions are spreading

Like many parts of Europe, Britain and France are facing widespread drought conditions that have shriveled crops and drained rivers, heaping pressure on water resources for households, agriculture and the environment, and forcing all parts of society to seek both short- and long-term measures to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Britain's Southern Water, which oversees supplies in the south of England, has applied for a rare drought order which would ban businesses from nonessential water use, including cleaning cars and filling nondoestic swimming pools, saying an "exceptional" lack of rain is threatening supplies. Environment Secretary Angela Eagle will decide on the application, which would be the first such ban since May 2006.

With temperatures soaring, many people headed to beaches and outdoor pools or found other ways to cool off. In Bordeaux in southwestern France, children and adults sought relief in the city's iconic "water mirror." Some frolicked in fountains, splashed their faces and filled up water bottles. Birds too quenched their thirst.

The most intense heat is forecast to move eastward away from Britain and France on Friday and then recede over the weekend.

A British firm starts containment of oil spill from stricken tanker off Oman

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A British company said Thursday it has been hired to salvage a grounded Russian shadow fleet tanker off Oman's coast and stop an oil spill that is threatening wildlife as it reaches the country's shoreline following its dramatic spread in recent weeks.

Satellite images have shown that oil from the tanker Caroline Bezengi has exponentially spread over hundreds of square kilometers during stormy weather, endangering a marine protected area. The region's "Khareef" monsoon season peaks in July and August.

Ambrey, a UK-based maritime risk and response company, said its personnel boarded the vessel with help from the Omani air force to assess its condition before stabilizing it.

The vessel has been grounded off Qabilyah Island in southwestern Oman following an explosion of unclear cause in early June. Its cargo previously has been estimated at more than 800,000 barrels.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 32 of 69

Satellite images also have shown that the tanker is increasingly submerged, and experts have warned of an unprecedented environmental disaster if the vessel sinks or breaks open and leaks its entire cargo.

"This is an extremely challenging situation, compounded by adverse weather conditions associated with the Khareef monsoon," Ambrey's global response director Ed Wollaston said in a statement. The company did not immediately have any estimates of how long the salvage operation would take or cost.

Oman's Environment Authority said Wednesday the oil spill has reached the shores of Ras Madrakah, more than 200 kilometers (more than 120 miles) north of Qabilayah Island. Authorities said they estimated the spill could reach more than 100 kilometers further north, to Masirah Island.

Hanen Keskes, a campaigner for the environmental group Greenpeace, said it is "extremely concerning" that the oil has spread from an offshore spill to the shoreline where it can contaminate coastal sediments.

"It can make the cleanup significantly more complex than containment at sea," she said. "Even after the slick has been contained and removed, the environmental impact can last for years."

The marine protected area of Qabilayah Island includes coral reefs, seagrass meadows and endangered turtles, and offers breeding sites for migratory birds. The area is also home to the rare Arabian Sea hump-back whale.

The remote area lacks infrastructure, making the salvage and containment more challenging and requiring more safety measures, Keskes said.

The 247-meter (899-foot) Caroline Bezengi is believed to be part of Russia's "shadow fleet" and has been sanctioned by the British government and the European Union for carrying cargoes of Russian oil.

It had left the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk, in Russia, in May, according to geospatial data tracking company SynMax Maritime. The vessel's owners are believed to be Shanghai-based. The vessel is unflagged, and it is not clear if it is insured.

It is only one of the environmental crises affecting the region. Off the coast of Iran in the Strait of Hormuz, Iranian authorities are cleaning up an oil spill off of Qeshm Island that has been attributed to the conflict between Iran and the United States.

Images distributed by Iran's semi-official news agency ISNA show oil damage to the sandy beaches of Qeshm. It is not immediately clear what caused the spill.

Iran has said it should receive compensation for its efforts to contain the damage. But maritime tracking firm TankerTrackers.com posted satellite images on X saying it appears the spill was caused by an Iranian attack on a bulk container ship off of Oman. The spill drifted across the strait to Iran.

Israeli settlers' siege of Palestinian homes draws a sharp US rebuke

By SAM METZ and AREF TUFAHA Associated Press

QUSRA, West Bank (AP) — For five nights, Israeli settlers surrounded three Palestinian homes on the outskirts of a town in the occupied West Bank, preventing the families from leaving safely as their food and water supplies dwindled.

Qusai Abu Rida was holed up inside with his teenage son when settlers cut the water and electricity, leaving them to drink well water as dozens of Israeli settlers erected tents outside. His Palestinian American brother in Ohio, who owns the house, watched the siege unfold on security cameras and called for updates.

The standoff in the northern West Bank town of Qusra is the latest in a wave of settler violence convulsing the territory, which Israel seized in the 1967 Mideast war and which would make up the main part of a future Palestinian state.

On Thursday, U.S. Ambassador Mike Huckabee referred to the settlers as "terrorists" — a word American officials usually reserve for Palestinian militants. It was an unusually sharp rebuke from the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, who has given unprecedented support to Israeli settlement over the years.

Mounting criticism of Israel from the United States could pose a challenge for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is trying to maintain good relations with his country's closest ally as he mobilizes ultra-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 33 of 69

nationalist voters ahead of a tough battle for reelection in October.

Settlers have remained in the area despite the army intervening

On Sunday, dozens of settlers arrived at the homes in Qusra, blocking doors and preventing occupants from leaving, according to the families.

Israeli troops have intervened multiple times, but the settlers keep returning, said Loui Ridi, the homeowner in Ohio who spells the family name differently. Rights groups have long accused Israeli forces of turning a blind eye to settler violence or of intervening to protect the settlers.

"It's a cycle," Ridi said. "They need to be prevented from the entire area, not just removed and moved 100 feet away so when the (Israeli military) leaves, they come back."

On Tuesday, Israel's military condemned the siege as "illegal, reprehensible, and unacceptable," and declared Qusra a closed military zone. The next day, dozens of settlers returned, tried to block the road with rocks and clashed with Israeli soldiers, according to video shot by village residents.

On Thursday, the military said troops dismantled "two illegal outposts" in Qusra and a nearby village, and detained one Israeli. It said more soldiers were sent to "carry out defensive missions and patrols."

Qusra Mayor Abdel Azim Wadi said that Israeli forces evacuated more than a dozen homes to take up positions in the village. The settlers, though removed from their outposts, remain in other parts of the village, he added.

Abu Rida said soldiers gave the occupants of all the homes 30 minutes to evacuate and move into one of the besieged houses. The military said the soldiers have been told to allow families to remain in their homes and not to operate in them, but families have not yet returned, Abu Rida said.

It's still not clear when families in the besieged area will be able to get basic supplies and what would happen to their homes. Israel's military said the families had basic supplies like food and water when it checked in on them on Wednesday.

But Ridi said Thursday that after water and electricity lines had been reconnected, settlers cut them again.

Settler violence has surged in recent years

Netanyahu's government, the most ultranationalist and religious in Israel's history, has presided over a surge of settlement construction in the West Bank. It views the West Bank as the biblical and historical homeland of the Jewish people and is opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state.

On Thursday, members of Netanyahu's Cabinet joined in celebrating the rebuilding of a settlement elsewhere in the West Bank that had been dismantled in 2005. "The era of withdrawals and expulsions has ended. The era of construction and Zionism begins," Defense Minister Israel Katz said at the ceremony.

During Trump's first term, he signaled broad acceptance of the settlements, which most of the international community views as illegal and an obstacle to peace. At the start of his second term, he lifted sanctions imposed by the Biden administration on settlers accused of violence.

Huckabee, a longtime supporter of the settlements, has condemned the rising violence.

"Actions by those who carried out this horrific act of terror meant to intimidate and harass this family are disgusting," Huckabee said in his post about the events in Qusra. He said the embassy has been coordinating with the Israeli military and police.

Qusra has been a focus of settler attacks

The U.N. humanitarian office in April said it had recorded more settler attacks in Qusra than in any other West Bank community in 2026. A 25-year-old resident was shot and killed by an off-duty Israeli reservist in March, and eight others have been wounded in the attacks, according to the U.N.

Violence between settlers and Palestinians last month left two Israelis and four Palestinians dead in a nearby northern West Bank village. In the aftermath, a mosque in Qusra was set on fire and the word "revenge" was graffitied on its wall in Hebrew.

A total of 87 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli settlers and soldiers this year, according to the Palestinian Authority's Health Ministry. Israel says some were involved in terrorism, which it defines broadly to include militant attacks and rock-throwing. Palestinian authorities do not distinguish between militants and civilians when recording deaths in the conflict.

Palestinian officials have reported 1,476 attacks by Israeli settlers in 2026, including several instances in

which settlers seized Palestinian homes and property.

The military says it works to maintain law and order in the territory, and Israeli Cabinet ministers have blamed the attacks on a small group of young extremists acting outside the law.

Some 2.8 million Palestinians live under Israeli military rule in the West Bank, with the Palestinian Authority exercising limited autonomy in population centers. The settlers, who now number over 560,000, are Israeli citizens. There have been no Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in over a decade.

"This is not a life that can continue this way," said Wadi, the mayor of Qusra. "Too much pressure eventually causes an explosion."

Taiwan briefly slows its mobile internet to text-only speed as part of defense drill

By JOHNSON LAI and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — For 30 minutes, the internet in parts of Taiwan crawled.

The slowdown Thursday for people in the capital, Taipei, and six other cities and localities was part of the last phase of the island's annual Han Kuang exercises, military drills that began last week and aim to model a response to a possible Chinese military invasion.

Telecommunication operators slowed mobile web traffic to 256 Kbps, making it difficult to exchange anything other than texts. Usually, residents can access 5G in major cities.

Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te apologized to the public for the inconvenience, "We ask for your understanding and support, as this is a necessary drill," he said.

Taiwan has stepped up the intensity of the Han Kuang drills, incorporating reservists and more civilians into the exercises with a focus on real-world scenarios. Previously, urban resilience drills in Taipei went largely unnoticed as they were not disruptive. For example, air raid drills in the metro station didn't stem the flow of passengers.

This year, integrating civilians and coordinating with local governments was a key part of the exercises, according to the Taipei Times.

At a Taipei metro station Thursday afternoon, passengers waited to be released after the station's gates were shut for the simulation as part of air raid drills.

Allen Hsieh, a tourist from Hong Kong who was among the passengers who waited 30 minutes to be let out of the station, said he found the exercises to be convincing.

"The exercise did not cause me any inconvenience. I know that Taiwan needs to conduct exercises, given the current situation. I can understand that," he said. "I did not expect it to be so real. I thought I would only receive text messages."

Lai also visited a hospital as it simulated how to relocate its critical operations to underground facilities as part of the drills.

Taiwan is ramping up its defense exercises and purchases in response to heightened tensions with China, which claims the island as its own. China sends military planes, as well as Coast Guard ships and other vessels towards Taiwan on a daily basis and carries out large-scale military exercises from time to time.

Between Wednesday to Thursday morning, 18 Chinese warplanes and 11 navy ships operated around Taiwan, the island's Defense Ministry said.

Judge drops Nevada case against electors accused of forging certificate in 2020 election

By JESSICA HILL Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — The yearslong case against six Nevada Republicans who were accused of submitting a bogus certificate that falsely declared Donald Trump the winner of the state's 2020 presidential election has been dismissed, a judge ruled Thursday.

The dismissal marks the latest setback in swing states' efforts to prosecute fake electors who tried to

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 35 of 69

keep Trump in the White House after he lost to Joe Biden in 2020.

Three other fake elector cases in Arizona, Michigan and Georgia have been dismissed. Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes recently dismissed her office's criminal case but vowed to bring it back to a grand jury in hopes of securing another indictment. The dismissal was a legal maneuver aimed at getting around a deadline for starting new grand jury proceedings after Mayes lost an appeal earlier in June.

Nevada Attorney General Aaron Ford, who is also running for governor as a Democrat, brought charges relating to forgery and "offering a false instrument for filing or record" against the six Nevada Republicans, who pleaded not guilty.

His office plans to appeal the ruling.

The defendants included Michael McDonald, the chair of the Nevada Republican Party, and Jesse Law, the former chair of the Clark County Republican Party.

In a Thursday statement, McDonald's defense attorney Richard Wright called the attorney general's plans to appeal "hasty" and "premature" and said continuing the case was politically motivated.

After the 2020 election, the six Republican electors gathered outside of the Nevada Legislature to sign a certificate giving the state's six electoral votes to Trump, despite Biden winning the state by more than 30,000 votes. The ceremony was broadcast online, and the video footage was used as evidence in the case.

The case has revolved around the defendants' intent behind submitting the certificate.

Prosecutors argue the defendants intended for their documents to be mistaken for actual electoral votes that then-Vice President Mike Pence would count on Jan. 6, 2021.

The defendants say submitting the certificate was an act of "political theater" designed to publicize their concerns about the election. They were preserving their rights to challenge the official election results and had no intent to deceive a government agency into accepting the GOP certificate as real, their attorneys argued.

Nevada Judge Mary Kay Holthus agreed.

She found there was a lack of evidence that showed the electors intended to deceive government officials, and she determined that the state failed to disclose exculpatory evidence to the grand jury.

"The fact that Defendants openly announced both their actions and their asserted purpose, rather than concealing their conduct or attempting to secretly induce governmental reliance, weighs against a reasonable inference that they acted with fraudulent intent," Holthus wrote in her ruling.

Jurisdiction had also been an issue, but the case eventually landed in Clark County, which is home to Las Vegas and leans Democratic.

The case was originally scheduled for a trial in Nevada's capital of Carson City, but the attorney general's office voluntarily dismissed the case to pursue it instead in Southern Nevada, which leans more Democratic.

Courts have dismissed similar cases in Michigan and Georgia, and a special prosecutor dropped a federal case in late 2024 that charged Trump with conspiring to overturn the 2020 election. Those cases ended after Trump defeated Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris in 2024. A fake electors case is ongoing in Wisconsin.

Documents show federal surveillance operation in Minnesota targeted progressive groups, unions

By TIM SULLIVAN and JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Federal agents launched a sweeping undercover surveillance operation earlier this year targeting progressive organizations, labor unions and other groups protesting the immigration crackdown then raging through Minneapolis, according to court documents filed Thursday.

The program, dubbed Operation Puppet Master, was aimed at what officials called a network of conspirators helping "violent opportunists and agitators." The documents were filed in a case involving 15 people charged by federal prosecutors in June with impeding the crackdown, accusing them of conspiring against the federal government through a range of actions, from throwing ice chunks to setting up blockades.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 36 of 69

The government documents were released Thursday in connection with a motion from a defense lawyer in the case, Kevin Riach, who requested that officials disclose more material collected during the investigations.

The reality, according to government documents revealed in court motions, was Department of Homeland Security officers infiltrating meetings in churches, schools and parks that were often simply discussions of constitutionally protected protests.

A statement from the department said Homeland Security Investigations doesn't comment on the existence or status of on-going investigations or investigative methods. The statement referred questions to the U.S. attorney's office in Minnesota, which didn't immediately respond to an after-hours email from The Associated Press.

Puppet Master, and a later operation called Project Whipple Shield, were a "broad and irrational investigation" driven by politics and not criminal conduct, Riach said in a motion filed Thursday.

Take, for example, a Jan. 31 meeting in a Minneapolis library, when a Homeland Security report says an undercover officer identified as "UCA 9833" listened as supporters of a progressive climate group, the Sunrise Movement, discussed sit-ins, de-escalation tactics and "having a police liaison and safety marshal present during events."

"During the Action meeting, it was made clear that the Sunrise Movement organization focused on 'peaceful' protests," the agent reported.

Dozens of pages of documents describe agents secretly infiltrating meetings, monitoring activist chat groups and using license plate numbers to compile names of people who attended gatherings.

A slide created by Homeland Security's investigative branch titled "The Conspiracy" shows 18 organizations, from a small Minneapolis bicycle repair collective to the AFL-CIO, the largest federation of labor groups in the U.S.

The government also obtained years of certain financial records for groups ranging from the Sunrise Movement to major unions, including the Service Employees International Union and the Communications Workers of America.

"You are requested not to disclose the existence of this summons for an indefinite period of time," warned a DHS request to FedWire, a money transfer system operated by the U.S. Federal Reserve.

"It's very disturbing," said Ahilan Arulanantham, a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law. Over time, it could deter people from expressing their beliefs, he said.

Many people don't want to live in a world where expressing their beliefs gives federal agencies the right to investigate them, he said.

"It's that fear of that creeping police state," he said.

Groups that the government investigated were furious at the news.

"Our union has become the latest target of a corrupt administration that weaponizes the legal process against law-abiding Americans exercising our Constitutional rights," CWA President Claude Cummings Jr. said in a statement. "We will not be intimidated, and we will not be silenced."

The AP News Guild, the union that represents many Associated Press employees, is part of the CWA.

On Thursday, a coalition of Minneapolis-area civil society groups defended the protests and criticized the investigations.

The government is "lashing out desperately in hopes of intimidating people and organizations that have shown the power of communities acting together," said a statement distributed by Unidos MN, a local human rights group.

DHS deployed about 3,000 federal officers to the Minneapolis-St. Paul area for roughly three months starting late last year in what the department called its "largest immigration enforcement operation ever." It led to thousands of arrests, angry mass protests and the fatal shootings of two U.S. citizens.

Minnesota U.S. Attorney Daniel N. Rosen said the 15 were part of two groups that he characterized as "antifa," an umbrella term for a diffuse movement of militant left-wing activists.

Defense attorney Riach said at the time that his client, Isaac Sant, had no affiliation with antifa, which he called "a boogeyman invented by the far-right."

Alabama man put to death for the murder of a 5-year-old girl in last of three US executions in a day

By KIM CHANDLER, TRAVIS LOLLER and JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

Tennessee and Oklahoma put inmates to death within 30 minutes of each other Thursday and Alabama followed suit hours later as U.S. states executed three men by lethal injection in one day for the first time since 2010.

The Tennessee man was executed for killing a motel maid in 1985 and the Oklahoma man for killing his girlfriend in 2003. In Alabama, a man was put to death for killing a 5-year-old girl he had offered to pay her mother to abuse.

Having three executions in one day was a coincidence in scheduling, but reflected a trend of increased executions in the U.S. Eleven states executed a total of 47 people in 2025, the highest number since 2009. With Thursday's injections, 22 executions have been carried out this year in the U.S. with nearly a dozen more scheduled.

The last time three executions were carried out on the same day was on Jan. 7, 2010, when Louisiana, Ohio and Texas put inmates to death. Three executions were scheduled on the same day in 2018, but only one went forward after a Texas man was reprieved and Alabama prison officials had problems with the IV line.

Florida executed two men the same day in July and has executed 31 overall since the start of 2025.

Oklahoma prisoner said he regretted killing his girlfriend

Carlos Cuesta-Rodriguez, 70, received an injection at the state penitentiary in McAlester in Oklahoma's third execution this year.

Cuesta-Rodriguez turned his head toward two relatives watching and mouthed "I love you" but had no last statement. He was declared dead at 10:13 a.m. after several minutes of labored breathing.

Convicted of murdering his girlfriend at their Oklahoma City home in 2003, Cuesta-Rodriguez had said he regretted killing Olimpia Fisher and told a board he didn't want clemency. Fisher, 43, planned to leave Cuesta-Rodriguez when he shot her.

Fisher's daughters, Cinthya Allen and Katya Wallis, said in a statement they hoped the execution brings awareness to preventing domestic violence, adding they are "raising our families to reflect the love and faith in God that she taught us."

Tennessee man challenged execution after previous one was halted

Anthony Darrell Hines was executed in Tennessee for the 1985 stabbing death of Catherine Jean Jenkins, 54, as she worked as a motel maid in Kingston Springs.

Hines said "not right now, thank you" when asked if he had final words, then said, "Tell my son hello."

Hines' son witnessed the execution. He reconnected with his father four days earlier after not seeing him since he was 3 years old.

Minutes after the execution chamber curtain opened, Hines asked his spiritual adviser: "How long do I have?" Soon afterward, witnesses heard groans and heavy breathing while the adviser put her hands on his shoulders and prayed. Hines was pronounced dead at 10:43 a.m.

Afterward, Jenkins' son said his mother had only a plastic spray bottle to defend against Hines' knife.

"I hope he felt severe pain because what he did to my mother is nothing compared to what he may have just gone through," Dennis Jenkins said.

Hines' execution comes three months after another man's attempted lethal injection was stopped after medical staff couldn't establish a backup IV line for over an hour.

Hines, 66, appealed unsuccessfully, saying the doctor who oversaw the May execution was unqualified and likely to botch his execution as well.

Alabama man asked to be executed swiftly

Alabama executed Jeremy Williams for the 2021 rape and murder of the young Georgia girl.

"I want to thank God for forgiving me for my sins so I can meet him in peace," Williams said on the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 38 of 69

gurney. He rocked his head back and forth, smiled and appeared to sing or speak before becoming still. A member of his family cried quietly throughout, and Williams was pronounced dead at 6:16 p.m.

Williams, who pleaded guilty to killing Kamarie Holland, had written the Alabama attorney general's office seeking an immediate execution date so his victim's family "may have some type of closure."

The 42-year-old raped and strangled Holland after offering her mother \$2,500 for the child to perform a sex act, prosecutors said, adding he filmed his attack.

"The unspeakable nature of this crime is exactly why we have the death penalty statute," Gov. Kay Ivey said in a statement afterward.

The mother is serving a 20-year prison sentence after pleading guilty to sex trafficking.

Russell County District Attorney Richard Chancey described Kamarie's final moments as "horrific."

"That baby didn't die in peace," he said at a later news conference, recalling Williams' last words about dying in peace.

Russell County Sheriff Heath Taylor, who called the case the worst he'd investigated in 39 years of law enforcement, said he believed Williams sought swift execution over worries about how he would be treated in prison.

"He didn't want to look over his shoulder for 30 years, in my opinion," Taylor said.

It was Alabama's first execution this year. A nitrogen gas execution was blocked in June after a federal judge ruled the method unconstitutional.

Williams also was a suspect in the 2005 death of his infant daughter in Alaska, but charges weren't filed until 2022.

Corey Holland, Kamarie's father, had said she was an exuberant child who loved princesses and made people laugh.

"She loved playing dress-up, all her little Halloween costumes and her princess stuff I got her," he said.

Iran-backed Houthis clash with Yemeni forces and other Mideast developments

By The Associated Press undefined

Clashes between Iran-backed Houthi rebels and government forces in Yemen raged overnight and into Thursday, raising fears that the country's civil war could reignite and open another front in the Middle East.

Here's a look at the latest developments in the Iran war and the wider Middle East. Full coverage can be found [here](#).

Yemeni soldier killed in clashes with Houthis

At least one government soldier was killed and another critically wounded in clashes with the Houthis in the mountainous province of Taiz, Yemeni military officials told The Associated Press.

The fighting came as part of a spate of recent Houthi attacks on government-held areas across the country. Dozens of government troops have been killed since last week, the Yemeni military said.

The Houthis also said they launched another drone attack on an Aramco oil refinery in Saudi Arabia. Saudi officials did not immediately comment on the reported attack in the city of Jazan. Last weekend, the Houthis fired drones at the refinery, where the Saudi Energy Ministry reported a fire but no casualties.

Last month, the Houthis announced a blockade of Saudi shipping, threatening another key trade route in the region.

US carrier heads toward Middle East after issues reported on long-deployed USS Lincoln

The Pacific-based aircraft carrier USS George Washington has begun heading toward the Middle East as reports have emerged of mental health and supply issues aboard the long-deployed USS Abraham Lincoln.

The Lincoln has been supporting the U.S. war against Iran, and its deployment has included a record-setting uninterrupted time at sea of more than 260 days.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told reporters on Thursday that reports of trouble on the carrier were "completely misrepresented."

Speaking during a trip to Panama, he said the U.S. military could maintain the blockade of Iranian ports

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 39 of 69

indefinitely, "because we'll rotate ships in and out, as we have and we'll continue to."

The USS George Washington left port in Da Nang, Vietnam, last week, a Navy statement said. The carrier, along with a cruiser and a destroyer, have since been spotted crossing the Singapore Strait.

A Navy official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to detail sensitive ship details, confirmed that the Washington was in the Strait of Malacca, which links the Pacific and Indian oceans and puts the carrier on a course to head into the Indian Ocean. The Wall Street Journal reported earlier that the Washington would replace the Lincoln as one of the two aircraft carriers now stationed in the Middle East.

The move would leave the waters of the Pacific without a U.S. carrier presence for an unknown period of time.

— Konstantin Toropin in Washington

Peace laureate calls for UN pressure to resolve Yemen conflict

Hans Grundberg, the U.N. special envoy for Yemen, told the U.N. Security Council in a video briefing Thursday that Yemen is at greater risk of returning to large-scale conflict than at any time since a 2022 truce paused the fighting.

Yemen faces "catastrophe" from rising hunger and from health services crumbling amid the fighting, said U.N. humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher. He said 6 million people in Yemen face emergency levels of food insecurity bordering on famine, "the highest number globally."

Yemeni Nobel peace laureate Tawakkol Karman told reporters outside the chamber that Houthi rebels bear the primary responsibility for the "collapse of the state" in her home country.

But the human rights campaigner also blamed Iran for backing the Houthis, Saudi Arabia for its intervention on behalf of the government ousted by the Houthis, the United Arab Emirates for its involvement in the conflict and the international community for its failure to do enough to protect civilians.

Karman was invited to brief the U.N. Security Council as an independent civil society voice on Yemen, but was blocked from speaking because of "strong opposition," Danish Deputy Ambassador Sandra Jensen Landi said. Instead, Karman spoke to reporters outside the council chamber.

Iran and Oman working to clean oil spills off their coasts

Oil spills spreading off the coasts of Iran and Oman are raising concerns about environmental damage as oil shipments have come under fire in the Iran war.

Iran said Thursday it's working to clean up an oil spill off Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz. Images distributed by Iran's semiofficial news agency ISNA showed oil fouling the island's beaches.

While Iran hasn't said what caused the spill, the firm TankerTrackers.com says it appears to have started with an Iranian attack on a bulk carrier off Oman. Iran has repeatedly attacked shipping in the strait since the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28.

Oman is responding to another spill in the Arabian Sea, coming from a tanker grounded off its southern coast. The tanker Caroline Bezengi — a sanctioned vessel believed to be part of Russia's "shadow fleet" — has been grounded since reporting an explosion in June. No party has claimed responsibility and the cause is unknown.

A British maritime risk and response company said Thursday it has been hired to salvage the tanker and stop the oil leak off Oman. Oil from the ship has been spreading for weeks, reaching shores hundreds of kilometers (miles) north of the vessel.

JD Vance says Iran war will end with US in stronger position

Vice President JD Vance appeared to be lowering expectations for the Strait of Hormuz to return to the way it was before the war. He predicted in an interview on Fox News Channel that the war will end with the U.S. in a stronger position, with Iran not having a nuclear weapon, and with the Strait of Hormuz "returned to a place where oil and gas prices are stable for the American people."

He did not say anything about the strait being open and toll-free for transiting ships, as he had in the past.

Vance's comments also seemed to suggest that the administration was more acutely focused on the economic impact of the war than the original aims of the war itself.

"That's goal number one: keep oil and gas cheap for Americans all over our country," he said.

The second goal, according to Vance, is to ensure that Iran will never get a nuclear weapon.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 40 of 69

Kushner will head to Middle East for talks on Gaza

President Donald Trump's son-in-law and negotiator Jared Kushner will travel to the Middle East next week to try to advance plans for an end to the conflict in Gaza after a deal recently announced by the Trump administration ran into Israeli opposition.

An official with the Board of Peace, the body Trump established to oversee the fragile ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war, said Kushner, board high representative Nickolay Mladenov, and executive board member and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair would arrive in Israel on Sunday.

The group will then travel to Cairo, where meetings of a Palestinian technocratic group set to assume control of Gaza under a U.S.-brokered ceasefire deal have been taking place for the past several months, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because planning for details of the trip has not yet been finalized,

The trip was reported earlier by Axios.

Rescuers call for silence around earthquake rubble as window for survival narrows in Colombia

By ASTRID SUÁREZ, MARKO ÁLVAREZ and NAYARA BATSCHE Associated Press

CALI, Colombia (AP) — With arms raised and fists clenched, rescuers in Colombia called for silence Thursday as they listened for signs of life in the rubble of a deadly earthquake and raced to pull more survivors from the debris before time runs out.

The call for quiet was part of last-ditch efforts to find anyone else alive in the aftermath of the 7.4 magnitude quake that struck the South American country Monday, killing more than 280 people and leaving hundreds more missing.

"Unfortunately, we are reaching a point where the probability of finding survivors is dwindling," said David Santiago Tamayo, director of the National Unit for Disaster Risk Management, in a press conference Thursday night. "But the mission is to never stop searching and find all those reported missing."

Aid agencies consider the first two to three days after a quake to be the prime window for retrieving survivors. People trapped in debris can live longer if they have access to food and water.

The death toll rose Thursday to 281, authorities said, with another 348 people rescued.

As time runs out, rescuers, families and volunteers across the country continue to hold on to hope.

"There might be two more people alive here, and I'm hopeful," rescuer Daiana Rojas told The Associated Press. "We have been hearing sounds since 2:30 a.m., so our hope remains."

Rojas and her family were unharmed by the quake, the most powerful to hit Colombia in this century. She has been volunteering to help search for survivors in Cali, one of the most heavily damaged cities, along with Pereira, Manizales and Quibdó.

"I thought that was going to be my last moment alive," she said, recalling the terror of the quake. "Seeing this situation in my city breaks my heart."

Rojas has witnessed two people being pulled alive from the debris, as well as the recovery of bodies.

"They are not a relative or a friend of mine, but it feels as they were," she said of the survivors who have been found. "Whenever rescuers ask for silence, everyone stays still and tries not to move, speak or whisper. But when signs of life are found, all the teams start to applaud."

Critical hours

The devastation has tested Colombia's new President Abelardo de la Espriella and his government as they scramble to respond while aid groups seek to help the hardest-hit communities.

"The situation is complex, but we are using all our capacity and the capacity that has come from other countries," de la Espriella said.

The president added nearly 400 people remain missing, though civilian-run databases put the number at more than 4,200. More than 3,900 people were reported injured, while nearly 10,600 homes were destroyed and more than 65,800 damaged. In total, more than 44,900 families have been affected, he said.

Authorities recognize that the rescue effort has entered a grim phase as search teams begin shifting

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 41 of 69

toward recovering bodies. But as the government moves forward with plans to help those affected and rebuild the country, finding potential survivors remains a priority. "Our priority is saving lives," de la Espriella said. "These are human beings who are trapped under the rubble."

In other developments, a 4.2 magnitude aftershock struck Thursday in San José del Palmar, in the Chocó region — the epicenter of the earthquake. More than 160 aftershocks have rocked the country, according to the Colombian Geological Survey.

"We're pretty shaken up, but we're in good spirits. We can see everyone working hard to get through this very complex situation," volunteer helper Jairo Galán said in Cali, where food and donation centers were set up.

Colombia, with a population of 54 million people, experiences an average of 2,500 earthquakes each month, most of them small. That's equivalent to about 80 tremors per day, according to the geological survey.

More international aid arrives

Meanwhile, international aid continues to arrive.

Speaking to reporters in Quibdó, in the Chocó region, Colombian Vice President José Manuel Restrepo said rescuers had concluded the search for survivors and bodies in the area and would now shift their focus to the "humanitarian phase."

The region has received some 7 tons of humanitarian aid, with another 10 tons expected to arrive late Thursday night. An additional 20 tons of supplies are expected to arrive on Friday. "That's almost 40 tons of humanitarian aid, containing everything people will need at this moment," Restrepo said.

Earlier today, a group of rescuers from the Los Angeles County Fire Department arrived to help with search efforts and structural engineering assessments. Other countries, including Peru, El Salvador, Mexico and Brazil, have also offered assistance.

De la Espriella announced on X that Colombia will receive a \$10 million donation from the United Arab Emirates.

The Chinese ambassador to Colombia said China will provide \$1 million in financial aid and more than \$2 million in humanitarian assistance.

The South American Football Confederation and the Colombian Football Federation also jointly announced a \$1 million donation to support reconstruction efforts.

"Soccer transcends the pitch and remains close to its people, especially in the most difficult times," they said in a statement.

The Colombia disaster unfolded less than two months after neighboring Venezuela endured back-to-back earthquakes. The contrast between the two countries' responses was stark.

In Venezuela, acting President Delcy Rodríguez waited nearly four hours before addressing the nation. In Colombia, de la Espriella announced an emergency command post to oversee rescue efforts barely an hour after the earthquake. For weeks, Venezuelan civilians were clawing through rubble by hand. Hours after the earthquake in Colombia, rescue teams were searching for survivors with cranes and excavators.

The contrast was a reminder of the differences between the nations — their political systems, resources and the strength of their institutions — and a demonstration of how those can take on life-or-death importance.

New aircraft carrier heads toward Mideast after reports of issues on long-deployed USS Lincoln

By KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pacific-based aircraft carrier USS George Washington has begun heading toward the Middle East as reports have emerged of mental health and supply issues aboard the long-deployed USS Abraham Lincoln.

The Lincoln has been supporting the U.S. war against Iran, and its deployment has included a record-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 42 of 69

setting uninterrupted time at sea of more than 260 days. Several Democratic lawmakers are pressing for accountability from the Pentagon over conditions aboard the carrier, which Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on Thursday said were “completely misrepresented.”

Extended deployments of carriers during the Iran conflict have raised concerns about the impact on service members who are away from home for long periods as well as the increasing strain on the ship and its equipment. While renewed hostilities between the U.S. and Iran have calmed in recent weeks, the Navy has reimposed a blockade on Iranian ports in the crucial Strait of Hormuz, and the Trump administration has offered no clarity on how it intends to wind down the war.

Hegseth told reporters that the U.S. can maintain the blockade “indefinitely.”

A new aircraft carrier is heading west from the Asia-Pacific

The USS George Washington left port in Da Nang, Vietnam, last week, a Navy statement said. The carrier, along with a cruiser and a destroyer, have since been spotted crossing the Singapore Strait.

A Navy official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to detail sensitive ship details, confirmed that the Washington was in the Strait of Malacca, which links the Pacific and Indian oceans and puts the carrier on a course to head into the Indian Ocean. The Wall Street Journal reported earlier that the Washington would replace the Lincoln as one of the two aircraft carriers now stationed in the Middle East.

The move would leave the waters of the Pacific without a U.S. carrier presence for an unknown period of time. The Trump administration sees China, the dominant power in the region, as “a settled force” that only needs to be deterred from dominating the U.S. or its allies and not the top global adversary that it was under the Biden administration.

The Lincoln originally deployed Nov. 21 from San Diego, and it arrived in the Middle East in January, ahead of the launch of the Iran war on Feb. 28. The Navy conceded that the conflict created a “highly contested environment where traditional supply hubs in the Middle East were disrupted by combat actions.” That, in turn, led to shortages and loss of mail aboard the aircraft carrier, the Navy said in a statement.

“Leadership prioritized mission-critical supplies: first food, then hygiene items, then mail,” the statement said, before assuring that sailors aboard the ship now have access to clean water and “healthy meal options.”

Democrats call for scrutiny, while the Pentagon defends conditions aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln

Democratic lawmakers are calling for investigations, more information and greater visibility into conditions aboard the ship, which was originally set to return home in May.

“The Lincoln’s prolonged deployment is especially significant because it is occurring in the context of continuing military operations against Iran and the possibility that substantial US naval forces will be required in the region for an extended period,” Connecticut Sen. Richard Blumenthal, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, wrote in a letter to Navy leadership asking for a response to several questions.

Arizona Sen. Ruben Gallego, a Marine Corps veteran, said on social media that he is looking to take a bipartisan delegation on an official oversight visit to the ship and that the way sailors are being treated is “not just disgusting; it’s dangerous.”

Hegseth told reporters during a visit to Panama that he wants the Lincoln’s sailors home and crews rotated as quickly as possible but pushed back against reports of problems aboard.

“We make sure that every ship, every crew, every captain has everything we can provide them at every single moment. Some deployments are longer than others, and I have more respect and gratitude for those sailors than anybody. What they do in those high seas in those austere conditions with less port calls — it’s incredible.”

Navy leaders, including acting Secretary Hung Cao, last week held a tense town hall for families of troops aboard the USS Lincoln, at which the commanders of the Navy’s air and surface forces promised to do everything they could to relieve the aircraft carrier. MS NOW reported earlier on the meeting.

When reports of food shortages aboard the ship first surfaced in April, the Navy pushed back, calling those reports “false.”

Reports of mental health concerns and more aboard the ship

Reports have since emerged that sailors on the Lincoln are struggling with mental health concerns. The

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 43 of 69

Navy said in its statement that it has “not observed an increase in suicidal ideations or attempts aboard the ship,” but officials declined to provide data, citing operational security and patient privacy concerns.

The Navy official said that a sailor aboard the Lincoln went overboard in early August but that the person was quickly recovered, treated by the ship’s medical department and transferred off ship for follow-on care. The official would not say if it was being considered a suicide attempt.

U.S. Central Command, which oversees military operations in the Middle East, pushed back on reports about poor conditions.

“The Sailors and Marines of the Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group remain resilient and resolved after more than 260 days at sea, 10,000 aircraft flights, and 1.5 million pounds of ordnance expended,” the command said on social media.

Other carriers also have had long runs that have raised concerns about morale. The USS Gerald R. Ford returned home in mid-May after an 11-month deployment, the longest since the Vietnam War, during which it supported the U.S. war with Iran and the capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro.

During its deployment, the Ford experienced a fire in a laundry space that forced the carrier to turn around and return to the Mediterranean Sea for repairs and left hundreds of sailors without places to sleep.

Concerns about the demands of battle and the dangers of overextending ships and their crew predate the Iran war, with a number of mishaps on ships battling Houthi rebels in Yemen in 2024 and 2025, including the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman on a longer-than-expected deployment.

Man used a screwdriver to kill his wife and daughter at a Minnesota daycare, police say

By R.J. RICO and MARK VANCLEAVE Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A man used a screwdriver to fatally stab his wife and their 7-year-old daughter inside a Minnesota daycare Wednesday morning before killing himself, according to a search warrant released Thursday.

The Hennepin County search warrant obtained by The Associated Press identified the man as Nathan Brown, 41. It says he stabbed his wife, 41-year-old Kristen Brown, and their daughter, Evie Brown, inside the daycare that Kristen Brown operated out of the family’s basement in Hopkins, a suburb of Minneapolis. He then fatally shot himself in an upstairs closet.

Hopkins police said in a statement Thursday that they are still investigating.

According to police records, a father dropping off two of his children for daycare heard screams coming from the basement. The father entered the home and initially thought Nathan Brown was performing CPR before realizing it was an attack. The witness called 911 and fled with his children and two other children.

Authorities said Wednesday that they believe Nathan Brown earlier killed a 78-year-old relative at her home in Burnsville, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) from Hopkins. Nathan Brown had recently been living there, investigators said. Police have not released the woman’s identity or said how she was related to Brown.

The warrant says the parent who witnessed the daycare attack told investigators that Kristen Brown had recently sent parents a letter that the daycare would soon be closing, citing “relationship issues with Nathan.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — This story includes discussion of suicide. 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.

Six other children were present, but none were physically harmed, authorities said.

Authorities have not released any information about a potential motive for the killings. They said there was no history of police calls to the Hopkins address.

Records show that Kristen Brown had been licensed by the state since 2019. The daycare had a capacity of 10 children and was found to be in compliance during visits in 2023, 2024 and 2025. Family members

of Kristen Brown declined to comment on Thursday.

Kristen Brown opened Brown Bear Childcare a few months after giving birth to Evie. In a 2019 post on the daycare's Facebook page, Brown wrote that she hoped to help her daughter and other children "blossom into happy, intelligent, caring individuals."

Kristen Brown had a bachelor's degree in elementary education foundations from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities and was certified in vision therapy, according to her daycare's Facebook page. She incorporated music and cooking classes into her days with the children and would take them on field trips to a science museum and an orchard.

Kennedy Center votes to restore Trump's name and close for 2 years, challenging a judge's order

By STEVEN SLOAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The battle over the Kennedy Center's future escalated Thursday as President Donald Trump's allies on the board took new steps to commemorate him with physical changes to the iconic performing arts institution that could defy a federal court order.

During an hourslong meeting that was conducted virtually, the board voted to add Trump's name to the building's facade so it would read "The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Restored and Renovated By President Donald J. Trump." The plaza in front of the building would be named after Trump and most of the space at the venue would be closed for two years to allow for substantial renovations.

The changes, described by Rep. Joyce Beatty, an Ohio Democrat who is an ex-officio board member, and her lawyers, amount to a dramatic test of U.S. District Judge Christopher Cooper.

He ruled in May that letters affixed to the building that spelled out Trump's name were added illegally and he ordered their removal, a decision that the Republican administration failed to persuade courts to overturn. At the same time, Cooper blocked a two-year closure that was set to take effect July 5, saying an earlier board vote authorizing the shuttering was "ill-informed and seemingly preordained."

"This latest development is a transparent effort to circumvent the Court's ruling, and flies in the face of the statutes that Congress passed," Beatty said in a statement. "I will continue to fight for this treasured national monument."

A Kennedy Center representative did not respond to a request for comment.

Much of Thursday's board meeting was expected to focus on the extent of closures required to allow for renovations that the Kennedy Center's management says are needed to improve safety. In response to the judge's criticism of the earlier vote, the institution's leaders said they would provide the board with three options to consider.

They included a complete closure or a partial closure that would allow "some continued public access and limited programming in spaces unaffected" by the work. A third option would "consider a highly limited series of phased closures to address only the Center's most serious infrastructure needs while scheduling and maintaining a full slate of programming."

Ultimately, the board decided to close the building for two years while leaving the potential for some degree of programming to still happen in an outdoor space known as the Reach. The decision to move ahead with the two-year closure, in addition to the moves to memorialize Trump, could revive questions about whether the board seriously considered the full range of options, a point Democrats emphasized after the meeting.

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, a Rhode Island Democrat who is also an ex officio board member, criticized a "sham meeting."

"What happened today was nothing more than a rubber stamp on a decision the President made months ago that the Board already tried to effectuate without doing proper due diligence," he said in a statement.

The Kennedy Center has become a metaphor for presidential power

During Trump's second term, the Kennedy Center has become an unlikely — and highly visible — metaphor for presidential power. While he largely ignored the institution during his first term in Washington,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 45 of 69

Trump moved quickly to oust its leadership when he returned to office in January 2025 and replaced it with a board of trustees that named him chairman.

His name was quickly added to the building, before coming down in June in response to Cooper's order. The area where it once stood is now covered by a massive tarp.

The Kennedy Center moves are part of Trump's broader push to reshape the physical landscape of the nation's capital in ways that have few modern parallels.

He demolished the East Wing of the White House and is building a controversial ballroom in its place, though an appeals court ruled last week that construction should stop because Congress didn't approve the project. Trump has said he will take the case to the Supreme Court.

His remodel of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool has also stumbled after algae returned and U.S. Attorney Jeanine Pirro refuted his claims that a vandal was responsible for the damage.

Meanwhile, Trump is planning extensive renovations of a golf course in East Potomac Park, which could significantly reduce the public's access to running and biking paths. He is also moving forward with a triumphal arch that will sit near Arlington National Cemetery.

Trump has derided the Kennedy Center as "rusty, rotted, and rat and bug infested" and threatened to hand the building over to Congress after Cooper rejected the closure and the addition of the president's name to the building.

The institution's leadership has argued that it's in genuine need of repair and updating.

Matt Floca, the Kennedy Center's executive director and chief operating officer, guided a group of journalists through the building in April, highlighting severe water damage that he said corroded steel in some places as thin as tissue paper. Some pieces of equipment, including several 800-ton chillers that help cool the building, are decades old and in need of replacement.

At the time, Floca said he considered doing the repairs individually but insisted it was his recommendation to Trump to close the building and move forward with the renovation all at once.

"When the president asked, 'How do you make these projects the best? How do you make them really excellent and deliver them efficiently?' My recommendation was you close the building and you do everything over a definite period of time, two years," he said.

More recently, the legal battles became the subject of barbs and jokes as comedian Bill Maher accepted the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor in late June. At the start of the program, Pamela Roland DeVos, a Kennedy Center trustee appointed by Trump, described the institution as a "national cultural center open not just for some but for every American patron who wants to experience the greatest art and expression the world has to offer."

"The responsibility that comes with it is one our board takes very seriously," she said.

Broken engine parts shattered the Ryanair plane window that a man's head got sucked into: NTSB

By JOSH FUNK and RIO YAMAT Associated Press

Broken engine parts shattered a window on a Ryanair flight shortly after takeoff in Greece last month, causing a man's head to be sucked through the opening before fellow passengers pulled him back inside, U.S. investigators said Thursday.

A fan blade in the Boeing 737-800's right engine broke loose, sending fragments flying out of the engine that broke the window and damaged the fuselage in several other places, according to a preliminary report by the National Transportation Safety Board. Greece turned the investigation over to the U.S. agency under international aviation rules.

The July 10 accident happened after the flight departed the northern Greek city of Thessaloniki. Investigators found bird remains inside the engine, suggesting the plane may have struck birds during takeoff, though they haven't determined what caused the fan blade to break loose.

The 61-year-old passenger suffered neck and shoulder injuries and friction burns.

Panicked passengers helped the man after the window broke

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 46 of 69

The flight attendants told investigators they heard and felt loud, continuous vibration and saw smoke or fog fill the cabin before the oxygen masks dropped from the ceiling.

One flight attendant then noticed some passengers standing and calling for help. The man in a row 11 window seat was partially lodged in the damaged window, and other passengers pulled him back into the cabin.

The injured passenger was moved to row 12, where a doctor on board tended to him. Other passengers retrieved a metal box from the flight attendants and used it to try to block the opening until the plane could land.

A series of short videos recorded inside the plane and shared by Radio Thessaloniki showed passengers wearing oxygen masks after the cabin lost pressure. Another appeared to show the broken window, with a man seated nearby wearing an oxygen mask. A third video, apparently filmed after the aircraft landed, showed first responders working in the aisle.

The engine's fan blades were inspected in May

Maintenance records show the fan blades in the right engine had undergone ultrasonic inspections in May 2026 and November 2025, with no damage found. But flight crews had reported four suspected bird strikes to the same engine over the previous year, according to the NTSB. Bird remains were found after two of them.

Jeff Guzzetti, a former NTSB and Federal Aviation Administration investigator who reviewed the preliminary report, told The Associated Press that the required maintenance appears to have been performed on schedule. Investigators, however, will likely examine how the inspections were conducted and whether the previous suspected bird strikes contributed to preexisting damage.

"We know what happened and even to some extent why it happened, but there's still unanswered questions that the NTSB will get at," Guzzetti said.

The NTSB last month reprimanded Ryanair CEO Michael O'Leary after he told investors the investigation was focused on foreign object damage rather than the plane's age or maintenance history. The agency said investigators had not ruled anything out and O'Leary wasn't authorized to discuss the investigation.

Ryanair said Thursday it would not comment further until the NTSB investigation is complete. Boeing and CFM International, the engine maker, said they are assisting with the investigation.

FAA had ordered fixes after similar accidents

The FAA issued three directives last year requiring airlines to strengthen parts of the engine coverings on Boeing 737s after two previous fan blade failures sent pieces of the engine coverings flying. In one accident, a Southwest Airlines passenger was killed in 2018 after debris struck the fuselage and knocked out a window, causing the cabin to rapidly lose pressure.

The directives, which took effect in April 2025, require changes aimed at keeping pieces of the engine covering from breaking away and striking the plane if a fan blade breaks loose. Among other things, airlines must replace certain fasteners and spacers that attach the engine's inlet covering and revise their maintenance and inspection programs.

The FAA gave airlines until July 2028 to complete the major modifications, and the NTSB report says the required changes had not yet been made to the Ryanair plane.

Guzzetti said the latest accident could prompt the FAA and NTSB to examine whether that deadline should be moved up.

"It takes time to do the maintenance, to get the parts, and the risk at the time was assessed such that the industry could probably wait that long. Now with this event," Guzzetti said, "that may change things."

Asked whether the July 2028 deadline could change, the FAA declined to comment on the open investigation, saying it closely supports the NTSB and will "take any necessary safety actions based on the evidence."

The plane returned about an hour after takeoff

The 737-800, which can seat up to 189 passengers, was delivered new to Ryanair in 2008, according to flight-tracking site Flightradar24.

Flight records show the plane climbed above 15,000 feet (4,570 meters) about six minutes after departure before descending to about 6,000 feet (1,830 meters) "to burn fuel for 30 minutes" and returning to Thessaloniki about an hour after takeoff, Flightradar24 said.

The flight was operated by Malta Air, a subsidiary of Ryanair, Europe's largest budget carrier.

The plane landed normally and passengers returned to the terminal. One passenger requested and received medical assistance on the ground, the airline said in a statement at the time.

Luigi Mangione expected to plead guilty in federal case in UnitedHealthcare killing, AP source says

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, LARRY NEUMEISTER and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Luigi Mangione is expected to plead guilty as early as Friday in the federal case accusing him of stalking and killing UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The person, who was not authorized to talk publicly about the case and spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity, cautioned that Mangione could change his mind. If he follows through, it would be a stunning development in a case that rattled business leaders while galvanizing their critics.

Mangione's lawyers, and spokespeople for the Justice Department and Manhattan federal prosecutors, declined to comment.

Mangione is accused of traveling to New York City to ambush Thompson, 50, then shooting him outside a Manhattan hotel on Dec. 4, 2024, as the executive walked to UnitedHealth Group's annual investor conference.

Mangione is due in court on Friday for a hastily scheduled hearing in the federal case, which involves two counts of stalking. It wasn't clear what charge or charges Mangione is expected to plead guilty to. The hearing, in Manhattan federal court, comes as his lawyers have been talking with federal prosecutors about a possible resolution to one of two criminal cases against Mangione in Thompson's death. Previous talks in June broke down.

Mangione, 28, has been charged in both federal and state court in New York and still faces the possibility of a trial in his unresolved state case. Mangione's state murder trial is set to begin Sept. 8. Both sets of charges carried the possibility of a life sentence.

Mangione has pleaded not guilty and has spoken out publicly against the prospect of two trials, telling a judge in February: "It's the same trial twice. One plus one is two. Double jeopardy by any commonsense definition."

Under New York law, a state prosecution could be barred if the federal case is resolved first, but it isn't automatic.

The state's double jeopardy protections kick in if a jury has been sworn in a prior prosecution, such as a federal case, or if that prosecution ends in a guilty plea. Mangione's cases involve different charges arising from the same course of conduct.

Once Mangione pleads guilty, his lawyers could then ask the judge in the state case to throw out those charges on double jeopardy grounds. State prosecutors argue their case is distinct and double jeopardy shouldn't apply.

Mangione's federal charges allege that he traveled across state lines by bus to stalk and kill Thompson and that he used means such as a cellphone, the internet, interstate highways and staying at a hostel that serves out-of-state customers while planning and carrying out the attack. The state charges pertain to the killing itself, as well as firearms offenses.

In a letter last month, state prosecutors objected to the possibility of a guilty plea in the federal case wiping out the state case.

"Obviously, any guilty pleas in these matters must account for the seriousness of defendant's offenses, the loss of an innocent life, the impact of those crimes on the victim's family, and the other state interests that are implicated, including the sanctity of life principle that underpins the state homicide charges," As-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 48 of 69

sistant District Attorney Joel Seidemann wrote.

Mangione's decision to plead guilty comes after a series of setbacks for his defense.

In January, U.S. District Judge Margaret Garnett took the death penalty off the table but ruled that prosecutors could use items collected from Mangione's backpack during his arrest as evidence against him.

They included a 3D-printed pistol that investigators said matched the one used to kill Thompson and a notebook in which authorities say Mangione described his intent to kill an insurance executive.

In June, Mangione's lawyers said they would pursue a psychiatric defense in the state case but reversed course a day later. The defense, involving claims that he was suffering from extreme emotional disturbance at the time of the killing, isn't allowed in federal court.

Surveillance video of the killing showed a masked gunman shooting Thompson from behind. Police say "delay," "deny" and "depose" were written on the ammunition, mimicking a phrase used to describe how insurers avoid paying claims.

Mangione, an Ivy League graduate from a wealthy Maryland family, was arrested five days later at a McDonald's in Altoona, Pennsylvania, about 230 miles (about 370 kilometers) west of Manhattan.

He has become a cause célèbre for people upset with the health insurance industry.

An online fundraiser for his legal defense fund raised more than \$1.5 million, and several dozen supporters have shown up to his court appearances, some wearing green clothing — the color worn by the Mario Bros. video game character Luigi — and "FREE LUIGI" T-shirts.

Trump's vaccine plan would require millions of individual shots last used decades ago

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Public health experts have been quick to condemn an executive order from President Donald Trump aimed at upending childhood vaccinations in the U.S., but the biggest obstacles may be the unprecedented financial and logistical challenges it would impose on parents, health providers and drugmakers.

Monday's announcement by the Republican president calls for separating combination shots — including the measles, mumps and rubella, or MMR, vaccine — into separate injections. Appointments for that and other vaccinations should be spaced out whenever possible, the order states.

To accomplish that, drugmakers would need to revive a slate of individual vaccines that have not been widely used in the U.S. for decades. They would also have to build new manufacturing plants capable of producing millions more vaccine doses than the nation currently uses.

For parents, unbundling the MMR vaccine and spacing out the shots would mean returning to the doctor's office many more times than is currently needed. Those appointments could also strain pediatricians who typically administer the shots, while driving up costs tied to syringes and other medical supplies.

Studies in the U.S. and other countries have shown that combination vaccines increase the likelihood that children will be fully protected from infectious diseases before starting school.

Health experts say there is no scientific basis for changing course.

"We do things that are less convenient and more expensive if there's a good reason to do it," said Dr. Anna Durbin, of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "There is no good justification for this. I think it's very bad public health policy."

Trump's plan would require vaccine manufacturing overhaul

Under Trump's executive order, federal officials are instructed to develop within 90 days plans for breaking up the MMR shot and spacing out other vaccines.

But pharmaceutical scientists and former regulators say those changes would likely take years and require drugmakers to spend tens of millions of dollars on new studies and manufacturing facilities.

Currently, there are no individual vaccines in the U.S. for measles, mumps or rubella. All the vaccines approved for those viruses by the Food and Drug Administration are combination shots. That three-in-one approach has been the standard in the U.S. since the 1970s.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 49 of 69

Dr. Jesse Goodman, a former FDA vaccine chief, said companies may have to conduct large studies showing their new individual shots produce immune system-boosting reactions in children similar to the current versions. The specifics would depend upon the quality of data from the original standalone vaccines and how it's viewed by FDA regulators.

"The question is how much has changed since then and how comfortable will the FDA and the companies be relying on those comparisons?" said Goodman, who is now a professor at Georgetown University.

Manufacturers may also have to demonstrate the safety of new manufacturing facilities and procedures, given that individual measles shots haven't been widely produced in the U.S. for decades.

Designing, constructing and getting federal sign-off for new vaccine plants typically takes about five years, according to industry experts.

Additionally, Goodman said the FDA would have to review and license each unbundled vaccine separately, a process with no precedent.

"I don't think there's any comparable example of removing hugely effective public health measures that protect babies for no documented scientific reason," he said.

Individual shots for measles and related diseases tend to be used by lower-income countries that can't afford the MMR shot. Merck, GSK and the handful of other companies that supply U.S. childhood vaccines make only the combination shot.

In separate statements, Merck and GSK said they stand by the safety and effectiveness of their products. Neither discussed plans to unbundle their shots.

"To date, there has been no published scientific evidence that shows any benefit in separating the combination MMR vaccine into three individual shots," Merck said in an emailed statement.

Parents would need to make many more trips to the doctor

The MMR shot is currently delivered in two doses — the first at the age of 1 and the second dose after age 4. Splitting up the shot into its three separate components would mean six office visits. Spacing out other shots for pertussis and other infectious diseases could multiply the number of visits many more times.

As the number of visits goes up, parents are more likely to miss appointments or stop making them, according to Durbin.

"It's going to be less convenient, more expensive and you're going to have fewer people getting vaccinated," she said.

For well over a decade, Trump has expressed his view — against medical groups' guidance — that American children receive too many vaccines and that they should be given in smaller doses over a longer period of time. Last year he called on Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to look at reducing the number. Kennedy and other officials have pointed to smaller countries, such as Denmark, that recommended slightly fewer vaccinations than the U.S.

But breaking up combination shots will result in kids receiving many more individual shots than other comparable nations, Durbin notes.

White House spokesman Kush Desai said the Trump administration's efforts on the MMR vaccine "will give parents more options on timing and frequency for their children, which ultimately will increase vaccination rates for all three diseases."

Vaccine order is not legally binding

Despite the precedent-breaking nature of Trump's order, some experts are skeptical it will result in meaningful changes.

Neither the White House nor the FDA can compel drugmakers to develop and seek approval for new vaccines. And from a business perspective, companies have little incentive to develop individual versions of vaccines they already sell in combination shots.

"They'd be competing against themselves, and there's no reason to do that," said Dr. Paul Offit, a Children's Hospital of Philadelphia vaccine researcher and former government adviser.

While Trump's order calls for more federal research and recommendations, only state governments have the legal authority to require vaccinations for schoolchildren. The order simply advises states to consider updating their laws to reflect the Trump administration's approach.

"I think states will ignore this," Offit said. "I think that bottom line is that we don't need to look to Donald Trump for our medical advice."

Jury selected for trial of former gang leader accused of ordering Tupac Shakur's killing

By JESSICA HILL Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A jury of 6 men and 10 women was selected Thursday to hear the case against an ex-gang leader accused of orchestrating Tupac Shakur's killing nearly 30 years ago in one of hip-hop's most pivotal moments.

Opening statements at the murder trial in Las Vegas are expected to begin Monday.

Family members and fans of the legendary rapper have been waiting for decades to learn the truth behind the 1996 drive-by shooting that left Shakur dead at the height of his career.

Shakur was just 25 when he was shot near the Las Vegas Strip at a time when he was in the middle of a fierce battle for dominance in a music scene shaped by rival gangs.

Authorities three years ago charged Duane "Keffe D" Davis with murder, describing him as the "shot caller" who orchestrated the killing. Davis has pleaded not guilty and could be sentenced to life in prison if he's convicted.

Sixteen jurors were picked for the trial, which is expected to last about a month. During the selection process, potential jurors were asked about their favorite books and movies, if they had any strong feelings about gangs, and whether they had listened to Shakur's music.

Shakur still is considered one of the most influential rappers of all time. With hits like "California Love" and "Dear Mama," more than 75 million of his records have been sold worldwide, including seven albums released after his death.

He was in the passenger seat of a BMW driven by Death Row Records co-founder Marion "Suge" Knight on Sept. 7, 1996, when shots were fired from a Cadillac at a red light. Knight survived but Shakur died six days later.

Prosecutors have not accused Davis, now 63, of pulling the trigger that night, instead saying that he made the calls that led to Shakur's death and provided the gun.

In Nevada, a person can be convicted of murder for helping another person commit the crime.

Davis is the only person still alive who was in the car where prosecutors said the fatal shots originated.

The case against Davis was revived when Davis published the book "Compton Street Legend," about the shooting and his time in the Crips, in 2019 as well as his statements during police and media interviews.

Davis' attorneys unsuccessfully fought to block from the trial details written in the book and said during a 2008 police interview. They argued the book was fictionalized and had a co-author, making it impossible to know which parts Davis wrote.

They also argued Davis' previous interview with a federal task force was supposed to be confidential and not used against him.

Among those who could be called to testify in the trial is Knight, the rap music mogul whose label represented Shakur. He continually has said that he wants no part in the trial.

Knight, who is serving a 28-year sentence for running over and killing a Compton businessman in 2015, is the only surviving person who was in the car with Shakur at the time of the shooting.

Prosecutors expect to call between 35 and 45 witnesses, ranging from people who saw Shakur moments before he was shot to those who were associates of both Shakur and Davis at the time. Sean "Diddy" Combs, who Davis claimed wanted Shakur and Knight dead, will not be one of those witnesses, attorneys said.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 51 of 69

US stocks rise to a record as oil prices drop and inflation gets less bad

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. stock market rose to an all-time high Thursday following the latest sign that inflation is getting less bad. Stocks also got a lift from easing oil prices in their latest yo-yo move.

The S&P 500 climbed 0.7% and topped its prior record set last week. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 69 points, or 0.1%, and the Nasdaq composite gained 0.8%.

Wall Street relaxed after a report showed prices at the U.S. wholesale level were 4.7% higher last month than a year earlier. While that's more painful than anyone would like, it's not as bad as June's 5.5% inflation rate at the wholesale level, and it was slightly better than economists expected.

If inflation continues to trend that way, the Federal Reserve could decide to hold off on hikes to interest rates. Higher rates would help keep a lid on inflation, but they do so by intentionally slowing the economy and making it more expensive for everyone to borrow money.

Fed officials are split on whether they should have already begun hiking interest rates. But Thursday's report, following a similar update on inflation at the U.S. consumer level the day before, has traders now betting on just a 35% chance that the Fed will raise the federal funds rate at its next meeting in September. That's down from the roughly 50% probability seen two days ago, according to data from CME Group.

Any increase by the Fed would be the first in more than three years. It also could anger President Donald Trump, who has been lobbying for lower interest rates.

Treasury yields sank in the bond market, which eases pressure on stocks and other investments. The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.65% from 4.68% late Wednesday and from 4.72% on Monday, though it's still well above its 3.97% level from before the war with Iran sent oil and gasoline prices surging.

Oil prices eased back on Thursday, helping to limit worries about inflation. The price for a barrel of Brent crude oil fell 2.1% to \$87.07.

It's been swinging sharply recently and pinballed between \$72 and \$102 last month as hopes rose and fell that a deal in the war could allow oil tankers to freely exit the Middle East again and deliver crude worldwide.

On Wall Street, stocks in the real-estate industry climbed to some of the market's bigger gains. When interest rates are lower and bonds are paying less in yield, the dividends that many real-estate investment trusts pay look more attractive.

Lower mortgage rates could also drive more activity in the housing market, and the average long-term U.S. mortgage rate fell this week for the first time in six weeks.

AvalonBay Communities, which owns apartments across the country, rose 2.3%. Homebuilder D.R. Horton added 2.8%.

Fossil Group climbed 5.9% after the seller of watches and jewelry became one of the latest companies to report better results for the latest quarter than analysts expected. Such reports have helped drive Wall Street to records because stocks tend to track the path of corporate profits over the long term.

They helped offset a drop for Cisco Systems, which fell 8.4% even though the tech giant reported stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than Wall Street expected.

Analysts said investors may be worried about its profit margins going forward, and its stock has been shaky through the summer amid worries that AI-related stocks in general shot too high.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 50.49 points to 7,798.99. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 69.72 to 53,839.99, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 214.54 to 26,803.03.

In stock markets abroad, indexes dipped in Europe following a mixed finish in Asia.

South Korea's Kospi again had one of the world's biggest moves and jumped 3.6%. Seoul has been at the center of the world's swings for artificial-intelligence stocks because its market is dominated by two tech giants, Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix.

Forbes editor out; report says he took \$6M from founder of firm that does business with magazine

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

The top editor of Forbes left his job last month after an “undisclosed conflict of interest” and was reportedly dismissed for accepting \$6 million from the founder of a firm that does business with the magazine.

The New York Times reported this week that Randall Lane was paid by RJ Shook, whose company, Shook Research, worked with Forbes since 2016 to publish rankings of wealth advisers. The payment was made after Shook sold a majority stake in the company to a private equity firm a year ago.

A internal email dated July 23 and reviewed by The Associated Press confirmed that Lane, who had been editor and chief content officer, no longer worked for the company. It provided no other details of his departure. Lane had worked for Forbes for nearly 16 years and as its top editor since 2017.

“When this undisclosed conflict of interest was brought to our attention, we examined the situation closely and took the appropriate action immediately,” a spokesperson for Forbes said in an email Thursday. She added: “Forbes remains focused on delivering trusted journalism.”

A person who works at Forbes and spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue told the AP that the staff discovered the apparent reasons behind the firing by reading the Times story. A subsequent email sent out this week said the company could not comment on the matter further.

Former editor quoted as saying he ‘made a mistake’

The Times quoted a person familiar with Lane’s thinking as saying he considered the payment a gift in return for advice he had provided Shook over the years.

“I made a mistake, and I take responsibility for it,” Mr. Lane said in a statement to The Times. I should have disclosed the gift and failing to was a serious error in judgment. I deeply regret that, and I lost the job and team I love because of it.”

Lane and a spokesperson for Forbes did not respond to requests for comment.

It’s unclear why Shook paid Lane. But the company and Forbes apparently had a close relationship. On its website, for example, Shook Research lists 12 rankings of wealth advisers and management teams in partnership with Forbes.

Also unclear is why Lane thought disclosing the payment would have solved the ethical issues it may have raised. Traditional newsrooms typically forbid journalists from accepting payments from sources or business partners to avoid conflicts of interest — or even the appearance of conflict.

Forbes’ statement of editorial values and standards says that the company “prohibit(s) all staff members and contributors from accepting compensation, privileges or favors of any kind from people, companies or groups featured in their coverage.

“Any real or perceived conflicts of interest or relationships at all (financial, professional, legal actions, personal or otherwise) must be avoided and/or discussed with the appropriate managing editor. If approved, it must be explicitly disclosed in the story to readers to maintain their trust,” it reads. “Any attempt to evade or failure to honor these solemn responsibilities is a serious offense and is subject to review and swift disciplinary action.”

Public trust in media is flagging

The Times report comes at a low moment for public trust in the media. A majority of Americans — 57% — said they have low confidence in journalists to act in the best interests of the public, according to a Pew Research Center analysis in February.

Forbes was founded in 1917 and developed into an influential biweekly account of corporate America, putting giants like Steve Jobs and Warren Buffett on its cover.

Lane was apparently aware of trust issues in the news business. In 2024, he published a column titled, “How Forbes Delivers Journalism You Can Trust.”

“Thomas Jefferson famously noted that we get the government we deserve,” he wrote. “That’s true of our media too.”

FACT FOCUS: Conspiracy theories falsely blame Colombia earthquake on Alaska research program

By MELISSA GOLDIN Associated Press

An enduring conspiracy theory has resurfaced on social media after a 7.4 magnitude earthquake hit western Colombia on Monday, with users blaming a research program in Alaska for the disaster.

Posts falsely claim that the earthquake, which has killed at least 270 people and left widespread damage, was caused by the High-frequency Active Auroral Research Program, or HAARP, which studies the properties and behavior of the upper atmosphere.

But the earthquake was caused by natural movements in the Earth's crust. Experts say it had nothing to do with human activities.

Here's a closer look at the facts.

CLAIM: HAARP caused the 7.4 magnitude earthquake in western Colombia on Monday.

THE FACTS: This is false. The U.S. Geological Survey says that the Colombia earthquake was caused primarily by "strike-slip faulting" — when two sections of Earth's crust move horizontally past each other. The epicenter of the earthquake is within the country's Pacific region, which lies along the "Ring of Fire," a line of seismic faults encircling the Pacific Ocean where most of the world's earthquakes occur.

"No human endeavor caused this earthquake," said Suzan Van der Lee, a seismologist and professor at Northwestern University. "The Colombia earthquake occurred in a region with many natural earthquakes."

She said there are cases where human activity in shallow parts of the Earth's crust such as gas extraction or waste water injection has caused small- to moderate-magnitude earthquakes. But the earthquake in Colombia occurred at a depth of 110 kilometers — at least 10 times deeper than any caused by humans, Van der Lee noted.

The University of Alaska Fairbanks has operated HAARP since 2015. It was previously run by the U.S. military, which still owns the land where the program is located.

HAARP has been the subject of conspiracy theories since the military started building it in the early 1990s. In addition to allegations that it can cause earthquakes, believers have falsely claimed that it is a mind-control device and that it can control the weather.

Researchers at HAARP study the physical processes occurring in the highest parts of Earth's atmosphere — the thermosphere and ionosphere — by using high-frequency radio transmitters to heat small regions and observing the effects.

The program uses many scientific instruments, but the one that is often at the heart of conspiracy theories is its Ionospheric Research Instrument (IRI), the world's most powerful high-frequency radio transmitter.

"I can confidently state that there is ZERO physical basis for radio-frequency transmissions having any effects on the occurrence of earthquakes," said Dean Whitman, a geophysicist at Florida International University, who called hypotheses about HAARP's supposed impact "ridiculous."

He pointed to a number of reasons the claims are not valid. One, the energy released by the Colombia earthquake was "much larger than that released by even the largest hydrogen bombs" and "millions of times larger than the energy produced by the HAARP array." Two, HAARP's equipment is pointed upward, not downward toward where earthquakes occur. And three, the radio transmitters it uses produce electromagnetic waves that would not be able to cause earthquakes because they "involve a completely different set of physics."

The search for those buried in the rubble of the Colombia earthquake is ongoing. Tons of aid from regional partners began to roll into the country on Wednesday.

Judge dismisses Trump administration lawsuit alleging antisemitism at Harvard University

By COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge in Boston on Thursday dismissed a Trump administration lawsuit that accused Harvard University of turning a blind eye to harassment of Jewish students.

The decision from U.S. District Judge Richard G. Stearns said that President Donald Trump's administration failed to prove an ongoing violation of federal civil rights laws. The judge said the lawsuit, filed in March, mostly focuses on incidents that took place in the 2023-24 academic year, with a few from March 2025.

The cases were "too isolated and episodic" to prove a persistent civil rights violation at the Ivy League campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the judge said.

"We disagree with the ruling and are assessing next steps," said Harmeet Dhillon, assistant attorney general for civil rights at the Department of Justice. Harvard did not immediately provide a comment on the decision.

The lawsuit accused Harvard of failing to protect Jewish students during pro-Palestinian demonstrations that roiled the campus after Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attacks on Israel. The Trump administration argued Harvard officials did nothing as Jewish students were "harassed, physically assaulted, stalked, and spat upon."

In a statement after the lawsuit was filed, Harvard said it "cares deeply about members of our Jewish and Israeli community and remains committed to ensuring they are embraced, respected, and can thrive on our campus."

Harvard President Alan M. Garber says the university formed a task force to combat antisemitism. The university also hired a new provost and new deans and reformed its discipline policies to make them "more consistent, fair and effective," Garber has said.

The government's case sought to recover billions of dollars in federal research grants awarded to Harvard since October 2023. Trump officials argued they had a right to recoup the money under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a federal law barring discrimination based on race or national origin.

The lawsuit is among several actions the government has taken against Harvard since the Ivy League university refused a list of demands made by the White House after Trump, a Republican, returned to office last year. Trump officials have separately sought to cut Harvard's research funding and limit its ability to enroll foreign students and U.S. military members.

In a separate legal case last year, a federal judge ordered the Trump administration to reverse more than \$2.6 billion in federal funding cuts to Harvard. That decision found that the White House put unconstitutional conditions on federal funding, using antisemitism as a "smokescreen for a targeted, ideologically-motivated assault" on universities.

Despite their bitter dispute, Harvard and the Trump administration have held some negotiations, and Trump himself said the two sides had been close to reaching an agreement. But when the Justice Department filed this civil rights lawsuit in March, it pointed to an extraordinary impasse. When colleges are found in violation of federal civil rights law, they almost always reach compliance through voluntary agreements.

Congo's fastest-growing Ebola outbreak reaches a sixth province

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) — Congo's Ebola outbreak has spread to a sixth province after a death was recorded in the previously unaffected Bas-Uele province, the head of Africa's CDC said Thursday.

The man died in Buta, the capital of Bas-Uele, after traveling there from Isiro in Haut-Uele province, said Jean Kaseya, director general of Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

He was a motorcycle-taxi driver who had sought treatment at several hospitals before he died, Jean-Jacques Muyembe, head of Congo's National Institute for Biomedical Research, said. His colleagues tried to forcibly take his dead body, prompting police intervention and concerns that more people may have been exposed to the virus, Muyembe added.

The outbreak in eastern Congo, considered the fastest-growing one yet, is on track to surpass the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 55 of 69

deadliest one in history, which erupted over a decade ago and killed over 11,000 people, the World Health Organization said Wednesday. There are no approved vaccines or treatments for the rare Bundibugyo virus responsible for the current outbreak.

It has killed over 2,100 people out of more than 4,500 cases, according to the latest government figures. This death toll has been reached almost three times faster than in the 2014-16 Ebola outbreak in West Africa — the worst in history.

The outbreak is unfolding in some of the most challenging conditions imaginable, with strikes by some unpaid health workers, threats by rebel groups, anger from long-traumatized communities and misinformation asserting that Ebola isn't real.

Bas-Uele is a vast province in northeastern Congo that borders the Central African Republic, where there is recurring armed violence that has forced thousands to flee and take refuge in the province. Access can be difficult due to bad and poorly connected roads as well as limited communication networks, and there are frequent population movements related to gold mining and displacement from conflict.

As of Thursday, six out of 26 of Congo's provinces have been impacted. About 90% of all cases and 80% of deaths are concentrated in Ituri province, the WHO said Wednesday.

Mercy Corps, an aid group, warned Thursday that Ebola cases have been reported along a major travel route about 35 kilometers (22 miles) from Congo's border with South Sudan, expressing concern over the outbreak's "widening footprint." No cases have been confirmed in South Sudan so far.

Unpaid health workers' strikes and low contact tracing hamper response

Meanwhile, health workers at the Nizi Treatment Center in Ituri province, one of the most affected in the area, went on strike Thursday, leading to the temporary closure of the center after they said they have not been paid for three months.

Kaseya on Thursday called on the Congolese government to pay the outstanding salaries.

"We need to pay health workers," he told reporters. "This is the responsibility of the government, not partners. And they told us that money is available."

The real scope of the outbreak remains unknown. It was declared on May 15, but the WHO now says sequencing showed it began months earlier, in February.

Health authorities have said between 60% and 70% of new cases are recorded outside contacts being monitored, and that the disease is spreading at an "alarming" rate. Contact tracing helps break chains of transmission by finding exposed people early and reacting quickly if they show symptoms.

"We are chasing the virus; the virus is ahead of us," the WHO regional director for Africa, Dr. Mohamed Yakub Janabi, said this week.

On Thursday, Kaseya from Africa CDC said "the concept of contact tracing in DRC has become useless."

Trials for treatments and vaccines are underway

Ebola is rare but highly contagious and can be contracted from bodily fluids such as vomit, blood or semen, and from contaminated surfaces and materials such as bedding and clothing. The disease it causes is severe and often fatal.

Clinical trials of two possible treatments for this type of Ebola began last month in Ituri, the most affected of the five provinces in Congo where cases have been reported.

Two vaccines developed specifically for the Bundibugyo virus are now being tested in people for the first time, the WHO said Wednesday.

WHO also plans to test whether an existing Ebola vaccine could protect people against the virus after studies in animals showed promising results.

Kaseya said on Thursday that the Africa CDC supports the use of Ervebo, a vaccine authorized against the Zaire Ebola strain in provinces impacted by Bundibugyo virus. He said some studies show some cross-protection from the available vaccines.

"We are in a gray area," he said. "And when you are in a gray area, you have to make strong decisions to stop seeing people dying."

In the Reflecting Pool saga, the National Park Service's mission is tested by Trump's demands

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's botched repairs at the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool have landed the National Park Service in a tight spot, forced to serve the public while managing controversial demands by the Republican president.

The beloved federal agency, its iconic park rangers and other employees have been navigating a new reality under Trump, from orders to revise exhibits at parks and other sites to the demolition of important structures under its stewardship, such as the White House's East Wing, to arresting visitors for alleged vandalism at the pool.

Critics say the monthslong Reflecting Pool saga and other demands by Trump risk undermining the integrity of a federal agency that has long been held in high esteem by the American public.

"Never — not once in decades — have I witnessed such systematic degradation, disrespect and dismantling of the National Park Service as I see today under the thumb of President Donald Trump and Interior Secretary Doug Burgum," said Bill Wade, a former park ranger and superintendent.

Wade, who now serves as executive director of the Association of National Park Rangers, wrote an op-ed for The Denver Post lamenting what he called the Trump administration's "assault on the people, the mission and the values that have made the National Park Service one of America's most valued institutions."

The park service has been at the center of some of Trump's most contentious actions during his second term. An executive order targeted funding and demanded reviews at national parks and other sites that Trump said advanced "divisive narratives" and "improper ideology," resulting in changes to some exhibits on slavery or climate change.

The president has also ordered sweeping changes to historical monuments and buildings in Washington that fall under NPS' purview, including the creation of a White House ballroom and a 250-foot-tall (76-meter-tall) memorial arch. The agency meanwhile has lost at least one-quarter of its permanent workforce since Trump began his second term, through layoffs, forced retirements and resignations.

Park service employees "are being politicized and drawn into the absurdities and corruption of this administration" on a regular basis, said California Rep. Jared Huffman, the top Democrat on the House Natural Resources Committee. He cited the pool project, the proposed arch and the executive order on exhibit materials.

The ongoing political assault on the agency "is unlike anything we've seen in this country, and it makes life miserable at agencies like the National Park Service," Huffman said.

Reflecting Pool saga continues

Trump launched repairs at the Reflecting Pool earlier this year, hoping to address longstanding problems at the iconic site ahead of the America 250 celebrations. But the \$16 million project faced immediate problems, including peeling blue sealant and a fierce return of green algae.

Trump blamed the sealant issues on vandalism without providing evidence, and felony charges were brought against a former Olympic canoeist, David Hearn, after he was accused of vandalizing the pool.

The U.S. Park Police, a unit of the National Park Service, arrested Hearn, who denied wrongdoing and said he briefly touched a chunk of the coating.

Charges against Hearn were dropped on July 31 after prosecutors acknowledged that damage was caused by a bungled installation rather than vandalism.

The advice and counsel of career officials and rangers — instantly recognizable by their signature flat hats and green-and-gray uniforms — has been ignored or pushed aside as Trump and Burgum make decisions regarding the failed pool repair, according to an Interior Department employee who was not authorized to discuss internal discussions and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

"It's tragic," said Ed Stierli, vice president of government affairs at the National Parks Conservation Association, another advocacy group. "The whole thing is a master class in how not to go about a public rehabilitation project."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 57 of 69

In the days since the dismissal of the charges, Trump has continued to lean on NPS in his repeated claims that vandals damaged the pool's lining.

"A National Park Service career employee, a highly credible witness, saw David Hearn ... in broad daylight vandalize the Reflecting Pool by 'violently' ripping and tugging at the Pool's somewhat delicate coating," Trump posted Aug. 9 on his Truth Social site. Hearn's legal team said Trump "is continuing to attack an innocent man."

Stierli, of the parks conservation group, called Trump's reference to the unnamed park employee an example of the awkward position agency workers now face under Trump and Burgum, who has publicly backed Trump's claims about vandalism at the pool.

"I think the public understands that unfortunately, you have the president of the United States directly driving decisions, both here in Washington and around the country," Stierli said. The park service — and especially its career staff — "has very little control over this," he added.

The White House and the Interior Department did not directly respond to requests for comment on the park service. The White House defended the pool project, saying Trump "promised to make D.C. safe and beautiful, and he's delivering."

"For years, the Reflecting Pool sat neglected, plagued with algae and leaking millions of gallons of water," the White House said in a statement. "Fixing it was common sense."

Park service morale is at its lowest point, a former official says

Wade, the former park superintendent, called the pool repair "a comedy of errors" and "a continuation of the incompetence" shown by the Trump administration.

"Most people realize the NPS is under the gun and can't do much about it, even though they'd like to," he said, adding that morale at the agency is at the lowest point he can remember.

Edicts from Washington have made clear that speaking honestly about what is going on could cost staffers their jobs, Wade said. "There's a very strong fear among employees at NPS," he said in an interview. "It's very frustrating for them, as you can imagine."

Trump's proposed memorial arch has faced some pushback. A recent report by park service staff warned that the proposed gilded arch could disrupt the historical significance of dozens of sites around its planned location near the Lincoln Memorial.

The arch, which last month received initial approval from a key federal commission, would impact the "integrity" of dozens of historical properties because it would change "character-defining visual and spatial relationships" between them, the report said.

Americans view the National Park Service favorably

The park service is popular with Americans. About three-quarters of U.S. adults — including similar shares of Democrats and Republicans — have a favorable opinion of the agency, according to Pew Research Center polling from 2025. Only about 1 in 10 have a negative impression, and about 15% are unsure.

A Washington Post/Ipsos poll from July found that about two-thirds of Americans say they are "dissatisfied" or "upset" about Trump's Washington area projects, including construction of a new ballroom at the White House, painting the Reflecting Pool and building his triumphal arch. Republicans are more likely to be "enthusiastic" or "satisfied" with the projects.

About one-quarter of U.S. adults say Trump's goal is to "make Washington more beautiful," while about half say he has a "different goal." In an open-ended question, many respondents speculated that Trump wants to glorify himself or leave his mark.

The pool and other recent controversies including the exhibit reviews jeopardize the agency's credibility, Wade said.

"Whether interpreting the Civil War, discussing climate science or describing the complex stories of Indigenous people, rangers have sought to present evidence, not political ideology," he said. "That is now being lost."

Poland says it thwarted a Russian plot to kill an American citizen in Warsaw

By CLAUDIA CIOBANU and EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

WARSAW (AP) — A Russian plan to kill a Ukrainian American citizen in Warsaw was thwarted by Poland before it could be carried out, the Polish prime minister said Thursday, adding it was the first time that “someone on the order of Russia” sought to attack a U.S. citizen on the territory of another NATO country.

Western officials have previously warned that Russia stepped up a campaign of targeted killings since President Vladimir Putin’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine, saying they have disrupted several plots across Europe. But Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said this incident was unprecedented.

The suspect, who was allegedly recruited by Russia’s secret services, was detained by Polish authorities on Aug. 7. He will be held in custody for three months, the Warsaw police said in a statement.

The American Ukrainian citizen “was uncomfortable for the Putin regime,” Tusk said in a news conference, without elaborating.

The operation was carried out in cooperation with U.S. services, said Tomasz Siemoniak, Poland’s minister overseeing intelligence services. He said the targeted victim was a U.S. citizen “of Ukrainian origin.” Officials did not immediately provide further details.

The Russian Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The U.S. State Department said it was aware of the reports but said it had no additional information.

Western countries believe Russia seeks to undermine Ukraine’s allies

Russia has long been accused of targeting its enemies abroad, including by using rare poisons. But intelligence officials previously told The Associated Press that Russia’s security services are now more brazen in their choice of targets, going after Russian activists and foreign supporters of Ukraine as well as military defectors.

“We must assume that the Putin regime will try to eliminate people who are inconvenient for various reasons, in various places around the world,” Tusk said on Thursday. He said that Poland and others must be prepared to counter such actions.

Western officials see the campaign as connected to Russia’s broader efforts to undermine European countries that support Ukraine. The AP has mapped about 200 acts of sabotage, arson and other disruption across Europe since the start of the war that officials have linked to Russia. President Vladimir Putin told the AP in June that Russia is not waging a sabotage campaign against Europe.

In 2006, British authorities accused Russia of being behind the killing of former FSB officer Alexander Litvinenko in London with radioactive polonium. The U.K. also blames Russia for the attempted killing of former Russian military intelligence officer Sergei Skripal in Salisbury in 2018 with the nerve agent Novichok.

German authorities said Russia organized the 2019 killing of Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, a former Chechen rebel commander who was shot in a Berlin park by Vadim Krasikov, a hitman who was later greeted by Putin after he was exchanged in a spy swap.

In June, a Russian artist who was critical of Putin was shot and killed at close range near his home in eastern Poland. Tusk said at the time that the killing of Robert Kuzovkov, known by the pseudonym Semyon Skrepetsky, had the hallmarks of a political assassination. He suggested it was possible Russia was behind it but Polish officials have not yet attributed it to Moscow.

Last year French officials disrupted a plot which they believe was aimed at killing Vladimir Osechkin, a Russian exile who lives under police protection and works to help military defectors flee Putin’s war. Lithuanian officials also disrupted a plot last year to kill a Lithuanian supporter of Ukraine and another against a Russian activist. Officials in Germany have similarly broken up two plots: one to target the head of a German weapons company supplying Ukraine, the other against a Ukrainian military official.

Polish authorities arrested a man in 2024 in what they said was a plot to assassinate Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. That year, a Russian helicopter pilot who defected was killed in Spain — with Russian operatives the prime suspects.

“This campaign is not by accident or chance,” a senior European intelligence official previously told the

AP. "There is political authorization."

USAID fallout: In Nepal, when the aid workers stopped coming, the women and babies started dying

By KRISTEN GELINEAU Associated Press

GAUR, Nepal (AP) — The young mother's breath had grown ragged. Inside her mud home in rural Nepal, she hunched over in agony, pain pummeling her pregnant belly, her swollen legs scarcely able to support her.

Kabita Mukhiya was in the midst of an emergency, but didn't know it. For weeks, she'd suffered at home, because there was nobody around to tell her to rush to a hospital. The aid workers who once regularly visited her village to help pregnant women had stopped coming, after foreign aid cuts by the United States shuttered a program aimed at saving mothers' and babies' lives.

Kabita was uneducated and impoverished, and she did not know what was happening to her body. In desperation, she turned at last to her aunt for help, who hauled her off to the hospital, where both women wept as the doctors said things neither could understand.

Which is why Kabita — confused and confined to her hospital bed — turned to something she could understand: prayer.

"Please save the baby," she begged God through her tears. "Please save me."

Then, through the chaos, came the words that Kabita finally grasped, but could not bear: It was too late. Her baby was dead.

And her own life was now hanging by a thread.

This story was funded by a grant from the Pulitzer Center. The Associated Press is responsible for all content.

One baby at a time, the world is marching toward a grim milestone: Because of global cuts to foreign aid, the Gates Foundation has predicted that 2025 will be the first year this century where child deaths will increase.

For many experts, the health of a country is measured by the health of its smallest: Children under the age of 5. And while global child mortality data for 2025 won't be available for several months, health officials are already bracing for a surge in deaths among the world's youngest and most vulnerable.

The decision by U.S. President Donald Trump's administration to dissolve the United States Agency for International Development — once the world's largest humanitarian donor — gutted maternal and neonatal care, decimated nutrition programs for millions of pregnant women and children and left scores of birthing centers devoid of equipment, medicine and staff. The U.S. cuts, followed by foreign aid cuts from several other countries, forced 60% of women's organizations to reduce their services, according to the World Health Organization.

The U.S. government has repeatedly insisted that no one — and, particularly, no children — have died because of its funding cuts. But the AP has documented the deaths of women and children from Myanmar to Nigeria.

A study published in The Lancet journal, meanwhile, said the U.S. cuts could lead to more than 14 million deaths, including more than 4.5 million children under age 5, by 2030.

"It's heartbreaking to see what's happening. It's decades of progress being washed away," says Rajat Khosla, executive director of WHO's Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health.

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

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

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 60 of 69

In Nepal, cuts to nutrition and reproductive outreach programs have already increased pregnancy complications and deaths, according to health workers, government officials, aid workers and families interviewed by the AP.

"The number of deaths of mothers, young mothers, during delivery has really increased," says Mona Sherpa, country director for the aid group CARE Nepal, which lost more than half its funding from the U.S. cuts. "The expected number within a year is happening within four to six months."

Maternal and child health programs are perhaps the clearest foreign aid example of small, relatively cheap interventions leading to the greatest good. Packets of fortified peanut paste that cost less than a dollar each can bring a malnourished child back from the brink of death within weeks. Clean birth kits that cost a few dollars slash the risk of mothers and newborns dying from infections.

In Nepal, a five-year, \$35 million program canceled by the U.S. cuts reached more than 100,000 women and girls in its first three years. The program equipped birthing centers and trained nurses, midwives and outreach workers known as female community health volunteers. These workers regularly visited pregnant women's homes, explained the warning signs of complications and urged them to attend prenatal appointments, often escorting them there.

When the program was canceled, many pregnant women were left to navigate a medical system they struggle to trust or understand, Sherpa says.

The consequences can be found in the dusty, sun-scorched villages of Nepal's Rautahat district, home to Kabita's family and one of the poorest and least-literate parts of the country. At a birthing center in Rautahat's municipality of Dewahi Gonahi, the number of women coming for prenatal checks has halved since the funding cuts, says the officer in charge, Kishori Shah. Because of that, women aren't identifying complications fast enough, he says, leading to emergencies.

"There would have been a decrease in complications if the USAID program was still running," he says.

In the village of Prempur Gonahi, it took just 10 months — a touch longer than a typical pregnancy — for newborns to begin dying again after the U.S. cuts, says the officer in charge, Sadho Baitha.

Before CARE's program launched in Rautahat in December 2022, Baitha says, the village averaged 10 to 15 neonatal deaths per year. By 2024, records show, there were zero. But since the program's cancellation, newborns have begun dying again; the first was in December, and four more followed by March.

Yet many deaths linked to the funding cuts will remain invisible, in part because the cuts themselves left scores of mortality data collectors jobless. In some places, there is simply no one left to count those who died.

This is the case in Dewahi Gonahi, where mortality reporting and recording services have collapsed, says Shatrudhan Singh, executive director of Campaign Nepal, CARE's partner. Which is why, he says, the government record shows just two infant deaths in the municipality since the funding cuts, despite his group knowing of eight.

"There must be more than that," he says. "We just can't identify them."

The stories of loss are hidden inside the cramped homes of the loved ones left behind and in the vacant eyes of now-motherless children.

From the shadows of her own home, Phula Devi tries to verbalize her loss in a voice so halting and hushed it's barely audible. She has never spoken of her grief to anyone — not even to her husband.

Like most women in this village a few miles from Kabita's, Phula never attended school. She knew almost nothing about pregnancy; she does not even know her own age, just that she is not yet 20.

Phula is the type of woman outreach workers say they would have targeted. Instead, one morning in January, an informal village health practitioner came to her home and said the fetal heartbeat was slow. He told her to go to a hospital, then left.

Phula didn't understand. And she was at the mercy of her relatives, who waited until that night to take her to the hospital.

There, the doctors urged a C-section. But Phula didn't know what that meant. Terrified, she pushed the baby out on her own. He emerged silent and still, declared dead and whisked away before Phula could hold him, name him or even see his face.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 61 of 69

He was overdue, hospital records show, a risk factor for stillbirth. Nurse Guddi Rahami, who remembers Phula's case, says the region's uneducated families often resist C-sections because they believe the operation is somehow bad.

From inside her darkened home, Phula hides her tear-streaked face behind a scarf.

"I think of my baby all the time," she murmurs.

She would have done anything to save him, she says. If she'd only known how.

Down a winding dirt path peppered with bleating goats, Kabita's two-room home emerges into view. Outside, women trudge past in a rainbow of saris that cling to their fragile frames, seared by the punishing sun.

This became Kabita's home at 14, when she married her husband after a life of loss. Her mother died when she was little, and her father soon abandoned her to move to India with his new wife. Her three siblings would later follow him.

Her wedding photo shows her as the child she still was when she married: slender, with wide-set brown eyes, soft cheeks and a shy smile. She struggled to bond with her mother-in-law, who shared their home, but endeared herself to her aunt and neighbor, Shraddha Mukhiya. Shraddha relished Kabita's innocence and was amused by her constant, occasionally nonsensical, chatter. She came to view the girl as her daughter.

Kabita quickly fell pregnant with a daughter of her own, Sonam. Her second daughter, Anushka, followed a year later, and her son, Yubraj, a year after that.

Her husband, the family's sole provider, was rarely home, forced to chase construction jobs around Nepal and India that brought the family around 12,000 Nepalese rupees (\$80) per month. It was enough to buy rice, lentils and vegetables, but little else.

Despite the difficulties, the 20-year-old Kabita was overjoyed to learn she was pregnant with her fourth; she and her mother-in-law longed for another boy. She scraped together enough money to buy clothes for the baby, whom she planned to name Shivraj, and dreamed that he would one day get the education she was never afforded.

When she was pregnant with Yubraj, she received a U.S.-funded nutritious powder that helped supplement her limited diet. But by the time she became pregnant last year, the funding cuts had eliminated the local birthing center's nutritional supplements and food for pregnant women, says Punam Mahato, a nurse who treated Kabita.

U.S.-funded nutrition programs were crucial to the region, particularly for children, health workers say. The prevalence of wasting — a life-threatening form of malnutrition — among children under 5 in Kabita's province was 7.4% before the U.S. funding cuts, according to a survey conducted by the government and the United Nations' children's agency. That number rose to 12.3% after the cuts, according to a national malnutrition screening conducted in May by the government and the aid group Helen Keller Intl, which saw its nutrition program halted by the U.S. cuts.

As her pregnancy progressed, Kabita's belly swelled while the rest of her remained gaunt. Sometimes she only managed to eat two small meals a day. And the mothers' group meetings she attended while pregnant with Yubraj had ceased.

She missed the recommended first trimester appointment, and made her first visit to the birthing center for a check at 16 weeks. Mahato, her nurse, noticed she was pale. She suggested Kabita get a blood test to check her hemoglobin, which can plummet in pregnancy amid nutritional deficiencies.

But Kabita never got the test, and didn't seem to understand its necessity; she never mentioned it to her mother-in-law. At 24 weeks, Mahato was worried by Kabita's pallid complexion and again recommended a blood test. Again, Kabita demurred, likely because she didn't grasp its importance, Mahato says.

Rajkumari Patel, a community health volunteer who worked under CARE's now-canceled program, said they would have acted as mediators to explain to Kabita why the test was crucial.

Instead, Kabita returned home. She was tormented by stomach pains that grew increasingly fierce. Her body swelled.

She suffered for weeks. By December, when she was 28 weeks pregnant, Kabita had become so weak

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 62 of 69

she could not walk. Her husband was working in India, so she turned to Shraddha, her aunt, for help. The elder woman took her to the hospital.

Doctors drew Kabita's blood to check her hemoglobin levels, then handed the results to the women. But Kabita and Shraddha didn't know what they meant. Nor did they understand the rush of activity and tests and medical explanations that followed.

Their understanding finally came amid the absence of a heartbeat. A test confirmed it: Kabita's baby was dead.

Everything was happening so fast.

The hospital was not equipped to remove the baby's remains from Kabita's womb. Staffers urged them to go to another hospital. But with no money and no sense for the danger Kabita was facing, the grieving women returned home.

By the next day, Kabita's vision was distorted. Her head pounded. She was delirious.

In desperation, Shraddha took her to another hospital with lower fees. The doctors determined that she'd had a seizure from preeclampsia, where dangerously high blood pressure can be fatal if untreated, says paramedic Hridaya Narayan Mahato, who is not related to Kabita's nurse.

Doctors gave her oxygen while the staff rushed to prepare the ICU.

Kabita's hemoglobin levels were critically low, leaving her short of oxygen and straining her heart. She lay on her back, shaking and gasping for air. Shraddha sat helplessly at the foot of the bed. "You'll be OK," she told her niece through tears.

And then she watched as Kabita drew her final breath.

She was dead before they could get her into the ICU.

A short drive from Kabita's home, Patel, the community health worker, sits outside her home, her words laced with frustration. Deaths like Kabita's, she says, are precisely what she and her colleagues had been trained to prevent.

Patel used to know every pregnant woman in her village, visiting them at home. She would have done the same for Kabita, she says.

"I would have asked her, 'Is the baby kicking? When did you last feel movement?' I would have checked for swelling in her hands and face. I would have looked at her eyes for signs of anemia," she says. "These are the signs I would have noticed in Kabita and said, 'This woman needs a hospital today -- not tomorrow.' Maybe we could have saved her life."

Kabita died from complications of eclampsia, with severe anemia contributing significantly, says Mahato, the hospital paramedic. Both conditions can often be identified and managed through regular prenatal care, he says.

The loss of Kabita and her baby so overwhelmed Shraddha that she couldn't bear to tell Kabita's husband. Still working in India, he was oblivious to the crisis until neighbors called him. His bus ride home took so long that he didn't arrive back in the village until three days after Kabita's funeral.

In the months since, he has frequently refused to work, lying in the dark crying for days at a time. He speaks only of Kabita, never the baby. Shraddha and his mother, Lachhiya Devi, remind him that they will all starve unless he returns to work. And so he does.

Both in their 60s, Shraddha and Lachhiya worry about how long they can care for Kabita's little ones. From the bed she shares with her grandchildren, Lachhiya strokes the leg of 4-year-old Anushka, who slumbers next to her in the midday heat.

"How will I feed them? I'm old," Lachhiya says, her bangles barely clinging to her bony arms. "You can see how desperately I'm trying to get by."

Their home is quiet now without Kabita's cheerful chatter or the cries of the baby who never made it home. The last reminders of Kabita's life — her sparkly green sari, the pink and yellow tapestry she knitted — are packed away in a box that will be given to her children one day.

Shraddha remains tormented by what she didn't know.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 63 of 69

"We don't have anyone to help us out here, to tell us about these things. If there was someone, we would ask them, follow their advice," she says. "It would have saved her life."

She looks at Kabita's children and aches for their mother, who was barely beyond childhood herself.

"She was too young to die."

Mission Improbable: A onetime Republican is trying to prove Democrats can win in Florida

By STEVEN SLOAN Associated Press

LEESBURG, Fla. (AP) — Cyn Doyle is a self-described political cynic. So when David Jolly, the Republican-turned-independent who is now running for Florida governor as a Democrat, swung through this town dotted by lakes and Spanish moss, she had doubts.

"How can you assure us," the 71-year-old pressed, "that you won't become another John Fetterman?"

As the crowd in the clubhouse of a manufactured home community for seniors jeered the mention of the contrarian Pennsylvania Democratic senator, Jolly, who once critiqued politicians as an MSNBC pundit, made the case for himself.

"Change is part of my journey," he responded. "What I can tell you is that the values I speak of — that the economy should work, that government can do a little bit to improve our lives and that everyone should have the right to be protected — those are the guideposts for how I'll serve as governor."

Doyle, an independent who said she's a registered Democrat mostly to participate in primaries, left impressed.

"I believe him," she said. "I don't believe many."

Florida spent a generation as America's prized political battleground, where the interests of big cities, agricultural towns, freshly arrived retirees and diverse Latino communities collided in elections often decided by fractions of a percentage point.

Jolly is bent on proving those days aren't over.

In the course of a single day last weekend, he rallied a chandeliered ballroom in The Villages, a wealthy Republican-leaning retirement community. Then it was off to the fluorescent lights of the Leesburg clubhouse before ending with a rousing speech to Democrats in Hillsborough County, home to Tampa, which backed a Republican presidential candidate for the first time in 20 years in 2024.

Democrats have collapsed in Florida

President Donald Trump's rise has coincided with a Democratic collapse in Florida. He won here three times, with ever-expanding margins. The 19-percentage-point win by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis in 2022 cemented a GOP supermajority in the legislature.

Jolly's path to victory could be blocked by both math and money in his likely race against Rep. Byron Donalds, the Trump-backed candidate in Tuesday's Republican primary. Donalds, who would be Florida's first Black governor, has raised more than \$100 million compared to Jolly's \$10 million.

Donalds has cast Jolly as an out-of-touch liberal, blanketing the state this week with an ad featuring Jolly referring to "gender-affirming care" and backing communities painting rainbow crosswalks to show support for LGBTQ people. Jolly countered that Donalds is ignoring pressing economic issues.

In an interview over an Outback Steakhouse lunch while his wife and two young children busied themselves with coloring, Jolly acknowledged "there's not going to be the political will" to reverse the state's ban on transgender girls and women participating on female teams at public schools and universities.

He said he didn't think governors should decide who plays in what sports even as he described himself as a "girl dad" and noted "I don't think we should have biologically born men playing in competitive sports."

"But look," he added, "if a 10- or 12-year-old soccer league in the community has a coed team, I don't think the governor should be throwing a flag on the field."

Republicans face tests of their own

For all the headwinds confronting Jolly, Republicans may encounter their own turbulence.

The culture wars that have raged under DeSantis, including a feud with Disney and fights over gender

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 64 of 69

and sexual orientation, have left some exhausted. Karen Kuhn, a 72-year-old resident at The Villages, described herself as in "despair."

Democrats have won a string of special elections from Miami to Palm Beach and Tampa, adding to their optimism. Former GOP Rep. Carlos Curbelo said Latinos who voted for Trump in 2024 might not support Republicans again, in part because of the administration's immigration enforcement tactics.

"I definitely can see a scenario where it's a closer race, where it's a competitive race," said Curbelo, who narrowly lost his reelection bid in 2018, the last wave election year for Democrats.

A race with implications for 2028

Jolly is telling that to any Democrat who will listen, including those with potential presidential ambitions such as Govs. JB Pritzker of Illinois, Gavin Newsom of California, Andy Beshear of Kentucky and former Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. If Florida can change, he argues, the national political landscape would change with it.

"All of a sudden the road to the White House looks dramatically different," Jolly said. "It reshapes the House of Representatives. The structural change from winning Florida is a generational opportunity for Democrats."

It's a point echoed by other Democrats, including state Rep. Emily Gregory, who flipped the Palm Beach district home to Trump's Mar-a-Lago.

"To abandon Florida was deeply, deeply unwise," she said. "I hope that investment is coming back because it is a purple state and I feel very confident going into November."

Nikki Fried, the Florida Democratic Party chair, acknowledged "the bottom fell out" for Democrats. She has spent the past several years rebuilding the operation. Democrats charged with winning back state legislative and congressional seats are prioritizing some Florida races this year.

But Beshear, who chairs the Democratic Governors Association, isn't making a financial commitment yet.

"David's working really hard," he said in an interview. "He's a good candidate, and we're watching it closely."

Donalds' campaign remains confident. His communications director, Gates McGavick, said: "Florida voters will reject radical liberal David Jolly because he will make life more expensive."

"Byron Donalds will make life in Florida more affordable," he said. "Our campaign will make that case to voters every single day."

A 'Bush 41' Republican's path to becoming a Democrat

Jolly is an unlikely figure cajoling Democrats to think about their future.

He first gained national attention in 2014 as the GOP winner of a Tampa Bay congressional seat that was seen as a bellwether. In a Democratic Party that emphasizes diversity, Jolly regularly refers to himself as a "53-year-old white former Republican with salt-and-pepper hair." His time in Congress runs counter to voters elevating fresher voices this year.

During stump speeches, he says he was a "Bush 41" Republican. He left the GOP in 2018, spending several years as an independent before registering as a Democrat in 2025.

Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings, who challenged Jolly until suspending his campaign in June and announcing he had prostate cancer, acknowledged Florida Democrats have to appeal to independents. But he also said "people don't want a chameleon."

"That's the big challenge that he's had, is convincing people that he has stepped away from the Republican policies," Demings said.

Others were more forgiving.

Sylvia Rieger, a 70-year-old resident at The Villages, said Jolly's evolution showed "moxie."

Steven Slyter, an 81-year-old retired handwriting expert, said it was "courageous" for Jolly to leave his party. "He made a decision about what he stands for," Slyter said. "I like that."

Florida's last Democratic candidate for governor, Charlie Crist, was also a former Republican. After his drubbing by DeSantis, several Democrats said Jolly was campaigning more effectively.

Facing minimal primary competition, Jolly has largely avoided debates over the party's ideological future. He's won support from progressives including Rep. Maxwell Frost while shoring up his centrist credentials

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 65 of 69

by picking former Rep. Gwen Graham, the daughter of longtime Sen. Bob Graham, as his running mate. Some Jolly supporters are hoping that his poly-party background will be an asset.

Jeff Adelman is running for a nonpartisan seat on the Coral Springs City Commission in Broward County. As he left a recent meeting of the Coral Springs Parkland Democratic Club, he described Jolly as a potentially unique fit for the state.

"We live in Florida," he said. "I don't think you're going to get somebody like Bernie Sanders to run for governor in the state of Florida."

Ukrainian drones strike a major refinery deep inside Russia, setting it ablaze

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian drones struck a major refinery deep inside Russia, military officials said Thursday, the fourth in three days in Kyiv's ongoing campaign to choke Moscow's vital oil sector.

Russia is one of the world's biggest energy producers, with oil providing an economic mainstay as its military tries to push deeper into Ukraine in a slow and costly advance more than four years after Moscow launched its full-scale invasion.

The attacks have dented Russia's refining capacity, causing shortages at gas stations. Kyiv officials say the onslaught is meant to compel Russian President Vladimir Putin to seek a peace deal, but there's no sign that strategy is working.

The targeted refinery is one of Russia's biggest

Ukraine's General Staff said its forces struck the Gazprom Neftekhim Salavat oil refining and petrochemical complex in Russia's republic of Bashkortostan overnight, causing a fire at the facility.

The complex, located southeast of Moscow about 1,300 kilometers (800 miles) from Ukraine's border, is one of Russia's largest such facilities, the General Staff said in a Telegram post. The plant processes up to 74 million barrels of oil annually, producing gasoline, diesel fuel and other products, it said.

Bashkortostan Gov. Radiy Khabirov said only that a drone attack wounded two civilians and started a fire in an industrial zone of Salavat.

Wildberries, Russia's biggest online retailer whose giant warehouses have repeatedly been struck by Ukrainian drones, said a fire started at one of its facilities in the Salavat industrial zone after the overnight attack. The company said the facility was evacuated but that goods were not being stored there.

The attack came a day after Ukrainian missiles and drones blitzed a major Russian naval base on the Black Sea.

Elsewhere, four explosives experts from Russia's Emergency Ministry and a security guard were killed Thursday after an unspecified Ukrainian weapon blew up in Sevastopol, said Mikhail Razvozhayev, the Russian-installed governor for the port city in illegally annexed Crimea.

They were inspecting the site of a Ukrainian attack when "an enemy weapon detonated," he said.

Also in Sevastopol, a Russian serviceman was killed by an explosion, and a Russian woman, allegedly acting on the orders of Ukrainian intelligence agencies, was detained as a suspect, the Crimean branch of Russia's Federal Security Service said Thursday.

It was not possible to independently verify either side's reports.

Russian official says refinery repairs could take 6 months

Meanwhile, a Russian refinery in Orsk that was hit by Ukrainian drones earlier this week has suspended operations, Orenburg region Gov. Yevgeny Solntsev said.

He said that "key infrastructure, which cannot be restored at this time" was attacked, including foreign equipment, and repairs could take up to six months because of international sanctions, Solntsev said in a rare public admission in Russia of the problems Ukrainian attacks are causing.

Ukraine's General Staff had reported striking the Orsk refinery near the border with Kazakhstan on Tuesday.

Russian drone hits a Ukrainian passenger train, killing 2

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 66 of 69

Russia has responded by hammering Ukraine with ballistic missiles, jet-powered drones and glide bombs, all of which are hard to intercept. The strikes have killed more than 16,000 civilians since the war began, according to the United Nations.

Russian attacks featuring 133 long-range drones killed at least four people and wounded eight others across Ukraine overnight, officials said.

A jet-powered Shahed drone struck a passenger train in the southern Odesa region, killing the engineer and his assistant, said Ukraine's state railway company Ukrzaliznytsia.

A Russian drone killed two men Wednesday evening in the southern city of Kherson, regional military administration chief Oleksandr Prokudin said.

Ukraine makes little headway on obtaining Patriot missiles

Ukraine desperately wants more U.S.-made Patriot interceptor missiles that can counter Russia's ballistic missiles, but stocks of the air defense system reportedly are low because of the Iran war.

Ukraine has two and a half times fewer Patriot interceptors than in 2025, according to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, saying he makes calls every day to try to source some more.

He said he is asking the United States to sell 5% of the interceptor missiles they have in stock to help Ukraine make it through next winter, when Russia's strikes focus on the power grid, according to an interview with CNN broadcast Wednesday, parts of which he posted online. So far, he said he has obtained only 1%.

In the first half of this year, European countries paid U.S. defense companies at least 3 billion euros (\$3.5 billion) for military equipment they sent to Ukraine, according to a report Thursday by Germany's Kiel Institute, which tracks assistance to Kyiv.

The Trump administration won't provide its own aid to Ukraine but is allowing other countries to buy U.S. equipment that is sent on.

Military aid provided to Ukraine in the first half of 2026 was close to last year's level, the Kiel Institute said, but financial and humanitarian aid was 41% lower than in 2025.

Wholesale price inflation slows last month as gas, food costs fall

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Wholesale inflation dropped last month as gas prices reversed some of their Iran war spike and other costs also cooled, a sign that consumer inflation could grind lower in the months ahead.

The Labor Department's producer price index — which captures inflation before it reaches consumers — rose 4.7% in July from a year ago, down from a much larger 5.5% increase in June. On a monthly basis, wholesale prices were unchanged from June to July, after they ticked down 0.1% the previous month.

The figures follow the government's consumer price inflation report, released Wednesday, which also showed a modest cooling last month. Still, consumer prices have risen faster than wages for the past four months, underscoring the challenges many Americans have affording necessities such as rent and utilities. If prices continue to outpace wages, many consumers may be forced to dial back their spending in the coming months.

Excluding the volatile food and energy categories, core wholesale inflation dropped to 4.2% in July compared with a year earlier, down from 4.7% in June. On a monthly basis, core prices 0.2%, down from 0.4% from May to June.

After falling in early July, gas prices then rose later that month and in early August, threatening to push inflation back up when August figures are reported next month.

"The soft (producer prices) reading for July points to reduced inflationary pressure for businesses in coming months," said Ben Ayers, senior economist at Nationwide. "While the renewed rise in fuel costs is concerning, input costs beyond energy are cooling."

Last month's cooling gives Federal Reserve officials more leeway to avoid a rate hike when it meets next in September. Fed officials are debating whether they should raise their key interest rate to combat inflation, or keep it unchanged in hopes that inflation continues to cool on its own.

Wholesale prices can offer an early look at where consumer inflation might be headed. Economists also

watch it because some of its components, notably healthcare and financial services, flow into the Fed's preferred inflation gauge — the personal consumption expenditures, or PCE, index. That price index will be released in about two weeks.

The PCE index uses data from the consumer price index as well. With both those reports now released, economists forecast that when the Fed's preferred gauge is issued Aug. 26, it will show yearly core inflation likely remained unchanged in July, at about 3.3%, unlike both the consumer and producer price indexes, which have slowed a bit. That could raise concerns among some Fed officials that inflation is too far above the central bank's target of 2% and showing little sign of easing.

Fed officials are considering whether to hike rates after leaving them unchanged so far this year. Last week, the government said employers actually cut jobs in July, a sign of economic weakness that could discourage the central bank from raising borrowing costs.

Nigel Farage faces off against Count Binface in special election that's been denounced as a stunt

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Nigel Farage, leader of the anti-immigration party Reform UK, had hoped a special election Thursday for his Parliament seat would help quell awkward questions about his finances.

But with the major parties refusing to field candidates in the election, voters in a small seaside resort outside London are choosing between a man with eyes on the prime minister's office and a random assortment of candidates, led by a man wearing a trash can on his head.

Farage triggered the vote last month when he quit his seat in the hope that it would put to bed questions about his finances and result in a resounding victory over his main political rivals from the Labour and Conservative parties. He said he would let voters judge him in a "people versus the establishment" contest.

But his political foes described the move as a stunt and opted not to play ball. Farage is instead facing opponents like Count Binface, a political satirist posing as a comic space alien with a keen interest in earthly matters, including the positioning of a hand dryer in the men's toilet in a pub in west London.

While Farage is widely expected to win the race, questions about the millions of pounds in donations that he had received will persist.

Record number of candidates standing in Clacton

The election is a novelty with a record 34 candidates, including Howling Laud Hope of The Official Monster Raving Loony Party and Marcus White from the Everyone is God Party. They have pounded the streets of Clacton over the past few weeks as they seek to win the support of around 80,000 voters.

Given the numbers standing, Clacton residents will be presented with a ballot paper around 3 feet long (around 1 meter). That's not going to be easy to navigate.

Turnout is widely expected to be low as it often is in special elections. In the July 2024 general election, Farage faced eight rivals and garnered 21,225 votes, or 46.2% of the total. Turnout was 58.7%.

This election is taking place during the summer holidays when thousands of voters will be far away from Clacton. It's also taking place during another U.K. heatwave, which could prompt many to opt against making the trip to the polling station.

Election isn't the one Farage was planning

Farage, who in 2024 was elected to Parliament at his eighth attempt in the strongly Brexit -backing town, has for months been facing what he considers to be unfair scrutiny of his finances.

Parliament's standards watchdog is investigating an undeclared donation of 5 million pounds (\$6.7 million) to Farage in 2024 from Christopher Harborne, a Thailand-based cryptocurrency billionaire. Farage says he didn't need to declare the money because it was a personal gift he used to fund his security and came before he was elected.

However, newly elected lawmakers must declare gifts worth more than 300 pounds (\$400) received in the previous year if they are related to political activities.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 68 of 69

When he stood down on July 7, he described the scrutiny as an “establishment hit job” and a media-driven “witch-hunt.”

His decision to stand down put a pause to the parliamentary investigation, but if he wins on Thursday, as most pollsters expect, it is set to start again.

If he's found to have breached Parliament's rules, then he could face a recall petition in Clacton, which may lead to another special election later this year, costing the British taxpayer hundreds of thousands of pounds more. The difference is that in that one, the other parties would choose to stand.

Farage's decision came weeks after Andy Burnham returned to Parliament in a special election in the Makerfield constituency near Manchester. That campaign shone a positive spotlight on Burnham, triggering a chain of events that saw him become Britain's prime minister a few weeks later following the resignation of Keir Starmer.

Any hope that Farage had that the Clacton campaign would be similarly positive for him was dashed when the other political parties failed to play ball and he was left standing against the likes of Count Biface.

Biface leads the alternatives

Under Biface's black cape, trash can and ample body armor that looks straight out of a low-budget sci-fi film, is a middle-aged comedian named Jon Harvey trying to keep his cool during a sweaty summer.

He has been a regular candidate in high-profile elections before, having previously stood against then prime ministers Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak.

He says his repeated candidacies are aimed at promoting the beauties of Britain's centuries-old democracy where even the most high-profile politicians are above no one — including someone from his fictional native planet of Sigma IX.

Joke candidates are a long-standing and cherished tradition in British elections so long as they meet the rules and pay the deposit of 500 pounds (\$675) required of all those standing. They only get it back if they muster 5% of the votes cast. In his most recent run, against Burnham in Makerfield, the 5,000-year-old Biface got 95 votes, or 0.2% of the total.

There is an expectation that he will do a lot better in Clacton. Many of the voters of the other political parties have been lending him their support, partly in the hope of embarrassing Farage.

Given the numbers standing, the result is not expected until breakfast time Friday.

Judge postpones hearing over whether Tate brothers should stay in custody as they fight extradition

By DAVID FISCHER Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — A federal judge in Miami has postponed a hearing over whether social media influencers Andrew and Tristan Tate should remain in custody as they fight extradition to the United Kingdom, where the brothers are accused of rape and sex trafficking.

U.S. Magistrate Lauren Louis had been scheduled to hear arguments from both sides on Thursday before determining if the brothers, who have repeatedly denied wrongdoing, should stay in jail or be released during what could be a monthslong extradition process.

Louis granted a defense request to move the hearing to Aug. 27. Lawyers for the Tates said they needed more time to respond to prosecutors' arguments.

The Tates have remained in a federal detention center in Miami since making a brief court appearance two days after their July 18 arrest. Their attorneys have argued the Tates' high profile makes it nearly impossible for them to flee and that they regularly post updates about their locations on social media.

The Tates have become some of the world's most polarizing internet personalities with their promotion of wealth, male dominance and misogyny through their social media empire. The new allegations are the latest in the Tates' long-running international legal saga spanning the U.S., Britain and Romania.

According to the U.S. Attorney's Office filing, the Tates should be detained pending their extradition hearing because they cannot overcome the strong presumption against bail in international extradition cases.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Aug. 14, 2026 ~ Vol. 27 - No. 070 ~ 69 of 69

The serious pending U.K. charges involving human trafficking and violent rapes and assaults against multiple victims, along with allegations in Romania that the Tates attempted to intimidate witnesses, present a clear public safety concern, prosecutors say.

While prosecutors call the brothers a flight risk, their attorneys said they have proved they are not by complying with all pretrial restrictions in Romania, where they are accused of luring women for sexual exploitation.

The U.K. has until mid-September to provide evidence to the State Department to support extradition, meaning the brothers could spend months in the Federal Detention Center in Miami before the proceedings are resolved, the defense motion says. No date has been set for an extradition hearing. They are being held in a special unit for their own protection.

Today in History: August 14, FDR signs Social Security Act

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Aug. 14, the 226th day of 2026. There are 139 days left in the year.

On Aug. 14, 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into law, ensuring income for elderly Americans and creating a federal unemployment insurance program.

In 1936, in front of an estimated 20,000 spectators, Rainey Bethea was hanged in Owensboro, Kentucky, in the last public execution in the United States.

In 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter, which detailed the postwar goals of the two nations.

In 1945, President Harry S. Truman announced that Imperial Japan had surrendered unconditionally, ending World War II.

In 1947, Pakistan gained independence from British rule.

In 1994, Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, the terrorist known as "Carlos the Jackal," was captured by French agents in Sudan.

In 1995, Shannon Faulkner officially became the first female cadet in the history of The Citadel, South Carolina's state military college. (However, Faulkner withdrew from the school less than a week later, citing the stress of her court fight, and her isolation among the male cadets.)

In 1997, an unrepentant Timothy McVeigh was formally sentenced to death for the Oklahoma City bombing. (McVeigh was executed by lethal injection in 2001.)

In 2009, Charles Manson follower Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, 60, convicted of trying to assassinate President Gerald Ford in 1975, was released from a Texas prison hospital after more than three decades behind bars.

In 2016, Usain Bolt became the first athlete to win the 100-meter dash in three consecutive Olympics, taking gold at the Summer Games in Rio.

In 2018, a 650-foot section of Genoa, Italy's Morandi highway bridge collapsed in a rainstorm, sending dozens of vehicles plunging to the ground and killing 43 people. The bridge was part of a major route linking northern Italy with the French Riviera.

In 2021, a 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, turning thousands of structures into rubble; Haiti's government put the death toll at more than 300,000, while a report commissioned by the U.S. government placed it between 46,000 and 85,000.

Today's Birthdays: Broadway lyricist Lee Adams ("Bye Bye Birdie") is 102. Country singer Connie Smith is 85. Comedian-actor Steve Martin is 81. Film director Wim Wenders is 81. Singer-musician Larry Graham is 80. Actor Susan Saint James is 80. Author Danielle Steel is 79. "Far Side" cartoonist Gary Larson is 76. Actor Carl Lumbly is 75. Olympic gold medal swimmer Debbie Meyer is 74. Actor Jackee Harry is 70. NASCAR Hall of Famer Rusty Wallace is 70. Actor Marcia Gay Harden is 67. Basketball Hall of Famer Earvin "Magic" Johnson is 67. Singer Sarah Brightman is 66. Actor Susan Olsen (TV: "The Brady Bunch") is 65. Actor Halle Berry is 60. Golfer Darren Clarke is 58. Actor Catherine Bell is 58. Actor Mila Kunis is 43. Actor Lamorne Morris is 43. Actor Marsai Martin is 22.