

Groton Daily Independent

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Community Calendar

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.; 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 Daily Independent

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

Monday, Aug. 17

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

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

Groton Area Staff Development Day

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

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

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

Tuesday, Aug. 18

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

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

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Groton Area Staff Development Day

Girls Soccer at Lennox, 4 p.m.

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Aug. 19

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

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

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

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1440

Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.

Mangione Pleads Guilty

Luigi Mangione pleaded guilty yesterday to federal stalking charges in the 2024 killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson in midtown Manhattan. He is set to be sentenced on Dec. 18 and could face up to life in prison.

The 28-year-old University of Pennsylvania graduate told the court he posed as an investor to confirm the location of UnitedHealthcare's annual conference, outside of which he ultimately shot 50-year-old Thompson. Mangione said he was motivated by years of struggling to navigate the health insurance system while suffering from severe back pain; prosecutors claim he was never a UnitedHealthcare customer. Evidence found on the scene included shell casings with "delay," "deny," and "depose" written on them—an apparent reference to criticism of how insurers handle claims.

Mangione's defense team has filed a motion to have murder and weapons charges in a separate state trial dismissed under New York's double jeopardy law. The state trial is currently scheduled to begin Sept. 8.

Trump takes White House ballroom construction to Supreme Court.

Trump officials yesterday petitioned the high court to allow the White House to resume its \$400M ballroom project. A lower court halted the project last week, ruling it requires congressional approval. The Trump administration says the project is a national security matter, citing the need for a more secure event space following incidents like the White House Correspondents' Association dinner shooting.

Separately, the Trump administration announced the arrest of a woman on felony charges for allegedly vandalizing the World War II Memorial in Washington, DC.

US missionary freed after nine months in captivity in Niger.

Kevin Rideout, 50, is in good health and back in US custody after being kidnapped by three armed individuals in Niger's capital city, Niamey, in October. As of this writing, no armed group has claimed responsibility and the details of Rideout's release are unknown. Niger has been ruled by a military junta since 2023 and has long faced attacks from militants linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State organization.

Jeff Bezos buys a minority stake in Liverpool FC.

A group of investors, including Bezos and Facebook cofounder Eduardo Saverin, bought around 30% of the Premier League club yesterday. The deal values the team at just over \$7B and marks the Amazon founder's first foray into sports ownership. It comes days after venture capitalist Joshua Kushner and former Disney CEO Bob Iger bought the Los Angeles Lakers for a record \$12.5B.

Spain removes remains of 11th-century kings as wildfires spread.

An emergency military unit temporarily relocated the remains of three kings and some historical paintings from a monastery threatened by a wildfire in northeastern Spain to a museum 50 miles south. The rescue operation comes as over 1.4 million acres have been burned by wildfires this year, fueled by record heat and persistent drought.

Over in Sicily, more than 700 flights have been canceled this week as Mount Etna—Europe's most active volcano—spews an unusually large amount of ash.

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Tiny satellite will listen for a faint whisper from the very early universe.

Researchers are developing a satellite the size of a carry-on suitcase to explore the period between the big bang and the appearance of the universe's first stars, according to a study published this week. The CosmoCube will orbit the far side of the moon to block interference from Earth as it searches for never-before-observed signals from hydrogen atoms in the early universe.

Italian police recover \$10M worth of paintings stolen in three-minute heist.

The paintings by Renoir, Cézanne, and Matisse were stolen from a private museum north of Parma, Italy, in March. Authorities yesterday said the works were recovered during searches ordered by prosecutors, but provided no further details. They also released security footage from the heist. Meanwhile, police in Brazil this week recovered eight Matisse illustrations stolen in December.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Lex K. in New York, New York.

"Yesterday, while heading to a dinner and running late, I went to grab a Citi Bike, but my Citi Bike app wasn't working. I was trying everything, getting more and more frustrated, and, in the heat, starting to get stressed. A guy rolled up on a Citi Bike and could see my frustration. He said, 'Here, take mine. I trust that you won't steal the bike.' I said, 'Are you sure?' He said, 'I am. Have a good evening.' I accepted with grace and gratitude and rode off to my appointment."

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Boys Soccer ties with Hot Springs, girls lose to Dakota Valley

Groton's boys soccer team opened its weekend with a hard-fought draw Friday, while the girls came up short in their matchup with Dakota Valley.

The Groton Area boys battled Hot Springs to a 2-2 tie at the Northern State University soccer complex in Aberdeen.

Ryder Schwan and Easton Weber accounted for Groton's two goals. Schwan also contributed an assist, while Logan Olson picked up the other assist for the Tigers.

Goalkeeper TC Schuster helped keep Groton in the match with eight saves as Hot Springs continued to apply pressure throughout the contest.

The Tigers were able to match Hot Springs offensively, with both teams finding the net twice before finishing the match deadlocked at 2-2.

In girls action, Groton Area fell to Dakota Valley, 10-2.

Brenna Imrie and Devan Locke scored the goals for Groton in the loss.

Despite being unable to slow Dakota Valley's offensive attack, the Tigers were able to break through for a pair of goals as Imrie and Locke each found the back of the net.

The girls will play Sioux Falls Christian today at 1 p.m. on the Groton Soccer Complex.



Girls Soccer
Groton Area hosts
SF Christian Chargers
Saturday, Aug. 15, 1 p.m.



Groton
Area
Tigers
Groton, SD

GDILIVE



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Groton Daily Independent



For more info: GDILIVE.COM

Today's game on GDILIVE.COM sponsored by

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**Jacobson Electric
John Sieh Agency
The Meat House**

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Groton Area's Easton Weber kicks down a ball during the first half of Friday's game against Hot Springs at the Northern State University soccer complex. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's Ethan Kroll jumps to head the ball during the first half of Friday's game against Hot Springs at the Northern State University soccer complex. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's Jace Hofer races toward the goal ahead of Hot Spring's Rowan Reineke during the second half of Friday's game at the Northern State University soccer complex. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's TC Schuster narrowly missed the penalty kick from Hot Spring's Rowan Reineke during the second half of Friday's game at the Northern State University soccer complex. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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Groton Area's Easton Weber kicks the ball, scoring the Tigers second goal of the game. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's Logan Olson heads the ball toward the goal after a corner kick during the second half of Friday's game at the Northern State University soccer complex. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's Ryder Schwan keeps the ball in bound during the first half of Friday's game at the Northern State University soccer complex. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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Groton Area's Tori Schuster grabs the ball to keep Dakota Valley from scoring during Friday's game at the Northern State University soccer complex. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's Brenna Imrie passes the goalie and defender to score during the first half of Friday's game at the Northern State University soccer complex. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



The Groton Area's team celebrates Brenna Imrie's goal during the first half of Friday's game at the Northern State University soccer complex. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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Groton Area's McKenna Tietz races down the sideline ahead of Dakota Valley's Isabel Bradshaw during Friday's game at the Northern State University soccer complex. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's Rowan Hanson and Devan Locke celebrate Locke's first varsity goal during the second half of Friday's game at the Northern State University soccer complex. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Groton Area's Devan Locke prepares to kick the ball, scoring her first varsity goal during the second half of Friday's game at the Northern State University soccer complex. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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Highway Patrol Sturgis Rally Daily Information Compiled from 6 a.m. Saturday, August 8, 2026, to 6 a.m. Friday, August 14, 2026

Item	Sturgis	Rapid City District	District Total	Last Year to Date
DUI Arrests	70	24	94	103
Misd Drug Arrests	137	36	173	209
Felony Drug Arrests	65	18	83	83
Custodial Arrests	136	50	186	N/A
Total Citations	669	657	1,326	1195
Total Warnings	2,373	1,375	3,748	3672
Cash Seized	\$3,116.00	0.00	\$3,116.00	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	12	7	19	24
Injury Accidents	13	19	32	58
Fatal Accidents	1	2	3	4
# of Fatalities	1	2	3	4

Fatal Crashes:

None

Injury Crashes:

At 9:24 a.m. Thursday, U.S. Highway 85, mile marker 30, Deadwood: A 2000 Harley-Davidson motorcycle, operated by a 57-year-old male, was southbound on U.S. 85 near mile marker 30. The driver lost control of the motorcycle. The driver was transported to Lead-Deadwood Monument Health with non-life-threatening injuries.

At 9:49 a.m. Thursday, U.S. Highway 85, mile marker 32: A 2018 Harley-Davidson motorcycle, operated by a 64-year-old male, was driving northbound on U.S. 85 near mile marker 32. The motorcycle had a tire failure and the driver lost control. The driver was separated from the motorcycle. He was wearing a helmet and sustained non-life-threatening injuries. He was transported to Spearfish Monument Health.

At 11:18am, Thursday, Wildlife Loop mile marker 8, Custer State Park: A 2013 Harley-Davidson motorcycle, operated by a 72-year-old male, was traveling northbound on Wildlife Loop near mile marker 8 behind other motorcycles. As the motorcycles in front slowed, the driver lost control of the motorcycle, and it overturned. The driver sustained minor injuries.

At 12:18 p.m. Thursday, Interstate 190, Exit 1A, Rapid City: A 2024 Indian motorcycle, operated by a 65-year-old male, was traveling northbound on Interstate 190 with a 55-year-old female passenger. As the driver was taking Exit 1A to travel westbound on Interstate 90, he failed to negotiate the curve and lost control of the motorcycle. The motorcycle left the roadway, and the passenger was separated from the motorcycle. The passenger was transported to Rapid City Monument Health with non-life-threatening injuries. The driver was not injured.

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At 1:56 p.m. Thursday, South Dakota Highway 87, mile marker 75: A 2005 Harley-Davidson motorcycle, operated by a 20-year-old male, was traveling southbound on SD 87 near mile marker 75. The driver lost control of the motorcycle while negotiating a curve in the roadway. The motorcycle overturned and the driver was separated from the motorcycle. He was wearing a helmet and sustained non-life-threatening injuries.

At 20:28 p.m. Thursday, South Dakota 79, mile marker 112: A 2016 Freightliner semi hauling a trailer, operated by a 33-year-old male, was northbound on SD 79 near the intersection with SD 34. The semi stopped and backed up into a 2021 Chevrolet Traverse, operated by a 28-year-old female. The semi pushed the Chevrolet Traverse into a 2023 Indian motorcycle, operated by a 63-year-old male, and a 2024 Indian motorcycle, operated by a 23-year-old male. Both motorcycle drivers sustained minor injuries and were transported to Sturgis Monument Health.

All information released so far is only preliminary.

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

Data as of 08/13/2026

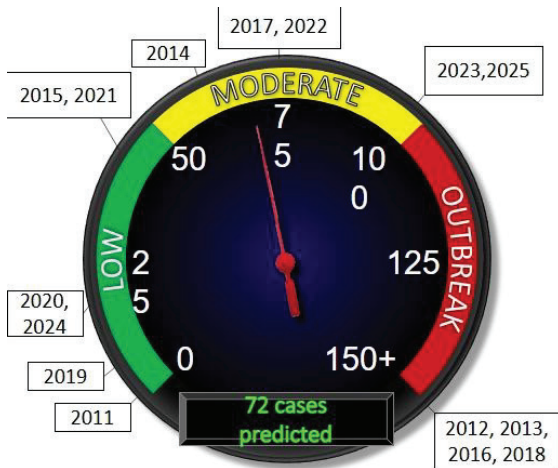
Division of Disease Prevention and Control

South Dakota Mosquito

SD West Nile Virus

- 5 human cases reported
 - 3 non-neuroinvasive cases
 - 2 neuroinvasive cases
 - 0 deaths
- 0 human viremic blood donor detections
- 5 counties with a positive mosquito pool
 - Brown, Codington, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha

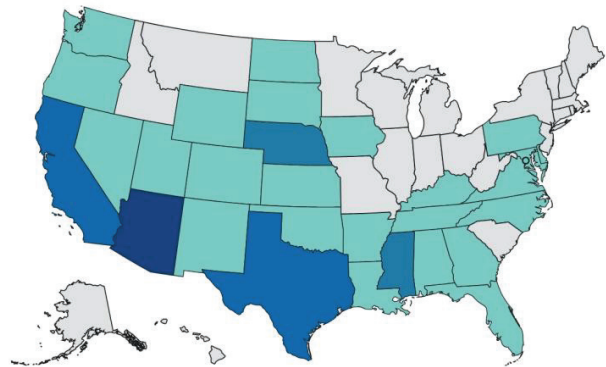
Current WNV SD Case Prediction:



US West Nile Virus

- 181 human cases reported
 - 129 of which are neuroinvasive

WNV Human Disease Cases Reported by State of Residence:



1 to 5 6 to 8 9 to 25 >25

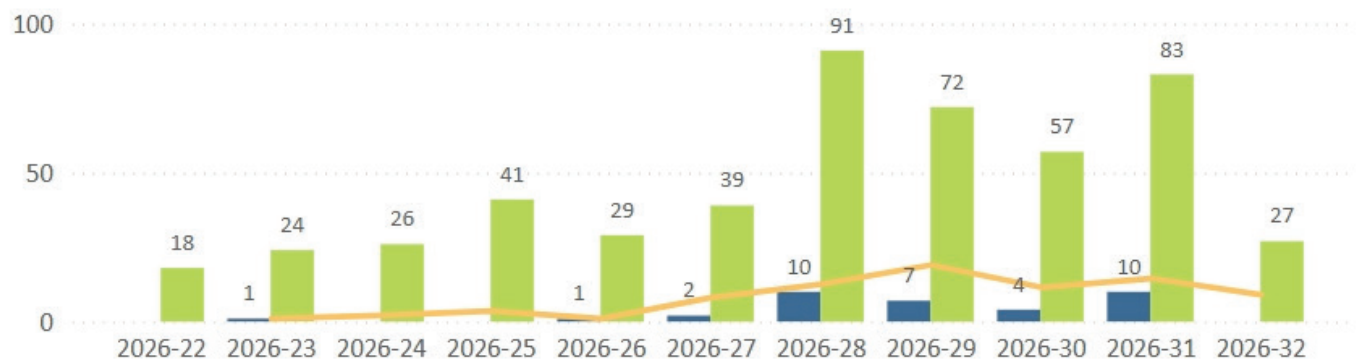
Data compiled from: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. West Nile Virus: Current Year Data and Maps. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/west-nile-virus/data-maps/current-year-data.html>

SD Mosquito Surveillance Summary for 2026

- Total sites collecting mosquitos: 59
- *Culex* Species Collected: 34,887
- Total mosquito pools tested: 542
- Percent positivity: 6.48%

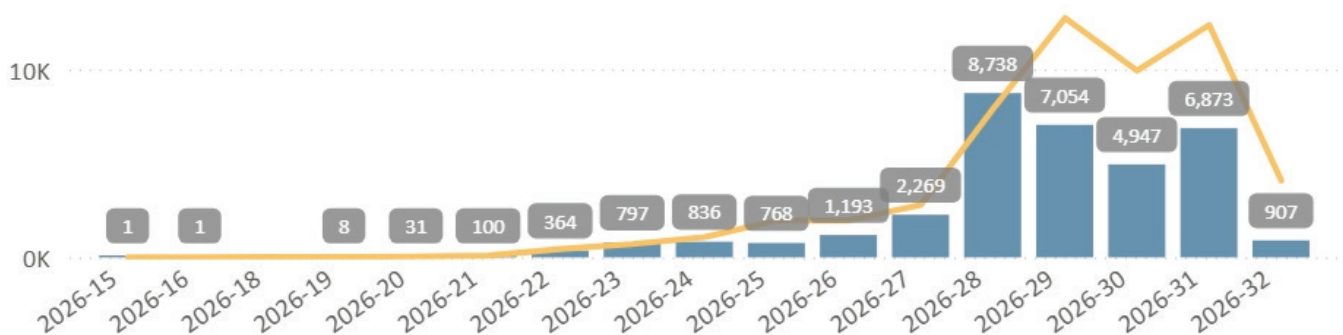
Number of Mosquito Pools Tested by MMWR Week and Status

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



Culex Mosquitoes Collected by MMWR Week

● Culex Species Collected ● 5Y Median Culex Count



Name Released in Pennington County Fatal Crash

What: Single-vehicle fatal crash

Where: Deerfield Road, 1/2 mile north of Hill City, South Dakota

When: 3:34 p.m., Monday, August 10, 2026

Driver 1: Joshua Jordan Cornelius, 46-year-old male from Hollandale, Minnesota, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2008 Harley-Davidson FLHR Touring

Helmet Used: No

Pennington County, S.D.- A Minnesota man died Monday in a single-vehicle crash near Hill City, South Dakota.

Preliminary crash information indicates Joshua Jordan Cornelius, the driver of a 2008 Harley-Davidson motorcycle, was traveling northbound on Deerfield Road near

Marshal Gulch Road. Cornelius passed a vehicle and lost control when returning to his lane. The motorcycle entered the northbound ditch and rolled. Cornelius sustained fatal injuries.

The investigation is ongoing. All information released is preliminary.

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

Name Released in Custer County Fatal Crash

What: Single-vehicle fatal crash

Where: U.S. Highway 16A at mile marker 27, 4 miles east of Custer, South Dakota

When: 3:22 p.m., Monday, August 10, 2026

Driver 1: Robert Thomas Ryan, 63-year-old male from Durham, Connecticut, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2002 Yamaha Super Hawk

Helmet Used: Yes

Custer County, S.D.- A Connecticut man died Monday in a single-vehicle crash near Custer, South Dakota.

Preliminary crash information indicates Robert Thomas Ryan, the driver of a 2002 Yamaha Super Hawk, was traveling westbound on U.S. Highway 16A near mile marker 27. Ryan became separated from his motorcycle when the Yamaha left the roadway, entered the westbound ditch, and overturned. He sustained fatal injuries.

The investigation is ongoing. All information released is preliminary.

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

AGENDA

BROWN COUNTY PLANNING/ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETINGS

TUESDAY, AUGUST 18, 2026 – 7:00 PM

BROWN COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX in the BASEMENT COMMUNITY ROOM
(STAIRWAY AND ELEVATOR ACCESS)

- I. **Call to Order:** for Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission
- II. **Roll Call:** Stan Beckler, David North, James Meyers, Carrie Weisenburger, Paul Johnson, Joel Wiedebush and County Commissioner Mike Gage (who serves on this Board per SDCL 11-2-2).
- III. **Opportunity for Public Comment if any.** Anyone may speak for up to three (3) minutes on any item that is not on this Agenda. A total of ten (10) minutes is set aside for this item if needed.
- IV. **Approval of August 18, 2026, Agenda:** Motion: 1st _____ 2nd _____
- V. **Approval of July 21, 2026, Minutes:** Motion: 1st _____ 2nd _____

ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT (BOA)

- VI. **Old Business:**
 - 1) **Sign-up sheet:** On the table by the door entrance, there is a Sign-up Sheet. Please legibly sign in and mark YES or NO if you want to speak to the Board on any Agenda Item.
 - 2) **Permits:** Anyone that has submitted a Variance Petition (VP) or a Conditional Use Petition (CUP) to the Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA) is still required to get their required PERMITS from the Zoning Office before starting their project if their Petition gets approved. Penalties may be assessed by Ordinance when starting projects without proper permits in place.
- VII. **New Business:** Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission as Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA).
 - 1) **Conditional Use Petition (CUP)** in a Heavy Industrial District (H-I) described as “Siebrecht Substation Addition” in the NW1/4 of Section 36-T123N-R64W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (421 135th Street SW; Aberdeen Twp.) for a 40’ x 50’ warehouse.
 - 2) **Variance to Lot Size** in an Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) described as proposed Lot 1, “Ben and Alyssa Gustafson First Addition” in the NE1/4 of the NE1/4 of Section 14-T125N-R60W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (12013 411th Avenue; Claremont Twp.) to allow Lot 1 (9.19±

acres) to be smaller than 40 acres and remain zoned Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) per Brown County Ordinance 4.0605.

- 3) **Conditional Use Petition (CUP)** in a Highway Commercial District (HC) described as Lot 1, "Ronnie's Way Addition" in the NW1/4 of Section 17-T123N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (2520 8th Avenue NE; Aberdeen Twp.) for a new structure for a small business, dining establishment, laundromat and gaming establishment.
- 4) **Conditional Use Petition (CUP)** in a Residential District (R-1) described as Lot 2, "Ronnie's Way Addition" in the NW1/4 of Section 17-T123N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (2620 8th Avenue NE; Aberdeen Twp.) for a new structure for a small business, dining establishment, laundromat and gaming establishment.
- 5) **Conditional Use Petition (CUP)** in a Heavy Industrial District (H-I) described as "Outlot A" in the NW1/4 of Section 35-T124N-R64W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (12948 386th Avenue; Lincoln Twp.) for a new office roof.

VIII. **Other Business:**

Completed as Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA) & going to Planning Commission

AGENDA

BROWN COUNTY PLANNING/ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETINGS

TUESDAY, AUGUST 18, 2026 – 7:00 PM

*BROWN COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX in the BASEMENT COMMUNITY ROOM
(STAIRWAY AND ELEVATOR ACCESS)*

PLANNING COMMISSION

I. **Old Business:**

II. **New Business:** *Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission as [Planning Commission](#).*

- 10) **Rezone Petition** for a (27.90± acre) property described as Lot 2, "Ronnie's Way Addition" in the NW1/4 of Section 17-T123N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (2620 8th Avenue NE; Aberdeen Twp.) to be rezoned from Residential District (R-1) to Highway Commercial District (HC).
- 11) **Preliminary & Final Plat** for conveyance purposes on a property described as "Locken Estate Addition" in the S1/2 of Section 5-T122N-R62W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (13660 & 13680 395th Avenue; Gem Twp.).

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- 12) **Preliminary & Final Plat** for conveyance purposes on a property described as “Ben and Alyssa Gustafson First Addition” in the NE1/4 of the NE1/4 of Section 14-T125N-R60W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (12013 411th Avenue; Claremont Twp.).
 - 13) **Ordinance Amendment to Comprehensive Plan** and correct existing page number errors.
 - 14) **Ordinance Amendments to Title 4 Zoning Ordinances** in Chapter 4.01 Definitions; Chapter 4.06 Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P); and Chapter 4.22 Administrative Procedures.
 - 15) **Discussion on Use and Structures of a parcel**; cost-sharing; bringing into compliance. Johnson’s Outlot 1 of “Johnson’s Outlot 1” in the NE1/4 Section of 22-T122N-R64W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (13945 386th Ave) 3.0 acres in Highway Commercial District (HC).
 - 16) **Discussion on monthly packets** on our Brown County Planning/Zoning department website; privacy of customer’s information; privacy of office information; open meeting rules.
- III. **Other Business:**
- IV. **Executive Session:** (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2).
- V. **Motion to Adjourn:** 1st _____ 2nd _____



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Q&A: Thune says Republicans can hold their majority — if they stop fighting each other

BY MAKENZIE HUBER

SIOUX FALLS — U.S. Senate Majority Leader John Thune's Republican Party faces midterm elections amid economic anxiety, high gas prices and a war with Iran.

But Thune, of South Dakota, said the biggest threat to the party's Senate majority might be Republicans themselves.

Thune told South Dakota Searchlight and other journalists Friday during an event at Southeast Technical College that Republicans need to "turn our fire on Democrats, not on each other."

Thune has been under fire from Republican President Donald Trump for not eliminating the filibuster, the Senate rule that requires the votes of at least 60 senators to end debate. Trump has repeatedly demanded the termination of the filibuster to help pass his SAVE America Act, which would require proof of U.S. citizenship when registering to vote and a photo ID when casting a ballot.

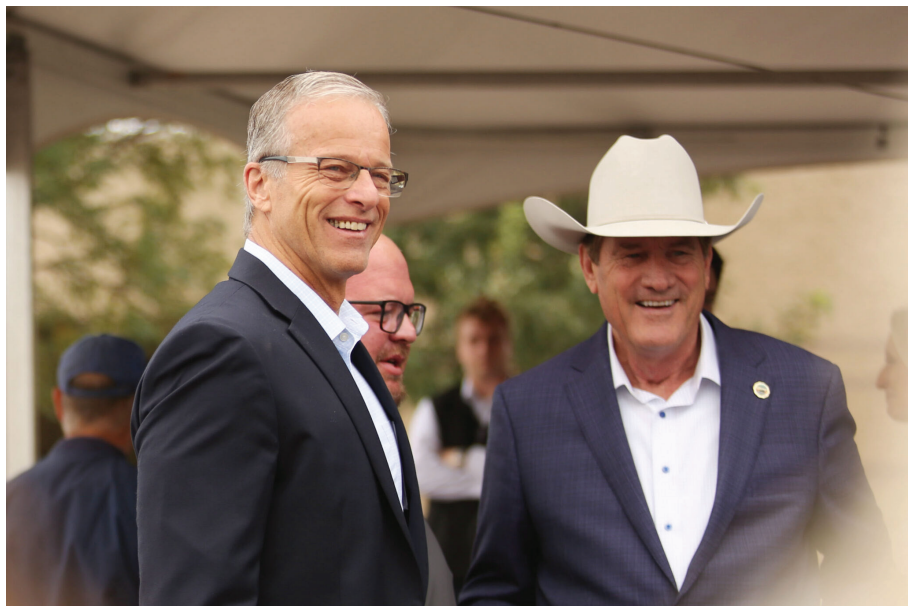
Republicans hold 53 of the seats in the Senate, and there are 33 seats up for election on Nov. 3. Thune doesn't face reelection until 2028.

The following question-and-answer session between Thune and several reporters has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: How much is the war with Iran making your job harder?

It's complicated on a lot of levels and certainly going into an election year with the politics around that. If you look at the things that have been achieved, there have been some great accomplishments there, but ultimately the way people are going to judge this is: How is it affecting the economy, how is it affecting gas prices, is the Strait of Hormuz open?

I think that's got to be the singular, clear-eyed focus of the White House administration right now — ensuring that we get the shipping lanes open and get the fuel moving again and ensure that our economy here in the U.S. is not suffering as a result of this.



U.S. Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-South Dakota, left, speaks with attendees including South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden, right, during a groundbreaking on Aug. 14, 2026, for a construction project at Southeast Technical College in Sioux Falls. (Photo by Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

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Q: Do you get the sense there'll be an improvement before the midterms?

I hope so. I think they continue to, or they are trending toward a deal on that to get the strait open. But these are really complicated issues and you're dealing with a regime that's dishonest and is not going to play by the rules that the rest of the world community plays by, so you've got to be tough. I think the president has leaned into this in ways that puts a lot of pressure on the regime, but the regime is not going to go quietly. I think there are challenges ahead, but I also feel like they're on a path toward landing something that will at least get things moving again and hopefully lessen some of the pressure on fuel prices here.

Q: Can the Republican Party maintain its majority in the midterm elections?

I think the headwinds that are there, can it improve? It can. Can it get worse? Maybe. We're facing typical midterm election political headwinds and some economic headwinds, because people are concerned about the economy and costs and everything else, which they should be since those are pocketbook issues. That's what most elections are really about.

I still think in spite of those headwinds, we've got really good candidates in the right places at the right time. You look at a state like Michigan, things really broke our way. Minnesota broke our way. The Democrats in both places nominated far-left candidates. We have candidates who are really, really accomplished people with a message I think is really going to resonate with voters in those states. Those are hard states, but we need to be on offense in a few places and we are in Michigan, as we'll be in Minnesota, New Hampshire, Georgia.

We're defending some ground too and the places where we're defending there's a firewall that if we don't keep certain states, we'll lose control of the Senate: Maine, Ohio, Iowa, Alaska — that's the firewall of the Senate.

If we could win one of those races around the country, that obviously would be a huge success too, but it's a tough year. These midterms always are. This one's obviously complicated by some factors that we simply don't control, but we're doing everything we can within our control: recruiting a good crop of candidates, raising the resources that are necessary for them to get their messages out, and hopefully succeeding in the ground game, which is the "get out the vote" thing that you have to do come Election Day if you're going to win elections. That's harder, especially for low propensity voters who typically don't vote in a non-presidential year. We've got to get a lot of those Trump voters out, so there's a real effort being made.

Q: Can you speak to your evolving relationship with President Trump and about him declining to say whether he supports you continuing as Senate majority leader because of your decisions in that role, including retaining the filibuster?

I take all of that with a grain of salt. There is a natural dynamic between any White House and the Senate. Most presidents, in my experience, don't like the Senate and view it as an obstacle to getting the things they want to get done. But we obviously have a different way of doing things by design, which makes it harder sometimes. The House in a lot of ways is an extension of the White House. It's a majoritarian body, while the Senate is a non-majoritarian body. It's designed to give a voice to the minority in this country, so it's harder to get things done because most things require a supermajority.

Those are the facts I have to live with, and I have very honest conversations with the president. He is entitled to his views about the things that we're doing in the Senate. I would certainly expect that he has a way of doing things. He's got a business model that's full speed ahead, and I know that sometimes in the Senate, just by virtue of the reality on the ground that we have to deal with, we have to pump the brakes occasionally on that. And that's not something that obviously he probably is good with, but nevertheless we get a lot done and if you look at the record of accomplishment, I think it's second to none.

We can't get everything done because it's a function of votes. I tell people that the math is the math, and the math on the issue that he cares the most about right now isn't going to change, at least not until after the election. Then we'll see from there. We get along fine and work together, but if he wants somebody else in the job he's welcome to that view.

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Q: Do you worry that President Trump's critical view of the body and fellow Republicans right now will be a hindrance ahead of the midterms?

What I've said, and I make this point quite regularly, is that we are less than 90 days away from an election. The election ought to be painting a contrast between us and the Democrats and not creating conflicts with fellow Republicans.

I've tried to deliver that message in the work that we're doing right now, the work we're focused on keeping, protecting and preserving our majority in the Senate — maybe even expanding it if we could get a win in a state or two. But I am a clear-eyed realist about what we have to do, what's in front of us and the best way for us to be successful, which is to have everybody pull in the same direction and turn our fire on Democrats, not on each other.

That's a message I deliver regularly and it seems to be getting across at least on some level, but I think it's in everybody's best interest — if you want to have a Republican Senate majority after the election — is not to have us turning fire on each other, but drawing contrasts with Democrats, and there are plenty to draw.

If you want to have a debate about the future of this country, you can really do it because there is a clear division in my view between the two visions of where the parties are headed and where the candidates are headed. I mean, look at Michigan and Minnesota, look at some of these states where you've got these far-left, radical Democrats winning elections or winning primaries at least. I think that represents a great opportunity to contrast with them in the fall, and that's where we ought to be focused.

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

Southeast Tech and Thune honor late US senator with \$18 million manufacturing building

Majority leader says 'I wouldn't be where I am without Jim Abdnor'

BY MAKENZIE HUBER

SIOUX FALLS — Southeast Technical College's newest building will train welders and machinists — and carry the name of a South Dakota politician who spent his career championing rural workforce development.

Local, state and federal officials gathered Friday for the groundbreaking of the \$18 million James Abdnor Center for Advanced Manufacturing in northwestern Sioux Falls.

The building is set to open in fall 2028, funded by \$6 million from the state, \$6.5 million in federal Housing and Urban Development funds and millions more in private contributions.

U.S. Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-South Dakota, helped secure the federal funding. Thune and Abdnor met after one of Thune's high



A rendering of the future James Abdnor Center for Advanced Manufacturing in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. (Courtesy of Southeast Technical College)

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school basketball games in the 1970s. Abdnor later hired him to work in his U.S. Senate office, became a mentor and was his "biggest advocate" when Thune ran for public office, Thune said.

"I wouldn't be where I am without Jim Abdnor," Thune said. "There's no question about that."

Abdnor was raised in Kennebec, served in World War II and was elected to state and federal offices including the U.S. Senate. He lost that seat in 1986 to Tom Daschle, a Democrat who went on to become majority leader. Thune ousted Daschle in 2004 and became Senate majority leader in 2025. Abdnor died in 2012.

Southeast Technical College President Cory Clasemann said the building was named for Abdnor because of Thune's role in securing funding and Abdnor's lifelong support for "the next generation of leaders" in South Dakota.

The college's construction, HVAC, mechanical engineering, plumbing and welding programs are all at capacity. Clasemann said the new building and expanded lab space will triple manufacturing program capacity and double the number of welding booths. Last year, Clasemann estimated the new building and a planned expansion will bring the total cost of the project to \$24 million.

Advanced manufacturing, Clasemann said, accounts for one in 10 jobs in South Dakota and is expected to grow its workforce by 6% through 2032.

"Manufacturing is not a huge program right now, but we know it's one that needs to be bigger, and it's only been limited by capacity at this point," Clasemann said.

Southeast Tech requested \$8 million from the state before this year's legislative session. Gov. Larry Rhoden said the state cut the contribution to \$6 million due to budget constraints. Rhoden, who has owned a custom welding business for decades, praised the project.

"I've always believed that there's dignity in working with your hands and in making something from start to finish," Rhoden said. "There's something special about being able to step back at the end of the day and see what your hands have built, what you fix or what you made better."

Rhoden said the new building and other trade school investments fill industry workforce needs while giving students "practical hands-on education."

Clasemann said the college is still fundraising to fill a \$2 million gap left by the state. Several private entities have contributed, including \$1 million from Sioux Falls-based Marmon Energy and \$775,000 from the Forward Sioux Falls campaign, a joint venture of the Greater Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce and the Sioux Falls Area Development Foundation.



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

Podcast: Ep. 29: SD House leader says 'third camp' of Republicans arose during primary to 'trash the conservative leadership'



House Majority Leader Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, speaks to the media during a legislative leadership press conference in January 2026. (Photo by Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

ODENBACH: And what we saw is essentially, in my opinion, a third camp arise that was pushed as the Doeden campaign came into force, where their whole, you know, motive was to trash the conservative leadership that we already had and tear us down in an effort to build him up.

O'BRIEN: We're back with another episode of the Searchlight Report, a podcast from South Dakota Searchlight that brings you up to date on policy and politics in the Mount Rushmore State. I'm your host, Meghan O'Brien.

After July's runoff election for the Republican nomination for governor, Republican political commentator Pat Powers joined the podcast. He's been writing the South Dakota War College blog for two decades.

Powers said the results of the runoff, which Aberdeen businessman Toby Doeden lost to Governor Larry Rhoden, were a setback for the populist movement in the party. He said the earlier losses of 16 incumbent Republican lawmakers in the June primary were a similar sign.

You just heard from state House Majority Leader Scott Odenbach. While outsiders might see two factions of the Republican Party, he says a third group arose during this year's primary season.

Odenbach is a Republican from Spearfish. He was elected to his leadership position in 2024, after a major turnover in the Legislature. Many of the new lawmakers elected that year were opponents of a proposed carbon-capture pipeline that would have been routed through the eastern part of the state.

Odenbach joined Searchlight Reporter Joshua Haiar to talk about this year's primary results and what they mean.

HAIAR: Republican House Majority Leader Scott Odenbach, thank you for giving me your time.

ODENBACH: Thank you, Josh, for the opportunity.

HAIAR: So you disagreed with the idea that the recent primary elections and the more recent runoff were a rejection or referendum on populism. That's what one of our recent guests, Pat Powers had suggested. I'm wondering if you could start this interview out by defining populism and how you see the camps differing out in Pierre.

ODENBACH: Well, I mean, I think that oftentimes folks that are, let's say more on the left take any idea that they don't like and they call it populist, and it's easy to slap a label on something and then maybe you can, you know, take digs at the idea.

And so, you know, I think any issue, frankly, can become a populist issue. If, like we saw with Senate Bill 201, for example, the legislature gets it really wrong and the people decide to take matters into their own hands.

So, you know, in one sense, the strict definition, you know, do we represent the populace? I mean our

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state's motto is "Under God the people rule." So I think we all have a duty to be populists in that sense of the meaning. And you know, I think as far as giving you a concrete definition of populism, that varies depending on the user of the term.

HAJAR: How about defining these camps then out in Pierre?

ODENBACH: Defining the camps in Pierre, well, I mean, I think you've got, you know, a number of folks who historically have identified themselves as moderates, and you've historically had a number of folks who identified themselves as conservatives. And God knows I saw that plenty being majority leader over the last couple of years, and I've worked really hard to try to, you know, continue our, our efforts, our agenda to pass good things in Pierre, and I think we did that.

But I think also what you saw the last couple of years is, you know, we had built up — with a lot of the things that happened with the carbon capture pipelines and other issues — there was obviously quite a grassroots movement going on. Conservatives or folks, you know, identified as conservatives, me being one, obviously had taken the leadership spots in the legislature.

And you know that would be what I think most observers would identify as the two camps, shall we say. I try to always use the term "thoughtful conservative." I think it's important if you're going to espouse a policy position to be able to articulate why and to make your argument and to hopefully do it in a friendly way where you have battles of ideas, you know, without just totally trashing the people.

And what we saw is essentially, in my opinion, a third camp arise that was pushed as the Doeden campaign came into force, where their whole, you know, motive was to trash the conservative leadership that we already had and tear us down in an effort to build him up and build up his campaign. And so what, what Speaker Hansen and I really saw and got squeezed between, if you will, over the last couple of years was we had supporters of Dusty Johnson in this four-way governor race, wanting nothing to get done so that they could say, "Oh see, Rhoden and Hansen did nothing. I'll have to ride in and fix it."

And then we had supporters of Doden saying, you know, all manner of things against us, accusing us of not being conservatives, being RINOs, you know, whatever, and that he was the true conservative. And everybody that was doing those things, you know, had ulterior motives to try to lift up their guy for the governor primary.

HAJAR: And so I'm hearing you say it wasn't maybe even a rejection of anything, rather a consequence of this like subdivision. Is that the case? And if not, what was being rejected, you know, like that's what Powers would point to, right, is this primary had a higher turnout than the one where you guys had seized control. Isn't something being rejected?

ODENBACH: Right. Well, so the other thing important to keep in mind is this is the first time where we essentially had, and you'd have to admit, a successful effort to buy the legislature. I mean, you take a look at the Republican Forward PAC, and it's just a fact that was administered or run here by Representative Rehfeldt out of Sioux Falls. You know, when they filed their campaign finance reports pre-primary, their first one, if I recall, was like \$650,000. Then you had a PAC that was formed, and the name escapes me now. I think it was initially funded by Meta and folks who are in favor of data center development, and I know just like in District 31, that PAC alone put roughly \$30,000 to \$35,000 backing Senator Deibert. And their, you know, their sole issue really was, was the development of data centers.

And so as against that, you know, when you talk about, well, these candidates were rejected, or as you're saying, Powers says, well, the populists were rejected. Well, in part, a lot of them had aligned themselves, whether the Freedom Caucus people or whatever, with Doeden and his campaign and his PAC Dakota First Action. Which, you know, he later, I guess, had disavowed. He said, I'm not directly engaged with it, whatever.

But I think a lot of those candidates, you know, there was talk, oh, they're going to spend \$2 million helping legislative candidates, and essentially when it came to the campaign, they did nothing except, you know, send out postcards with Doeden on it and many of us on their postcards attempting to essentially grift off of our, you know, goodwill in our districts.

And so, you know, you had the Freedom Caucus essentially go down to, you know, a party of one now,

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so that's gone. And, you know, Liberty Tree, my PAC, we've been engaged now for three separate cycles and maybe we spent, I don't know what it was, \$55,000 or \$60,000.

I don't know what the Freedom Caucus folks spent, and then you had, like I say, Republican Forward and these other groups spending probably a combined in excess of \$2 million on legislative races. Now I don't know. I mean, that was their reports of what they had raised. I haven't seen the reports of what they spent, Josh, so I don't know what in total got spent, but, you know, I think this was, by far and away, the most lopsided primary election as concerns spending maybe in state history. And so that is clearly a factor in the wins and the losses.

Contrasted with 2024, obviously the grassroots folks had risen up and, you know, in opposition to the carbon capture pipeline, Senate Bill 201, and you know we were there at the time helping candidates and so those things came together and a lot of people got elected, you know, on the strength of that issue, and then two years later, you know, they were one and done and they were swept out of office.

And so I circle back to what I said at the beginning. You've got to be a thoughtful conservative. You've got to be able to espouse and articulate conservative issues, do a good job, build coalitions, and you know, this business isn't about just making noise. It's about actually governing and being able to work with people. If you disagree with them 10% of the time, maybe you don't trash them or have your allies trash them nonstop online because you might want to work with them later on something else.

HAJAR: Let me jump in on that. I think that that's something I really want to make sure we get defined in this, you know, the daylight between the moderates, as you say, and the conservatives, you know, I think most people understand that, it's quite clear. Where is the daylight between yourself and Doeden, you know, period.

ODENBACH: Where is the daylight? Well, I mean, what you saw in the last couple of sessions is the supporters of Doeden, you know, then kind of allied themselves with folks from groups like Young Americans for Liberty, basically just libertarian groups. A lot of people started just calling them flying monkeys, and it really became obvious to me they exist just to criticize and destroy.

But as far as, you know, passing real good policy positions, you know, you can take a great example is House Bill 1020 that I ran to, to finally bring school choice to South Dakota, an excellent bill.

We had the governor. And then when she resigned, the next governor who's going to be our future governor supporting it, we had the House speaker, the House majority leader, the Senate president, and the Senate majority leader, all co-sponsors of an excellent school choice bill that had had a year of work in it and was patterned off of what has been done in many other states.

What do we have happen? We had newly elected members introduce a separate bill, 1009. And two of them in the education committee voted with, you know, folks who were essentially in lockstep with the school lobby to kill the bill, promising, "Oh, they have a better bill," and their quote "better bill" was some deal where it was like \$7,000 per student given to anybody with zero strings attached.

Well, that might be a great idea to some people, but you also have to think strategically of whether something has a chance in hell of passing. And certainly that did not versus the bill that we had, which I think specified three ways that it's an opt-in only, the government's never going to take over your curriculum, etc.

They continue to lie about that to this day because a lot of people are just out there to get attention and to try to tear things down for their own groups, whether, you know, that was the Freedom Caucus or whether that was Young Americans for Liberty, rather than actually pass good conservative legislation. And so that's the frustrating part. And if you say, where's the daylight between, you know, where some of us are and where Doeden was — past tense — that would be it. I mean, he was a force that arose to essentially ... he had a lot of policy things that he said he wanted to do.

You know, like he said, first of all, well, we're going to totally eliminate property taxes. By the end of the campaign, when they started actually forcing him to get a little more in detail about what he was going to do, "well, that's going to take some time, and we're going to just start with maybe some, some, some breaks for veterans and seniors." Well, that kind of anemic stuff was the same thing that a few members

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who didn't really want tax relief were, were promoting the last couple of years.

So, you know, instead, Speaker Hansen and I, going down and working with Governor Rhoden passed the largest owner-occupied property tax cut in state history. We did that by working together, by finding common ground, you know, by passing both Senate Bill 96 and Senate Bill 245 because we polled our members in the House three times and found that to be the top issue.

The preceding summer we did a summer task force, traveled around the whole state and listened to people. And, you know, that was an issue that the voters were demanding.

HAIAR: Let me jump in here. You know, I imagine you want to see that movement rebuild. You know, what does rebuilding look like in practical terms? And do you think there's room for Team Doeden in that rebuild?

ODENBACH: Well, rebuilding looks like a version of what it was when we were doing the initial building, which is always to identify, recruit, and support good candidates who share our conservative values.

I don't know the answer to your question. Does Team Doeden, I think you asked, you know, have a place in that? I mean, I guess I would say for myself, when I look at candidates to support going forward, I'll be much more discerning. I think, you know, we had candidates that we supported who got in and, you know, within a month had decided they were supporting that campaign and were very, very critical, which is their right. Obviously it is, and if they thought we weren't doing things that, you know, comported with where they thought the conservative movement ought to be, that's their right to do it.

But I don't think what they did was constructive at all, and you can just go down the line and take a look at the kind of conservative, you know, policy victories or fights that those of us who had built this up in the preceding six years took on.

From the COVID mandate fights to the carbon pipelines to reforms to the Future Fund to election integrity to the Data Center Bill of Rights to like I said, property tax relief, things like that, none of those things, you don't get any conservative victories in any of that unless you have leadership and unless you have committees and unless you can actually pass legislation. You know, you can make the best talking points and scream the loudest from the balcony, from the bleachers, but if you're not in any position to pass anything because nobody takes you seriously, you're having exactly zero effect. And so I'm not interested in helping people like that in the future.

HAIAR: You know, one interesting thing that's really popped up in this is in that podcast, I think, Powers says, identifies Rhoden as one of the Republicans more like him. You also endorsed Rhoden. I'm kind of curious where you put him on this like, you know, in this debate.

ODENBACH: Well, Governor Rhoden, you know, when you start talking about who's a conservative, will often, you know, he'll get a little fire in his eyes and say, you can take a look at my last 26 years, and then make a decision on whether or not I'm a conservative.

And, you know, I do think that in a world where somebody like Larry Rhoden is suddenly a liberal, maybe you need to pause and reflect as to what it really does mean to be a

conservative. And so, you know, he and I, we've had some disagreements on some issues over the years, but I can tell you I had greater disagreements on things with his predecessor, and many people know that.

And one of the things that I really appreciated about Governor Rhoden is basically on about day one when he took over as governor, he had Speaker Hansen and I down to his office, and he essentially said, "Guys, things are going to be different now," and he recognized that there had been some strife, some acrimony, a lot of fights, and he said, "We're going to be moving forward with civility."

And he really, he kept his word. You know, we had some issues at times, and at one point, he called me to talk it through and kind of apologize and say, "Hey, let's, let's figure out how we can work on this," and I mean, just the level of humility that he exhibits is a real piece of leadership.

And so, you know, you go down the line on some of the biggest issues that we did pass this session. Governor Rhoden signed those bills. I mean, he signed the Data Center Bill of Rights, he signed the bill regarding 1052 for carbon pipelines and on and on. And at some point, you know, six weeks ago or whatever, in the middle of the campaign, you probably noticed that he signed a pledge, basically, a 10 point

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deal saying, hey, on these conservative issues, we're not going backward.

And it's a pretty good list of stuff, and it's pretty hard to look at that list and say, oh, this guy's a liberal RINO. So, you know, I don't agree with him on 100% of things, but I don't agree with anybody on 100%. I think overall he's a good man, steady hand on the tiller of the ship of state for South Dakota, and overall he's governed like a conservative. I'm sure we're going to have, you know, fights and disagreements and issues we work through. But his style of humility and civility, he's got a great team of people around him who I like.

I mean, all those things work in his favor, and it's really hard, I guess, for me to say, "Oh, this is a bad guy," somebody that you just have to oppose out of hand. I don't think that makes any sense.

HAIAR: Do you think you'll be in leadership next session? Why not, if not?

ODENBACH: I don't know yet. It's quite possible not. The reason would be because I wouldn't have the votes. So, you know, there was an old legislator from Selby, I think, named Walt Zabel, and he had that good German accent like the people I grew up with in Eureka, and he'd say to one of my mentors, Harvey Krautschun, and Harvey would tell this story, 'Harvey, you's gots to have the votes.' And so it's just math, and you know, I really haven't...

Since the primary, it's been kind of enjoyable to, to live a normal life, do some of my own business things, and I haven't really cranked up the whole leadership efforts, nor have I heard from any members, frankly, with any concrete plans on that. And so we're probably right now in the process of starting that up.

OUTRO MUSIC

That's all we have for this episode of Searchlight Report. Audio for this episode of the podcast came from recordings by South Dakota Searchlight.

The podcast is based on reporting by South Dakota Searchlight's staff — editor Seth Tupper, senior reporter John Hult and reporters Joshua Haiar, Makenzie Huber and me.

I write the scripts and produce the audio, with editing by Seth Tupper.

South Dakota Searchlight is part of States Newsroom, the nation's largest nonprofit news organization. Until next time, I'm South Dakota Searchlight's Meghan O'Brien with the Searchlight Report.

Congressional approval not needed for White House ballroom, Trump tells high court

BY ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump asked the U.S. Supreme Court Thursday to intervene in a lower court decision that halts his \$400 million White House ballroom construction unless he receives authorization from Congress.

The administration requested the justices grant an immediate stay to a 2-1 federal appeals court decision that sided with historic preservationists who argued Trump doesn't have the authority to build a 90,000-square-foot ballroom where the White House East Wing stood until Trump ordered its demolition in October 2025.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit issued the decision on Aug. 7 but delayed the ruling for two weeks to allow the administration time to appeal.

U.S. Solicitor General D. John Sauer, who previously defended Trump before the high court as his personal defense attorney, argued the project was needed to enhance security at the White House.

The "updated East Wing complex is absolutely required and should not be enjoined," he said, citing assassination attempts on the president.

Sauer also wrote that Congress has "twice over" already authorized the current project, through a 1916 law governing the National Park Service and a 1978 statute, by empowering the Department of the Interior to embark on major construction projects and delegating powers to the president to use appropriated funds to alter the White House.

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"Following this tradition, President Trump determined that many factors urgently required modernizing the old East Wing — most critically, that it no longer performed vital security functions," according to the appeal.

"Compounding those problems were structural defects, such as a degraded foundation, crumbling roof, pervasive mold and mildew, water-related deterioration, obsolete electrical infrastructure, toxic asbestos, and lead paint."

In a written statement to States Newsroom Friday, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the group that initially sued to stop construction, described the administration's application to the Supreme Court as "audacious."

The "transparent efforts to evade the rule of law, frustrate judicial review, and limit the availability of meaningful relief in the courts must stop here," the statement, attributed to the group as a whole, said.

'Military complex'

The Trump administration has asserted publicly the project would serve as a security upgrade. Sauer again made that argument in his 45-page appeal.

The ballroom, which is expected to seat 1,000 people, will be incorporated into a "highly integrated military complex" descending several stories underground, he told the court, and would include security features such as drone-proof ceilings, bomb shelters, sniper nests, "military-grade venting," and "state-of-the-art hospital and medical facilities."

The trust noted that courts had already rejected the security arguments.

"Each court reviewing this case has ruled that construction of the Ballroom is unlawful," the statement said. "Each court has seriously and carefully considered the administration's asserted national security concerns. And each court has ruled that while underground bunker construction can continue, Ballroom construction must stop."

According to Thursday's appeal, the project is already 65% complete, with a concrete-and-steel "superstructure" reaching five stories underground and 70-feet high, occupying nearly 50,000 square feet.

The construction has accelerated over the past four months, with workers on a 250-person crew operating 20 hours a day, seven days a week, "to keep the Project ahead of schedule and under budget," Sauer wrote, adding that \$200 million has been spent or committed to date, and has been "shouldered by private donations."



Demolition work continued where the East Wing once stood at the White House on Dec. 8, 2025. President Donald Trump ordered the 123-year-old East Wing and Jacqueline Kennedy Garden leveled to make way for a new 90,000-square-foot ballroom. (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/

Getty Images)

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The National Trust for Historic Preservation accused the administration of taking advantage of the court delay to speed construction.

"The administration has not only refused to listen, but is now actively attempting to outrun the courts by accelerating construction of the Ballroom," the group said.

"The administration's audacious Supreme Court filing today announced it would be installing another 1 million pounds of rebar and pouring another 3,000 cubic yards of concrete in just the next week alone, before the Appeals Court's stay of the injunction expires next Friday," the group said.

Court battle

In mid-April, a judge for the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia blocked any above-ground construction on the ballroom, allowing underground construction on security facilities to continue.

A day later, April 17, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia stayed the lower court ruling and put the case on a fast track.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation hailed the split appeals court decision earlier this month as a "great day for our country and for the American people's right to voice their opinions about the historic places they cherish, including the White House."

"From the beginning, our position has been clear and consistent: the law states that only Congress can authorize the construction of a ballroom at the White House," the trust's president and CEO Brent Leggs said in a statement Aug. 7.

The East Wing was originally built in 1902 as a receiving area for visitors, according to the White House Historical Association. A 1942 renovation added a bomb shelter and a second story. From the late 1970s onward, beginning with first lady Rosalynn Carter, the wing housed the office of first ladies and their staff.

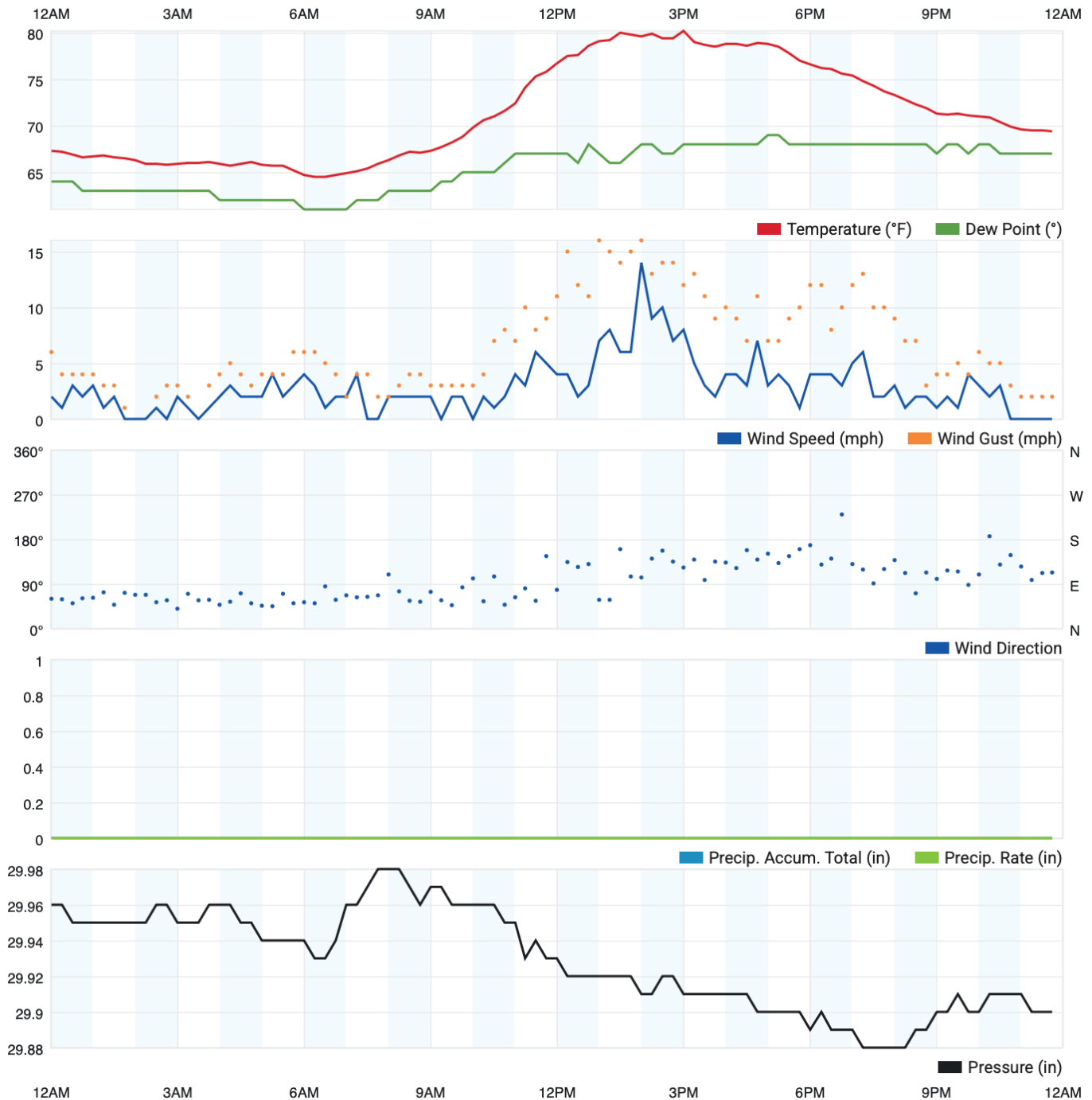
Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

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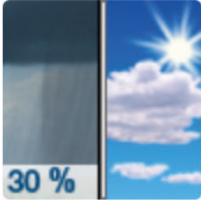
Saturday

Saturday Night

Sunday

Sunday Night

Monday



High: 82 °F

Chance
Showers and
Patchy Fog
then Mostly
Sunny



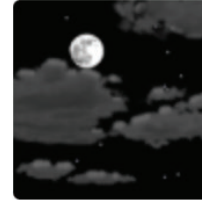
Low: 57 °F

Partly Cloudy



High: 81 °F

Sunny



Low: 56 °F

Partly Cloudy



High: 84 °F

Chance
Showers

Today



Highs 76 to 83°

Morning Fog East. Light thundershowers possible (15-20%) this morning into early afternoon, mainly across south central and northeast SD and west central MN.

Sunday



75 to 83°

Monday



78 to 87°

- 30-60% storms central SD late Sunday
- 20-30% storms northeast SD/west central MN Monday
- Warmer temps Monday

 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION



Foggy conditions will linger through mid morning across parts of the northeast SD into west central MN. A few showers will also be possible across south central SD into parts of northeast SD and west central MN this morning. This activity could perhaps lingering as late as the mid afternoon hours across far southern and eastern SD and western MN. Mostly cloudy skies will give way to more sunshine from west to east through the day. The remainder of the weekend looks more dry and less humid. Storms could return to central SD late Sunday night and early Monday before shifting into the eastern portion of the state into western MN on Monday and Monday night.

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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: 111 in 1937

Record Low: 42 in 1895

Average High: 83

Average Low: 57

Average Precip in Aug.: 1.08

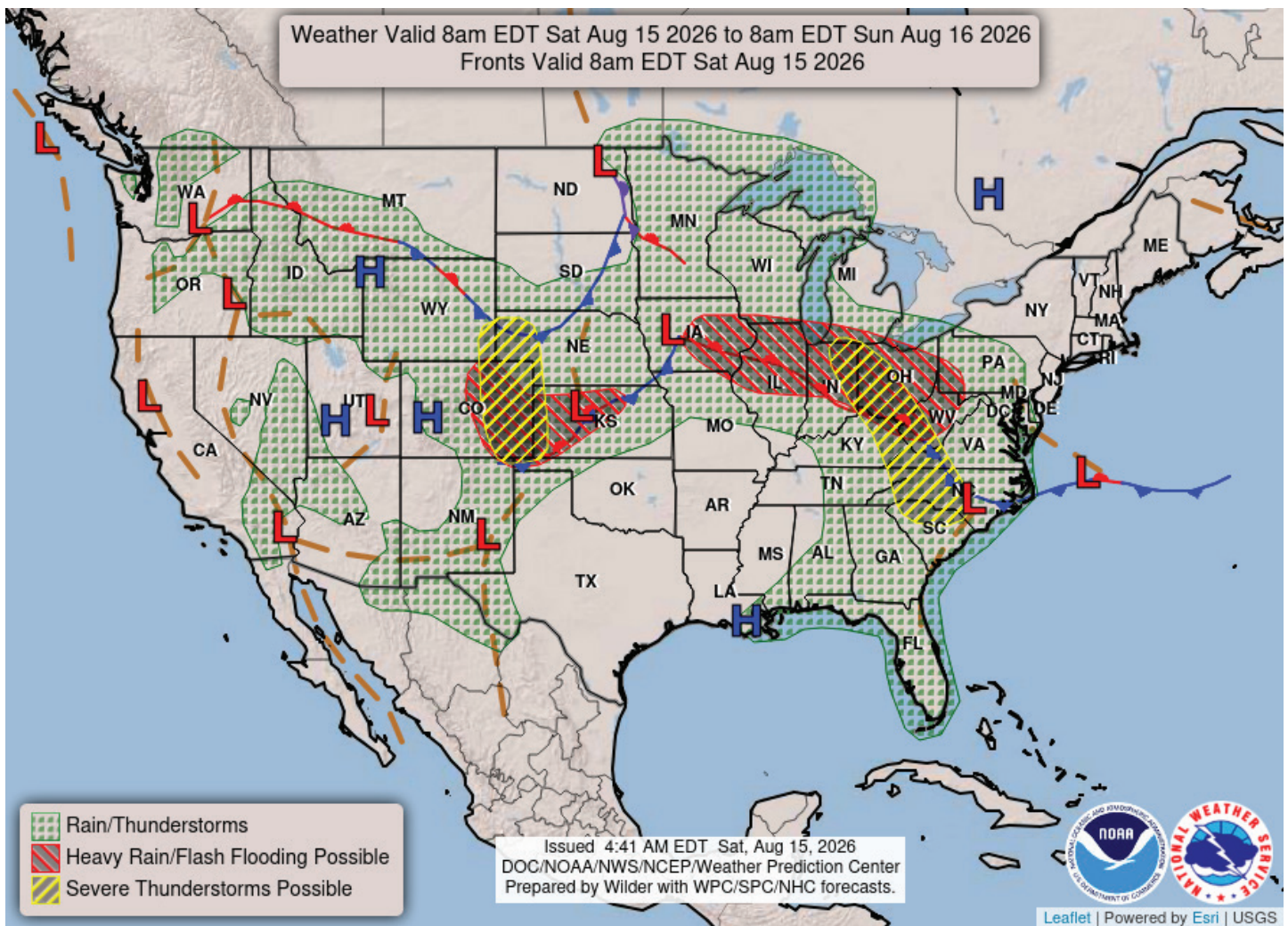
Precip to date in Aug.: 10.14

Average Precip to date: 15.18

Precip Year to Date: 19.61

Sunset Tonight: 8:40 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:34 am



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Today in Weather History

August 15, 1886: A tornado moved northeast from 5 miles southwest of Newark in Marshall County, through town and into North Dakota. Only three buildings were reportedly undamaged at Newark, and a bartender at a saloon was killed. Three people died in two homes on adjoining farms 2 miles southwest of town. A saddle from a Newark stable was carried for a half mile. In North Dakota, houses and barns were damaged along the Wild River. This tornado was estimated as an F3.

August 15, 1987: On this day the largest hailstone was reported in Brown County. The size of the hailstone as 4.5 inches in diameter, and fell on the southwest corner of Warner. This storm also produced F1 tornado that touchdown about 2 miles southwest of Warner. An estimated wind gust of 60 mph was also reported about 2 miles NNW of Stratford.

August 15, 2011: Slow moving thunderstorms across parts of northern Roberts County produced anywhere from 4 to 8 inches of rainfall resulting in flash flooding. The town of New Effington was affected with many roads along with several homes flooded. Sandbagging took place to keep the water from the school. Highway 127 from New Effington to Hammer was flooded in several spots. The floodwaters remained for several days afterward with several roads flooded.

1787: Tornadoes were reported in Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. Wethersfield, Connecticut was hard hit by the tornado outbreak. There, a woman and her family were caught in the open. She and her son were killed. Clothes from the family farm were carried three miles away. This event is regarded to be the most significant tornado outbreak in early New England history.

1946 — Saint Louis, MO, was deluged with a record 8.78 inches of rain in 24 hours. (The Weather Channel)

1967 — The sundance fire in northern Idaho was started by lightning. Winds of 50 mph carried firebrands as much as ten miles in advance to ignite new fires, and as a result, the forest fire spread twenty miles across the Selkirk Mountains in just twelve hours, burning 56,000 acres. The heat of the fire produced whirlwinds of flame with winds up to 300 mph which flung giant trees about like matchsticks. (David Ludlum)

1983 — Hurricane Alicia formed on this day and was the costliest tropical cyclone in the Atlantic since Hurricane Agnes in 1972. It struck Galveston and Houston, Texas directly, causing \$2.6 billion (1983 USD) in damage and killing 21 people. This storm was the worst Texas hurricane since Hurricane Carla in 1961. Also, Alicia was the first billion-dollar tropical cyclone in Texas history.

1987 — Thunderstorms developing ahead of a sharp cold front produced severe weather in the Upper Midwest during the afternoon and evening hours, with Minnesota and eastern South Dakota hardest hit. A thunderstorm in west central Minnesota spawned a tornado at Eagle Lake which killed one person and injured eight others. A thunder- storm in eastern South Dakota produced softball size hail at Warner. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Thirty five cities in twenty states in the north central and northeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Lamoni IA and Baltimore MD, where the mercury hit 105 degrees. Temperatures 100 degrees or above were reported in twenty-two states. Pierre SD was the hot spot in the nation with a high of 114 degrees. Bluefield WV reported eight straight days of record heat. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Evening thunderstorms in eastern New Mexico produced wind gusts to 66 mph at Clovis. Evening thunderstorms in West Texas produced baseball size hail around Hereford, Dimmitt, Ware and Dalhart. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



Obstacles as Opportunities

When barriers obstruct our path, God provides a way around or the strength to overcome.

Psalms 27:11-14: 11 Teach me Your way, O LORD, And lead me in a level path Because of my foes.

12 Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries, For false witnesses have risen against me, And such as breathe out violence.

13 I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living.

14 Wait for the LORD; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the LORD.

Learning to see obstacles as opportunities takes time. When we're facing barriers, our natural response is frustration or fear. But recalling God's faithfulness can lead us to a truer perspective. It helps to remember ...

God is at work. He's actively moving His plan forward, even when we can't see it. The Lord will either provide a way around obstacles or show us how they fit into His larger purposes. This doesn't mean every difficulty is part of some divine test, but it does mean God is present and working.

God equips and guides us. His indwelling Holy Spirit communicates what we need to know (John 16:13). Whether we receive His direction in stages or all at once, He asks us to trust Him rather than human wisdom.

God invites our participation. It takes courage to move forward despite barriers. Patience is necessary as we wait for Him to work and reveal His plan. And faith enables us to trust God with the outcome.

Obstacles don't disappear because we trust the Lord, but our perspective shifts. When we remember these truths, we can face barriers with confidence that God is already at work in ways we may not yet see.

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

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The Groton Independent

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.14.26

12 15 18 28 35 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 8 Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.14.26

3 23 27 46 60 11

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$100,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 3 Days 16 Hrs 53 Mins 39 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: 16 Hrs 8 Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.12.26

1 5 6 27 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$28,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 23 Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.12.26

3 4 19 21 58 8

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 52 Mins 39 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: 16 Hrs 52 Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon kill 9 people, Health Ministry says

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon killed at least nine people Saturday, in some of the deadliest attacks since a precarious truce between Israel and Hezbollah went into effect on June 20. Lebanon's Health Ministry and state news agency said one of the airstrikes that targeted a home on the edge of the village of Ansar killed seven people, including three children, and wounded two. The second, on the village of Deir al-Zahrani, killed two and wounded nine.

Israel and the Lebanese government announced a "framework agreement" on June 26, laying out a plan for Israeli forces to withdraw from southern Lebanon, in exchange for the disarmament of the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group. It also envisions steps toward an eventual peace agreement between the two countries — which technically remain in a state of war nearly 80 years after Israel's establishment.

Hezbollah has refused direct talks and wasn't party to the deal.

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam criticized Israel's airstrikes on southern Lebanon, saying they intimidate "residents in their homes" and undermine efforts to stabilize the situation in the south.

"The seven martyrs of the Israeli airstrike on the town of Ansar are not military infrastructure and the children and women killed were not military targets," Salam said in comments posted on X. He added that it is the job of the Lebanese state to deal with any military infrastructure in the country.

"Israel must halt this escalation," Salam said. He added that the security of the Lebanese people and their right to life on their land "are not subject to negotiation or bargaining."

Intense Israeli airstrikes early Saturday also hit the strategic Ali Taher hill, which overlooks parts of the southern city of Nabatiyeh and main roads leading to it, NNA reported. Despite the truce, Israel's military has continued its almost daily attacks on the area, which is north of the Litani River and has been a de facto boundary in Lebanon, with large areas to the south under Israeli military control.

The Israeli military said in a statement that it struck Hezbollah infrastructure in the areas of Ali Taher and Ansar in response to an action against Israeli soldiers in the area. The military added that it will not allow the Hezbollah to harm Israeli civilians or soldiers "and will continue to operate to remove threats."

A Hezbollah official did not immediately respond when asked for comment on whether they carried out any attacks on Israeli forces in southern Lebanon.

Earlier this month, two Israeli soldiers were killed in an explosion in southern Lebanon, the first Israeli deaths since the shaky truce. Hezbollah did not comment on the blast.

Lebanon and Israel have held seven rounds of talks; the most recent took place in Rome earlier this month.

The Iran-backed Hezbollah has refused to disarm and accuses the Lebanese government of making too many concessions without guaranteeing an Israeli withdrawal.

The latest Israel-Hezbollah war erupted on March 2, when Hezbollah fired rockets across the border two days after the U.S. and Israel launched their attacks on Iran. More than 4,000 people have been killed by Israeli strikes in Lebanon since then, including hundreds of civilians. About 40 soldiers and three civilians — including a military contractor — have been killed on the Israeli side.

Magnitude 7.7 earthquake strikes off Indonesia's coast, killing at least 38 and toppling buildings

By YACOB HERIN Associated Press

MAUMERE, Indonesia (AP) — A powerful magnitude 7.7 earthquake struck off the coast of Indonesia early Saturday, killing at least 38 people, collapsing buildings and homes as well as causing panic in a region prone to deadly quakes. Authorities said more than a dozen residents were injured.

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Authorities issued a tsunami warning and urged coastal residents to move to higher ground, but later lifted the warning when Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency said monitoring showed no significant sea-level changes that would pose a threat to coastal communities.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the quake hit Indonesia's Flores region with a depth of 10 kilometers (six miles) at 5:58 a.m. local time. Its epicenter was 68 km (42 miles) north-northwest of the city of Ende in East Nusa Tenggara province. The initial quake was followed by several aftershocks.

The head of the National Disaster Management Agency, Suharyanto, said rescuers have recovered at least 38 bodies, mostly in the three devastated regencies of Sikka, Manggarai and East Manggarai, including 16 bodies that were pulled from a landslide in the village of Reok in Manggarai. At least 13 people were rushed to nearby hospitals, including two with serious injuries.

Suharyanto, who like many Indonesians uses a single name, said three helicopters and a rescue vessel were deployed to assist with logistics and support emergency response operations, including possible evacuations if needed, given East Nusa Tenggara's geography, which consists of numerous islands and presents significant transportation and access challenges.

He said about 2,000 villagers in Nagekeo regency fled their homes to temporary shelters.

East Nusa Tenggara Police Chief Rudi Darmoko said the earthquake caused severe damage and collapsed buildings. He said power outages in cities and villages have hampered the flow of information and complicated search and rescue efforts.

"We are continuing to collect reports of damage and casualties, but there are communication disruptions," Darmoko said. He said that landslides in Ende regency triggered by the earthquake also cut off the Trans-Flores highway, a roughly 700-kilometer (435-mile) paved mountain road spanning Flores Island, from Labuan Bajo to Larantuka.

Footage on local television showed patients at several hospitals being evacuated from buildings as a precaution following the quake. Hospital staff moved equipment outdoors, including beds, IV stands and oxygen cylinders, and set up temporary treatment areas to adapt to emergency conditions.

Quake felt on Flores island and other areas

The quake was felt across much of Flores island with initial reports indicating heavy damage.

Yohanna Embu, a resident of Sikka regency, said a number of buildings were damaged by the strong shaking and panicked people ran to higher ground.

"Many buildings here were damaged ... I saw that the waiting room at the port terminal in Maumere had collapsed," she said.

Students at St. Peter Major Seminary in Sikka who were attending morning Mass fled in panic when the roof of an assembly hall collapsed, said the Rev. Guidelbertus Tanga, rector of the seminary, which is known locally as Ritapiret Seminary on the predominantly Catholic island of Flores.

"Our students and nuns ran out in panic beneath a collapsing roof," Tanga said. "At least one priest suffered a broken leg after jumping from the second floor of a building during the quake."

The quake also reportedly caused panic in Labuan Bajo, a gateway town to eastern Indonesia's Komodo National Park, one of the country's best-known attractions. Damage was also reported in Bima, a city in neighboring West Nusa Tenggara province, and in some parts of southern Sulawesi island.

Indonesian authorities initially issued a tsunami warning for parts of East Nusa Tenggara, West Nusa Tenggara, South Sulawesi and Southeast Sulawesi provinces, and urged residents to stay away from beaches and riverbanks. The agency located the shallow undersea quake near Flores island.

Indonesia prone to earthquakes

Indonesia, a vast archipelago of more than 17,000 islands, is prone to earthquakes and volcanic activity because of its location on the "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines in the Pacific Basin.

A powerful earthquake caused a tsunami in 1992 that killed about 2,500 people on Flores, part of a group of islands in the eastern half of Indonesia.

In 2018, a magnitude 7.5 quake spawned a large localized tsunami that wiped out coastal areas, while liquefaction caused by the shaking turned entire neighborhoods into rivers of sludge in the eastern Indonesian city of Palu, on the Palu-Koro Fault. The disaster killed more than 4,400 people.

In 2010, a 10-foot (three-meter) wave struck the Mentawai Islands, off the western coast of Sumatra in Indonesia, just minutes after a massive offshore earthquake. More than 400 people were killed and hundreds of homes were destroyed.

In December 2004, a massive magnitude 9.1 earthquake off Sumatra in western Indonesia triggered a tsunami that killed 230,000 people in a dozen countries.

There's a reason why Israel has done little to rein in settler violence. It's not just Netanyahu

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

Palestinians in the occupied West Bank village of Qusra have huddled inside their homes for days on end, unable to leave because of the threat posed by Israeli settlers.

The Israeli military, which over the past three years has displayed staggering military and intelligence capabilities from Beirut to Tehran, has yet to fully remove the settlers from the area of the village, about an hour's drive from Tel Aviv.

The United States, which provides billions of dollars in military aid to Israel, has issued a scathing rebuke, perhaps because one of the homeowners is a Palestinian American living in Ohio.

U.S. Ambassador Mike Huckabee referred to the settlers as "terrorists." Israel's defense minister dismissed them as radical misfits — "boys on the hills."

In reality, they are the tip of the spear for a much larger movement, supported by successive Israeli governments and supercharged under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, that is aimed at cementing Israeli rule over the territory and preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Settlements built over decades now house over 500,000

Israel captured the West Bank, along with Gaza and east Jerusalem, in the 1967 Mideast war, territories the Palestinians want for a future state.

Since then, the Israeli government has built nearly 150 settlements that are home to well over 500,000 Jewish settlers. Many of the settlements resemble fully developed suburbs, with apartment blocks, shopping malls, parks and industrial zones.

Radical settlers have established hundreds of additional outposts without government authorization, while still enjoying protection from the Israeli military and often other public services.

Netanyahu's government, the most nationalist and religious in Israel's history, has boasted of establishing over 100 new settlements. On Thursday, as the army deployed in Qusra, members of his Cabinet celebrated the rebuilding of a settlement that had been dismantled in 2005 as part of the Gaza withdrawal.

Israel's current government and much of its political class view the West Bank as the biblical and historical homeland of the Jewish people and see the settlements as key to maintaining security.

Most of the international community views all settlements as illegal and an obstacle to peace.

Separate laws for settlers and Palestinians

The roughly 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank live under Israeli military rule, with the Palestinian Authority exercising limited autonomy in population centers. Israel's military operates in all parts of the territory, and Palestinians suspected of militancy can be held without charge for months or years under what's known as administrative detention.

The settlers are Israeli citizens, with law enforcement typically handled by Israeli police and civilian courts.

Israel's Defense Minister Israel Katz said in 2024 that Israelis would no longer be subject to administrative detention, which has also been used against settlers accused of violence. On Friday, he announced plans to fully transfer law enforcement among settlers to the Israeli police.

The military's role "is to fight Palestinian terrorism" and "focus on protecting the borders and settlements against threats," he said in a statement. "Not chase after boys on the hills."

That would cement the status quo of what are already largely separate legal systems for Jews and Palestinians in the West Bank, which major human rights groups say amounts to apartheid, something Israel denies.

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Israel's police and military have been reluctant to confront the settlers

The Israeli police are overseen by National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, himself a hard-line settler who has been convicted eight times for offenses that include supporting a terrorist organization. He was a defense attorney for Jewish extremists before entering politics.

The Israeli military says the settlers' actions in Qusra are "illegal, reprehensible and unacceptable," and that it tries to maintain law and order in the West Bank. It says it dismantled two outposts in the area of Qusra and detained one Israeli.

But rights groups say the military frequently turns a blind eye to settler violence, and that when it intervenes it often focuses on protecting the settlers. Yesh Din, an Israeli rights group, says around 94% of investigations into settler violence since 2005 have ended without an indictment, with just 3% leading to full or partial convictions.

US pressure has had little impact, and has eased under Trump

Settler violence intensified after the Hamas attack on Oct. 7, 2023, triggered the war in Gaza. The following year, the Biden administration imposed sanctions on settlers and Israeli organizations accused of violence.

Other Western nations have announced sanctions against Ben Gvir and another hard-line Israeli Cabinet minister, Bezalel Smotrich, accusing them of "inciting extremist violence" toward Palestinians.

The sanctions had little impact, as the settler community rallied around those targeted.

President Donald Trump rescinded the U.S. sanctions at the start of his second term and appointed Huckabee, a staunch supporter of Israeli settlements, as his ambassador.

During his first term, Trump had upended decades of U.S. policy by moving the American Embassy to Jerusalem and supporting Israel's claims to other territories seized in war.

Netanyahu's opponents criticize the violence but support settlement growth

Netanyahu will need the backing of Ben Gvir, Smotrich and other settler supporters if he hopes to keep his job after October elections. He will also need to maintain good relations with the Trump administration.

His opponents have criticized what they characterize as the growing chaos in the West Bank. But most of Israel's political leaders — even critics of Netanyahu — support the growth of existing settlements and are opposed to Palestinian statehood.

Gadi Eisenkot, a former top general seen as Netanyahu's main opponent, criticized the government's handling of the events in Qusra, accusing it of undermining military commanders "in the face of anarchy and violent lawbreaking by an extremist minority." He has also come out against plans to annex the West Bank.

But he has also told Israeli media that he has "never spoken about a Palestinian state," and that he supports settlements that are "in line with Israel's interests."

Naftali Bennett, a staunch settlement supporter and another leading rival of Netanyahu, has condemned the violence, saying it amounts to "terrorism" by a minority.

"Precisely as someone who believes in our right to the land and in the settlement enterprise, we need to denounce this and eradicate the violence from within our own ranks — not wait for the Americans to tell us to do it," he said in a recent interview with Israeli media.

When Bennett was prime minister, during the only brief period in the last 17 years that Netanyahu was out of office, his national unity government approved thousands of additional settler homes.

Exhausted health workers in Congo struggle to keep up as Ebola outpaces contact tracing

By CONSTANT SAME BAGALWA and MARK BANCHEREAU Associated Press

NIZI, Congo (AP) — Every day, community health worker Gédéon Banga Ngbape and his team fan out across communities in eastern Congo looking for people who may have crossed paths with the country's fastest-growing Ebola outbreak in history.

The workers investigate dozens of alerts, search for those exposed to suspected or confirmed cases and

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try to get anyone showing symptoms into care before the virus spreads further.

But the surveillance system is increasingly failing to keep pace with the virus. Between 60% and 70% of new Ebola cases are being detected among people who were not already being monitored as contacts, meaning health workers may only discover infections after patients become sick and have had opportunities to expose others.

"If surveillance does not work well, the entire response suffers," Ngbape said. "Surveillance is the engine of a response."

The outbreak has killed over 2,200 people out of more than 4,700 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. That outbreak claimed over 11,000 lives.

"We are chasing the virus; the virus is ahead of us," said WHO regional director for Africa, Dr. Mohamed Yakub Janabi, this week.

U.N. humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher on Friday announced an additional \$30.5 million in emergency funding to help tackle the Ebola outbreak.

Response teams work long hours, often without pay

In Nizi, Ngbape's surveillance teams say they receive an average of 60 to 70 alerts a day. They move through communities to investigate suspected infections, follow people who have been in contact with suspected or confirmed cases and direct those showing possible symptoms to health facilities.

The work can stretch deep into the night.

"I leave in the morning at 8 and return around 11 p.m., sometimes midnight," Ngbape said. "I still have to follow up and plan the next activities. I feel really tired, but what matters to me is always being of service to the community."

He did not say how many days a week he works or how often he is able to take time off.

Community health workers who go door to door face risks of their own. Ana Ndroy Kasime, a community health worker in Nizi, said she visits homes to educate residents about Ebola and reports suspected cases to health officials. But she said workers like her lack basic protective supplies.

"When we go door to door, we don't have protective equipment, like boots, disinfectant and other supplies, even though we are at risk," Kasime said. "We buy disinfectant with our own money."

The current outbreak, caused by the rare Bundibugyo Ebola virus, is unfolding in some of the most challenging conditions imaginable. There are no approved vaccines or treatments for the Bundibugyo virus, though trials are underway. Strikes by some unpaid health workers, threats by rebel groups, anger from long-traumatized communities and misinformation asserting that Ebola isn't real have significantly hindered the response.

The gaps are especially consequential in Nizi, one of the most affected health zones in Ituri province, which accounts for about 90% of Congo's Ebola cases and 80% of its deaths.

"We started surveillance with fewer workers," Ngbape said. "The challenges are enormous," he added.

On Thursday, health workers at the Nizi Treatment Center went on strike and the facility temporarily closed. Ngbape said the health workers have not been paid in over three months.

The head of Africa CDC, Jean Kaseya, on Thursday called on Congo's government to pay the outstanding salaries, saying money was available and that paying workers was the government's responsibility.

The government says payments are delayed because it's verifying worker payroll lists after finding unrelated names had been added and while it shifts payments from cash to mobile money.

Kasime said community health workers like her have received their payments, but at about \$50 a month, she considers the amount inadequate for the work and risks involved. She said other Ebola response workers should be paid quickly.

"They are making sacrifices and taking risks," Kasime said. "If these workers decide to stop working, the epidemic will spread further into the population."

Insecurity and displacement put contacts out of reach

Surveillance workers in Nizi often struggle to get around, making it harder to investigate alerts and fol-

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low contacts across the health zone, Ngbape said. Frequent population movements linked to mining and people fleeing armed conflict add another complication, as people can move before surveillance teams are able to follow up with them.

Poor and sometimes impassable roads can also make remote areas difficult to reach, while insecurity restricts where health workers can safely operate. It remains unclear how many communities in the province are currently inaccessible to surveillance teams.

Dozens of rebel and militia groups operate across eastern Congo. The Allied Democratic Forces, which is tied to the Islamic State group, is among those active in Ituri. The insecurity has forced some health and aid workers to leave remote Ebola hot spots for the relative safety of the provincial capital, Bunia.

Violence affecting the Ebola response has also come from residents. At least a dozen attacks on health facilities and workers were recorded as of mid-July, according to local health authorities. In one incident, residents attacked a hospital in Nyakunde and entered a nearby Ebola treatment center, forcing patients and staff to flee before operations resumed the following day.

Many residents' anger is caused by misinformation about the virus and bans on traditional burials — when families prepare the bodies and people gather for a funeral, which can lead to further infections.

Ngbape, however, said his surveillance teams in Nizi have not been attacked.

He said cooperation has improved as residents have become more familiar with the surveillance teams and their work. Ngbape also said he does not believe people in Nizi are widely concealing suspected infections, though population movements and limited transportation can still make contacts difficult to follow.

For Ngbape, maintaining that surveillance is critical to preventing individual infections from developing into wider chains of transmission. The long hours and limited resources have left him exhausted, he said, but not ready to stop.

"I am here to save the lives of the population," he said.

Hawaii's Big Island under rare hurricane landfall threat as Tropical Storm Lola strengthens

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Tropical Storm Lola is expected to strengthen to a hurricane before reaching Hawaii's Big Island this weekend, forecasters said Friday, bringing heavy rains that can cause destructive flooding and strong winds that can fuel wildfires.

The National Hurricane Center said Lola should be at hurricane strength by the time it approaches the Big Island Saturday.

If it makes landfall there, it would be the first to hit the island since 1871. Back then, according to a University of Hawaii atmospheric scientist's research of newspaper accounts, a Category 3 hurricane hit the northeast corner of the island, said Vanessa Almanza, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Honolulu.

"First time since satellites," Almanza said. "The latest forecast has it very close to the southern tip of the Big Island."

A hurricane warning was issued for the Big Island, and a tropical storm warning was in effect for Maui County, which includes the islands of Maui, Molokai, Lanai and Kahoolawe.

Officials and residents braced for Lola regardless of whether Hawaii takes a direct hit. Shelters were scheduled to open, and various events were canceled.

"It doesn't take landfall to create destruction," Almanza said. "A lot of the impacts are felt outside of the hurricane."

The National Hurricane Center predicted 8 to 12 inches (20.3 to 30.5 centimeters) of rainfall totals across Maui and the Big Island, with maximum totals as high as 25 inches (63.5 centimeters) in some spots on the Big Island. Four to 6 inches (10.2 to 15.2 centimeters) were expected across the island chain.

The center also warned that the storm could cause "life-threatening flooding and mudslides, especially in areas of steep terrain," along with a dangerous storm surge and ocean swells "likely to cause life-threatening

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surf and rip current conditions."

"Suffice it to say, this is an enormous storm," Gov. Josh Green said.

Officials urge taking the storm seriously

State Rep. Jeanné Kapela, who represents communities that are in the storm's possible track, traveled to the Big Island from Honolulu on Friday morning and called for people to be on alert.

The southern end of the island is remote and rural but growing in population because of its affordability. Kapela said she was especially worried about people who live off the grid in unpermitted structures. The area's agriculture includes coffee and cattle.

"We're encouraging residents to take this storm seriously, remain vigilant, and get somewhere safe before conditions deteriorate," she said in a text message to The Associated Press as her flight took off. "We're hopeful the storm moves through quickly, but we're preparing for whatever comes."

Green urged residents to be ready: "If you feel now that your house doesn't have a great roof or might not be able to withstand hurricane force winds, then first things first you go to a family or friend's house and you kind of hunker down there."

Kapela also noted that many parts of the state are still reeling from devastating flooding in March, saying, "We know how quickly heavy rain and flooding can impact our rural communities."

Brian Miyamoto, executive director of the Hawaii Farm Bureau, said growers are always concerned when there is a threat of a lot of water in a short amount time. But those still recovering from the spring floods, including on Oahu's North Shore, were worried about suffering more damage.

Coffee farmer Bruce Corker said it was "sunny and beautiful" Friday in Holualoa, on the west side of the Big Island, and the island's only Costco seemed normal a day earlier. Still, he said, the prospect of "streams overflowing and high winds" was worrisome.

Wildfire risks increase during windy weather

As winds ramped up across the islands, there were no red flag warnings in place but Almanza said the dry and breezy conditions would still elevate fire concerns.

In 2023 the Maui town of Lahaina burned during extreme winds amid a hurricane passing far to the south of Hawaii.

"Since the fire, everybody is way more aware of weather in general and our environment and things that are happening," said Archie Kalepa of Lahaina, who is well known in the area for his surfing, paddling and other ocean skills and has been watching the storm closely.

As of Friday afternoon, Tropical Storm Lala was located about 275 miles (440 kilometers) east-southeast of South Point, Hawaii, according to the National Hurricane Center. It had maximum sustained winds of 65 mph (100 kph) and was moving toward the west-northwest at 14 mph (22 kph).

The wind speed threshold for a Category 1 hurricane is 74 mph (46 kph).

"I wouldn't be afraid of what's to come, just be prepared," said Steven Businger, the University of Hawaii professor whose research found information about the hurricane that hit the Big Island 155 years ago.

Lala has the potential to make landfall with damaging winds, he said, but its path was trending south with every forecast.

"The Big Island is furthest south and furthest east, so it has the greatest probability of having a hurricane hit," he said. "However, historically Kauai has seen the most landfalls."

Kauai, which is several islands northwest up the archipelago from the Big Island, saw Hurricane Iniki make landfall as a Category 4 hurricane in 1992. That, like this year, was an El Nino year. Pacific hurricane activity increases during El Nino, a warming of the Pacific near the equator that affects weather patterns across the globe.

Iniki, the last hurricane to make landfall in Hawaii, was following a southern trajectory before it turned up and hit Kauai, the governor said.

"It did \$3 billion worth of damage. It destroyed thousands of homes, and it did kill six people," he said. "So we just can never know if a storm is going to turn."

Hope reborn in Colombia as signs of life emerge under earthquake debris

By MARKO ÁLVAREZ, ASTRID SUÁREZ and NAYARA BATSCHKE Associated Press

CALI, Colombia (AP) — Rescuers reported apparent signs of life under the rubble in two of the Colombian cities hit hardest by a massive earthquake, rekindling hopes Friday that more people could be found alive.

Search and rescue teams from Venezuela, Argentina and Israel joined the search for survivors following the 7.4 magnitude quake that struck the South American nation on Monday, killing at least 287 people. At 96 hours since the temblor hit, the window for survival was narrowing Friday afternoon.

The mayor of Pereira, Mauricio Salazar, told radio station FM on Friday that "contact was made with a woman who was asking for help amid the rubble" of a collapsed hotel at around 4 a.m. He suggested other people may have survived but were still trapped.

Authorities in Cali also reported apparent signs of life, saying at least three people were trapped under collapsed buildings. The search and rescue effort has been extended through Saturday.

Residents who lost their homes must start over again

With the overall search for survivors winding down, Colombia faced another challenge: rebuilding a nation shattered by a disaster that affected more than 100,000 people.

Tens of thousands of houses were damaged or destroyed, according to the government. Authorities have also reported damage to thousands of schools, medical facilities and community centers in more than 400 cities.

"There is no place to live, we lost everything," Ebert Jonathan Morales, 38, said Friday in a shelter in Cali.

Morales is one of the 102,263 people whose lives were upended by the quake. The government says nearly 4,000 people were injured and hundreds remain missing. Private groups estimate the number of missing is in the thousands.

Morales said he, his wife and four children are trying to rebuild from scratch.

"The earthquake destroyed several neighborhoods in the city. Many houses were damaged, and buildings collapsed," he said. "We are going to stay here until the government gives us some help, some support."

The government focuses on providing shelter

The devastation has tested Colombia's President Abelardo de la Espriella, who was inaugurated just days before the earthquake shook the country's west. De la Espriella acknowledged Thursday night that "the situation is complex" and announced a plan to partner with private companies to rebuild, as well as subsidies for families who are homeless.

"We will not overcome this tragedy alone as a government," he said. "We need the private sector to rebuild Colombia together."

Monday's earthquake was the most powerful to hit Colombia this century. Government aid has yet to arrive in some areas, where many people are relying on volunteers and neighbors for help.

"A neighbor is giving me shelter," Olga Castro, a mother of five in Cali, said. "At least we survived, but right now we are practically on the street because we don't have a home anymore."

De la Espriella said national and international funds raised in response to the disaster will focus on the reconstruction of hospitals, schools, homes, roads and airports.

Rebuilding the country requires a "serious technical assessment" to determine which buildings can be used, which can be repaired and which must be demolished and rebuilt, said Yezid Alvarado Vargas, a professor in construction engineering at Javeriana University, in Bogota, Colombia.

"Before even discussing reconstruction, we must guarantee temporary housing, food, healthcare, continuity of basic services and economic support for families who lost their homes or livelihoods," Alvarado said.

In Bogota, Colombia's capital, around 500 volunteers gathered at a reception center to sort food, toiletries and pet food before distributing the supplies in the most affected areas. From youngsters to the elderly, everyone diligently participated in the challenging relief efforts.

"We all have to help. Today is for you, tomorrow might be for me," volunteer Jorge Muñoz, 85, said. One of the oldest helpers at Bogota's Vive Claro aid collection, Muñoz has witnessed the devastation caused

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by other earthquakes, including one in 1999 that killed more than 1,180 people.

National and international aid keeps coming

Authorities have converted schools, parks and public buildings into shelters, providing tents, mattresses and food to the displaced. In other hard-hit cities, residents improvised shelters in the streets, while hundreds of volunteers rush to help those in need in hard-to-reach areas.

"These are isolated, neglected territories, historically lacking in institutional support, already plagued by violence, and now they are hit by an earthquake of this magnitude," said María Mercedes Liévano, director of Save the Children in Colombia.

"It's a crisis on top of a crisis, leaving the population in a situation of extreme vulnerability," she added, citing communities including Buenaventura, the country's main port, and Choco, the earthquake's epicenter.

Many buildings in Pereira have limited or no access to electricity and water, and volunteers have been delivering hygiene kits to displaced families in the city's shelters, said Pamela Londoño, a technical adviser with Project HOPE. Of the five or six shelters in the city, at least one is already full and no longer accepting new residents. The nonprofit is also assessing medical supply needs.

Other areas are also suffering, such as the town of Roldanillo, where approximately 60% of residents do not have access to clean water.

"The main concern is the lack of basic services for multiple communities," Londoño said. "This is a really critical situation."

De la Espriella visited several cities to track relief efforts and aid distribution, including Quibdó, in the Choco region, and Pereira. Authorities are still waiting for tons of supplies and humanitarian aid from countries that have pledged their support, including Peru, China, the United States and the United Arab Emirates.

"My heart, my strength and my spirit are with all the victims and with all these territories that have been forgotten and now devastated by nature," he said. "We must rebuild them. There is a great task ahead and I am committed to it."

The Trump administration announced Friday an additional \$11 million in humanitarian aid — including food, health, protection and shelter assistance — bringing the total U.S. assistance following the earthquake to \$26.5 million.

The U.S. "continues to coordinate with Colombian President Abelardo de la Espriella and the Colombian government to assess and respond to earthquake-related needs," the State Department said in a statement.

Army temporarily halts Apache helicopter training missions after Texas crash that killed 2

By JIM VERTUNO and JOSH FUNK Associated Press

The U.S. Army temporarily halted all Apache helicopter training missions Friday after a fatal crash in Texas earlier this week killed two soldiers.

No cause of the Wednesday crash has been released because the investigation has just begun. A safety investigation team from the Army Combat Readiness Center in Fort Rucker, Alabama, is trying to determine what happened, the Army said.

"The stand-down will remain in effect until we have a better understanding of the root cause of the accident," the Army said in its statement Friday.

The military has taken similar action after past crashes. Three years ago, the Army grounded all aviation units until they completed some additional training after 12 soldiers died in separate crashes in Alaska and Kentucky.

The Army made no mention of stopping the combat missions that Apache helicopters are regularly flying in the war in Iran. These helicopters have been employed around the Strait of Hormuz as part of the measures to maintain open navigation channels. One Apache crashed after running into an Iranian drone.

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Deontre T. Huey, 34, of Killeen, Texas, and Warrant Officer Seth L. Olmstead, 25, of Belton, Texas, were killed in the Texas crash, the Army said. They were the only two people on board

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when the helicopter crashed in a grassy field near Salado, about 30 miles (48 kilometers) from Fort Hood. Huey entered the Army in 2014 and Olmstead entered in 2023. They were assigned to Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division.

"Our hearts and deepest condolences are with the families of the Soldiers we lost Wednesday," said Lt. Gen. Kevin D. Admiral, III Armored Corps and Fort Hood commanding general. "The Army is a family, and a tragedy like this is felt throughout our formations and our community."

Aviation safety expert John Cox said it's encouraging to see the Army take this step because "you're guessing until you get some hard answers" and this move signals the Army is making safety a priority.

"I am very much glad to see them doing that. It says that they're being proactive," said Cox, who is CEO of Safety Operating Systems and a longtime pilot.

The National Transportation Safety Board criticized the Army's safety culture sharply during the investigation of last year's collision between a Black Hawk helicopter and an American Airlines jet in the skies near Washington, D.C. The NTSB said the Army did a poor job recognizing some of the safety risks in the busy airspace around the nation's capital before that crash in January 2025 that killed 67 people.

Fort Hood is a massive base with 214,968 acres (86,995 hectares) that is used to train and deploy heavy forces. In November 2015, four soldiers were killed when a Black Hawk helicopter crashed during a training exercise. And nine Fort Hood soldiers died in 2016 when a rain-swollen creek swept their vehicle into rushing waters.

The Apache attack helicopter has been a core part of Army aviation since the first one was delivered in 1984. More than 5,000 Apaches have been deployed by the U.S. military and its allies over the decades.

2 planes with the same flight number avoid possible disaster thanks to quick-thinking controller

By JOSH FUNK AP Transportation Writer

A potential disaster was averted Friday when a Phoenix air traffic controller recognized two American Airlines jets mistakenly were flying the same flight number and acted quickly to avoid confusion and keep them a safe distance apart.

Audio of the incident shortly after midnight Friday shows how he found a solution to ensure the planes that were both called American 2482 maintained proper separation as one plane arrived from Chicago shortly after the other had taken off in Phoenix.

"I've been working air traffic for 25 years. I've never seen two aircraft pretty much merge with the same call sign. That's pretty incredible," the controller said after the departing plane had safely cleared the area.

If both pilots thought the controller was telling them to fly at the same altitude as they headed toward each other, they might have collided, so it was crucial they knew which plane he was directing.

Quick thinking ensured the controller's instructions were clear

The audio posted by ATC.com shows how the controller quickly started referring to "American 2482 on the arrival" and "American 2482 on the departure" to keep the two planes straight.

The controller kept the arriving plane safely above the departing plane even as their flight paths converged and made sure that the pilots of both airlines saw each other when they were still miles apart. He also directed the departing plane not to climb too high, so a gap would remain between the planes.

The arriving pilot complimented the controller for his "nice work" once the two planes had passed each other safely.

"It could have been disastrous, but I'm glad it worked out," the controller replied.

Expert says airline must have missed that the flights would overlap

Aviation safety expert Steve Arroyo said it's likely that someone inside the airline's dispatch center failed to catch that both planes would be in the air at the same time with identical flight numbers when both the dispatcher and the pilots signed off on the flight plan.

"You can drop the ball and that shouldn't happen, but it's nice to see that the system is resilient and we have all the safeguards," said Arroyo, who has only seen this type of issue a couple times in his four

decades with United Airlines. Arroyo started his career as a dispatcher before becoming a pilot.

Flight 2482 is a round-trip route that often flies back and forth between Chicago and Phoenix. Typically the same plane goes back and forth, but the flight out of Chicago was delayed by weather, so American found a second plane in Phoenix and that flight left on time. The result was that both planes briefly shared the same airspace before the arriving flight landed.

The government and airline will determine how this occurred

The Federal Aviation Administration and American Airlines will investigate how this happened, and they both emphasized how glad they were that everyone remained safe.

"The diligence and professionalism of air traffic controllers and our pilots ensured required separation was always maintained and the issue was identified and addressed. Both flights continued safely and without incident," American Airlines said in a statement.

Trump says USS Lincoln's record time at sea during Iran operations 'not nearly long enough'

By KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Friday downplayed the toll on American sailors enduring nearly nine months at sea on the USS Abraham Lincoln as concerns escalated about mental health and supply issues aboard the aircraft carrier supporting U.S. operations against Iran.

In a brief exchange with reporters before flying to New York for an event to highlight falling violent crime rates across the U.S., Trump refuted that family members have raised concerns about the deployment's length and even said that the deployment — which includes a record-setting uninterrupted time at sea of more than 240 days — is "not nearly long enough."

"That ship is moving right now, or very shortly, and it's being replaced with another very similar ship," Trump said when asked about the lengthy deployment. The acting navy secretary, Hung Cao, said the Lincoln "will return home soon" in a social media post on Friday.

Trump strode into office for a second term vowing to avoid lengthy and expensive military entanglements. And after launching the Iran war, alongside Israel, Trump and his advisers said the conflict would last a matter of weeks. The war is now more than five months old.

But on Friday, during his crime address in Garden City, New York, he acknowledged that he's used the U.S. military "a little bit more than I wanted to," while asserting anew that the U.S. operation against Iran is going well. He even said, seemingly in jest, that "pretty soon I'll be declaring the Hormuz Strait a territory of the United States."

"I'll never apologize," Trump added about the war and its impact on oil prices. "I did the right thing."

Democrats demand Pentagon briefing on USS Lincoln

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 ships and their equipment.

Several Democratic lawmakers, including Sens. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut and Ruben Gallego of Arizona, are pressing for accountability from the Pentagon over conditions aboard the Lincoln, which Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on Thursday said were "completely misrepresented."

Rep. Jason Crow, D-Colo., who served three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan with the 82nd Airborne Division and 75th Ranger Regiment before being elected, took to social media to criticize Trump's comments, saying on X that "President Trump does not care about our servicemembers or their families."

Top Democrats on the House Oversight Committee have requested a classified briefing on the ship's food inventory, sanitation issues and healthcare availability, as well as an assessment of how much longer it would be deployed before relief arrives.

Republicans have been less outspoken about the situation on the Lincoln. The GOP chairmen of the House and Senate armed services committees did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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While 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 said the U.S. military can maintain the blockage of Iranian ports "indefinitely."

Another aircraft carrier, the USS George Washington, left port in Da Nang, Vietnam, last week, and is expected to replace the USS Lincoln, one of two aircraft carriers currently deployed in the Middle East.

After reports emerged that sailors on the Lincoln are struggling with mental health concerns, the Navy said it has "not observed an increase in suicidal ideations or attempts aboard the ship," though officials have declined to provide data, citing operational security and patient privacy concerns.

A Navy official said a sailor aboard the Lincoln went overboard in early August but 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 whether it was being considered a suicide attempt.

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

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-setting uninterrupted time at sea of more than 240 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

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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 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.

Luigi Mangione pleads guilty to federal stalking charges in the killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, LARRY NEUMEISTER and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Luigi Mangione pleaded guilty on Friday to federal stalking charges in the killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, admitting matter-of-factly that he trailed the executive to an investor conference and gunned him down on a New York City street in 2024.

Mangione, 28, said he made a gun with the aid of a 3D printer, traveled to New York and used a ruse

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— posing as an investor at a multibillion-dollar firm — to contact the company for details on the event.

"On the morning of Dec. 4, 2024, I shot Mr. Thompson in Manhattan, and he died," Mangione told the Manhattan federal court, which he entered shackled at the feet but not handcuffed in his beige jail uniform.

Listening in the audience, Thompson's wife, Paulette, took several deep breaths and repeatedly wiped tears from her eyes.

Prosecutors plan to seek a life prison term at Mangione's sentencing, set for Dec. 18. When U.S. District Judge Margaret M. Garnett asked whether he understood that he could spend the rest of his life behind bars, Mangione answered neutrally: "Yes."

In a statement, Thompson's family called the plea "an important step toward justice" and noted that Mangione still faces other cases, including a New York state murder prosecution. It carries the potential for a separate long sentence.

Mangione still faces a state murder case

Federal prosecutors didn't give Mangione any deal or incentive to plead guilty, they and his lawyers said. Nor did Mangione plead guilty to avoid a potential death sentence. That possibility was taken off the table when a federal murder charge was tossed out this winter.

Mangione's lawyers didn't explain why he choose to plead guilty now, but after he entered the plea at Friday's hastily scheduled hearing, they quickly sought to have the New York case thrown out on double jeopardy grounds. The state's double jeopardy protections can kick in if a prior prosecution ends in a guilty plea.

"Mr. Mangione has accepted full responsibility for the death of Brian Thompson," defense lawyer Karen Friedman Agnifilo said outside court, arguing that her client shouldn't face two prosecutions over a "single tragic event."

The Manhattan district attorney's office, which is handling the state prosecution, said it remains committed to its case and would contest the defense's efforts to shut it down.

Mangione alludes to back pain in explaining his actions

Surveillance video of the ambush showed a masked gunman shooting Thompson, 50, from behind. Police say "delay," "deny" and "depose" were written on the ammunition, mimicking a phrase used to describe how insurers avoid paying claims.

That detail — and revelations that Mangione's private writings lambasted health insurers as greedy, according to authorities — made the case a fulcrum for debate about the industry and made Mangione a cause célèbre for some of its critics.

A University of Pennsylvania graduate from a wealthy Maryland family, Mangione told the court Friday that he pursued Thompson "after years of enduring severe pain from a broken back, navigating the obstacles of the health insurance system and witnessing similar experiences of countless others."

Friedman Agnifilo later said her client "believed that the system had failed him and destroyed his life."

Authorities say Mangione's grievances are no excuse for killing

Mangione never was a UnitedHealthcare customer, according to police and the company.

"To those who idolize Luigi Mangione, I say this. Violence is not a cause. Murder is not a message. And a killer is certainly not a hero," New York Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said outside court Friday.

U.S. Attorney Jamie McDonald, whose office handled the federal case, added: "There can be no celebrity in assassination."

Thompson led one of the United States' largest health insurers, but he wasn't well known outside the industry. Trained as an accountant, he worked at parent company UnitedHealth Group Inc. for 20 years and became CEO of its insurance arm, UnitedHealthcare, in 2021. He and his wife had two sons, who were in high school when their father was killed.

Thompson's violent death "devastated everyone who knew and loved him," the company said in a statement Friday, thanking law enforcement for bringing Mangione to justice.

His defense had lost some disputes over evidence

Mangione was arrested five days after the shooting, when he was spotted at a McDonald's in Altoona,

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Pennsylvania, about 230 miles (370 kilometers) west of Manhattan. Police had released various images of the suspected shooter, including one showing his face as he checked into a hostel.

Although his lawyers got the federal murder charge dismissed, Garnett also delivered some setbacks to the defense, 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.

Similarly, the judge in the state case threw out terrorism charges against Mangione but agreed to let the gun and notebook be used as evidence. The case has been heading toward a September trial, but his lawyers' new bid to dismiss it could complicate the timeline.

Trump focuses on violent crime reduction as he boosts GOP candidates at New York police academy

By COLLIN BINKLEY and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

GARDEN CITY, N.Y. (AP) — President Donald Trump highlighted 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 was visiting the Nassau County police academy in suburban Long Island, where he was expected to promote new FBI crime statistics being released Friday showing a decrease in violent crime for 2025. But despite the setting and an array of uniformed local police officers behind him on stage, the event was overwhelmingly a political one, with Trump lashing Democrats and promoting his record and his party's candidates.

Trump's visit aimed at boosting Republicans 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 briefly touched on the new crime statistics, but before long he was returning to familiar attacking lines, calling his opponents "Radical left Democrats" and his predecessor, former President Joe Biden, "Sleepy Joe."

"We call them Dumb-ocrats now because their policies are so dumb. Fighting to defund the police. Does that play well in this room?" Trump said at one point, turning around to look at the officers behind him.

Trump slams Democrats and promotes policies on crime, tariffs and more

He criticized the state's Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul and insulted the state's Attorney General, Letitia James, as "a real slob" and "a disgrace."

James successfully sued the president and his companies for financial fraud. The Justice Department last year secured a mortgage fraud indictment against James, but the case was dismissed after a judge concluded that the prosecutor who charged her and another Trump adversary, former FBI Director James Comey, was illegally appointed.

He touted his deployment of the National Guard to cities around the U.S., including in the nation's capital. Trump repeatedly said that "young, beautiful girls in the White House" have thanked him for making Washington safer. It was not clear who he was referring to, but he said, "These young, these gorgeous, beautiful girls are — they want to be safe."

"Two years ago, we were in a hellhole, and now we have one of the safest cities," he said.

The new FBI statistics released Friday showed the homicide rate in the United States dropped to the lowest it's been in 75 years. The report on 2025 crime statistics also showed that overall violent crime dropped 9.3% last year. Experts note that national violent crime rates have been declining since 2022, and pinpointing an exact reason is difficult.

Trump also promoted his tariff policies, along with his tax cuts and spending law passed last year and suggested that the tax breaks on overtime would be popular with police officers. Many of his lines, especially the political attacks, didn't get as much of a reaction from the uniformed officers as it did from

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the crowd of regular Trump supporters in the audience, who enthusiastically cheered and booed on cue.

To the side of the stage during his remarks were the new U.S. Attorney General Todd Blanche and FBI Director Kash Patel, who each spoke to warm up the crowd before the president. Their appearance at an event that in part was designed to help Republican candidates broke longstanding norms in which the nation's law enforcement generally tried to steer clear of participating in overtly political events.

Also seated among the guests of honor was actor Kelsey Grammer.

Trump narrowly won Nassau County in 2024, flipping the county in the largely Democratic state to Republicans for the first time in more than two decades.

It's home to one of the largest police forces in the nation and 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.

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.

Blakeman, who briefly took the stage during Trump's remarks, said he was honored Trump was visiting.

In a Fox Business interview on Thursday, Blakeman downplayed 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.

Wall Street slips from its record following the latest weak update on the US economy

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. stock market edged back from its all-time high Friday following the latest report on the economy to come in surprisingly weak, this time about how much shoppers are spending at retailers. Such data could keep interest rates low, which is something Wall Street loves, but it also raises the risk of a slowing economy when inflation is still high.

The S&P 500 slipped 0.2% from its record set the day before. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 107 points, or 0.2%, and the Nasdaq composite sank 0.3%.

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Stocks gave up modest gains from early in the morning after oil prices swung higher. The price for a barrel of Brent crude rose 1.7% to \$88.52 as uncertainty continues about when the war with Iran will allow oil tankers to freely exit the Persian Gulf again.

Also raising uncertainty was a report showing shoppers spent less at U.S. retailers last month than the month before. That surprised economists, who were forecasting another month of growth.

On the bright side for financial markets, such a pullback in spending could take pressure off inflation. Inflation remains much higher than anyone would like, but reports earlier this week suggested the pace of increases in prices is decelerating.

If inflation keeps trending that way, it could encourage the Federal Reserve 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.

The downside of such data, including last week's surprisingly weak report on the U.S. job market, is that they raise the risk of a slowing economy. The Fed has no good tool to fix both a stagnating economy and high inflation at the same time, which is why what's called "stagflation" is seen as a worst-case scenario.

Some on Wall Street cautioned against overreacting to the weak data on U.S. retail sales, even if it was broad based. It could simply be a snap back after retail sales in earlier months were boosted by unusual factors such as big tax refunds, the World Cup and even an earlier Prime Day event at Amazon, according to Jennifer Timmerman, senior investment strategy analyst at Wells Fargo Investment Institute.

U.S. consumers nevertheless appear to be getting more discouraged about the economy. A preliminary survey by the University of Michigan suggested sentiment among them is weakening by more than economists expected.

The survey said drops occurred across the political spectrum and showed up particularly among older, lower-income and other groups who can be hurt most by inflation.

On Wall Street, Reddit jumped 12.6% after learning its stock will join the S&P 500 index on Tuesday. Many professional investors and funds closely track the index, either mimicking it or at least measuring their performance against it. That can push many to buy a stock automatically when it enters the index.

Applied Materials fell 5.1% even though the company, whose technology helps make semiconductors, reported stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected. CEO Gary Dickerson said global hunger for artificial-intelligence technology helped it deliver another record quarter.

But its stock had already more than doubled this year and built expectations very high, which helped pressure the stock on Friday.

AI stocks in general have been swinging sharply on worries that their prices shot too high because of AI euphoria and that their strong growth in revenue may not be sustainable.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 13.23 points to 7,785.76. Despite the loss, it nevertheless closed out a third straight winning week, its longest such streak since a nine-week run that ended in May.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 107.58 to 53,732.41, and the Nasdaq composite sank 73.86 to 26,729.16.

In the bond market, Treasury yields ticked higher and followed the price of oil. The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.69% from 4.63% late Thursday.

In stock markets abroad, indexes were mixed in Europe and Asia.

London's FTSE 100 slipped 0.2% after Nigel Farage regained the seat in Parliament he quit a month ago, beating trash-can wearing comic candidate Count Binface in a special election.

South Korea's Kospi again had one of the world's sharpest moves and jumped 2.4% for its third straight gain of at least that much. Seoul has been at the center of the world's swings for AI stocks because its market is dominated by two tech giants, Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix.

Vote counting suspended then restarted in Zambia election after attacks at polling stations

By JACOB ZIMBA Associated Press

LUSAKA, Zambia (AP) — Vote counting in Zambia's presidential election was suspended Friday and then restarted hours later under heightened security after the electoral commission said there had been attacks against some polling station officials and some ballot papers had been stolen.

The main opposition leader claimed he had been questioned by the army, and police said one person was killed at a polling station during Thursday's vote. Police identified the person as a party official and said they had arrested nine suspects.

While the counting was suspended, riot police and soldiers in armored vehicles were deployed to parts of the capital, Lusaka, including the main vote tallying center, though there were no immediate reports of any major unrest.

It was an unusual set of developments for the southern African country of 22 million people, which has held largely peaceful elections since it returned to multiparty democracy in 1991.

"The violence is targeted at poll staff and in some instances has resulted in the theft of marked ballot papers in ballot boxes," the Electoral Commission of Zambia said in a statement announcing vote counting had been halted.

It did not say who was responsible for the violence or the alleged theft of ballot papers.

Counting restarts after security threat is 'contained'

Electoral commission head Mwangala Zaloumis later announced counting would start again and said the violence affected a small number of polling stations in Lusaka.

"Following a review of the security situation and consultations with the relevant law enforcement agencies, I'm pleased to inform you and to inform the nation that the security threat to the electoral process has been contained," she said at a press briefing.

The main opposition candidate, Brian Mundubile, said in a video statement that his alliance of parties had "received deeply troubling reports from several parts of the country" and called into question the credibility of the election.

He later said on social media that he was being interrogated by the army.

The president calls for peace and patience

Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema, who ran for a second five-year term, called for Zambians to "remain peaceful, patient and patriotic as we await the official outcome from those entrusted with managing the vote" in a statement on X.

Thursday's election was seen as a test of Hichilema's economic recovery plan after the copper-rich nation was plunged into a debt crisis in 2020. Hichilema was elected in 2021 and oversaw the restructuring of Zambia's sovereign debt while reining in inflation and stabilizing the currency.

But critics say that economic stability has not trickled down to many people in Zambia, where poverty is widespread and frustration has grown over the high cost of living and electricity shortages.

The government was under scrutiny before the election

There was also criticism of Hichilema ahead of this election by the opposition and independent rights groups, which said his government was squeezing dissent. Mundubile's alliance accused the government of being behind a law enforcement agency raid on its offices days before the election and claimed the action was designed to hurt the alliance's campaign.

Hichilema, 64, was one of 14 candidates in the presidential election, but his biggest challenge was thought to come from Mundubile, a 55-year-old law graduate who emerged this year as the leader of the opposition alliance.

Zambians also voted for members of Parliament and local government councilors. About 8 million people were registered to vote at more than 13,500 polling stations. Final results were expected by Monday, according to the electoral commission.

The opposition claims election interference

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Mundubile had said the suspension of the vote counting could lead to "an opportunity for interference with or manipulation of the results."

"Put the records before the nation and allow every number to be reconciled. The people of Zambia voted. Their decision must be respected," he said.

Mundubile said he had received information that members of the military had taken control of vote counting stations in at least one town and boxes containing ballots had been taken away from stations in other places, though he did not provide any evidence for those claims.

Zambia gained independence from Britain in 1964 and was a one-party state from 1973 to 1991. It has held largely peaceful votes and transfers of power between parties and political alliances since then.

Hichilema himself was once imprisoned on charges of treason when he was an opposition leader in 2017 during a bitter rivalry with then-President Edgar Lungu. He was held for four months after his motorcade did not give way to Lungu's on a road and claimed he was tortured during his imprisonment.

Hichilema was released after international condemnation of the arrest and beat Lungu in an election in 2021.

Mundubile served in Lungu's government and rose to lead the opposition alliance challenging Hichilema after Lungu died last year.

Trump asks Supreme Court to let White House ballroom construction continue during appeal

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's administration on Friday asked the U.S. Supreme Court to allow the White House to continue construction on its \$400 million ballroom project while it appeals a lower court's order to halt the work.

Trump's solicitor general petitioned the high court to suspend last week's decision by a three-judge panel from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Chief Justice John Roberts set a deadline of Tuesday for a response by plaintiffs challenging the ballroom project.

The divided appeals court panel ruled last week Trump must stop the White House ballroom's construction because Congress has not approved the project. The panel's majority said Trump doesn't have the unilateral authority to build a 90,000-square-foot (8,400-square-meter) ballroom where the White House's East Wing stood before he ordered its demolition last fall.

The lower court suspended its own ruling for two weeks to give Trump's Republican administration time to appeal to the Supreme Court. Solicitor General D. John Sauer asked the Supreme Court to rule on its stay petition before the appeals court panel's decision takes effect on Aug. 21.

"This case involves an extraordinary and unlawful injunction that will halt the ongoing construction of the integrated military complex, including a totally secure ballroom space, at the East Wing of the White House, which is vitally required by national security," Sauer wrote.

Friday's court filing includes the administration's first confirmation that a threatened missile attack on Air Force One prompted the Secret Service to secretly fly Trump out of Turkey last month on an alternate military aircraft. In arguing for the need for a secure ballroom space, the filing cites "the threat of a missile attack against Air Force One on July 8" in a list of recent assassination attempts against Trump.

The filing also asserts that the project is "on time and under budget" with approximately \$400 million in private donations obviating the need for any taxpayer dollars to be spent. However, Democrats in Congress have said it appears that funds from Trump's "big, beautiful" tax cuts bill appear to be paying for ballroom work. The administration also has requested additional funding from Congress for the project, but lawmakers haven't approved it.

In April, a district court judge ordered a stop to aboveground construction of the planned ballroom. But the judge stressed that the White House was free to proceed with underground work, including the construction of any bunkers, military installations and medical facilities.

The D.C. Circuit panel's 2-1 decision upheld an order to pause aboveground construction on the project,

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siding with historic preservationists who sued to stop construction of the ballroom.

"Whether or not a massive ballroom should be constructed is for Congress to decide and is not a matter for Executive self-help," wrote the majority's two judges, both appointed by Democratic presidents.

A third judge disagreed, finding that the preservationist group that challenged the project had no legal right to sue.

"The district court elevated the aesthetic displeasure of a single passerby over the government's security interests in the ballroom," wrote Judge Neomi Rao, who was appointed by Trump.

The Trump administration argues that the president, not Congress or the courts, has unimpeded authority to renovate the White House. The current state of the project, essentially an open construction site, makes it harder to protect the White House, the Justice Department contends.

The administration also says the National Trust for Historic Preservation does not have the legal right, or standing, to sue over the ballroom, which is part of Trump's plans to quickly remake Washington. The solicitor general said the ballroom project "should be a matter for the President and the political process, not construction-by-injunction."

In response to the petition, the trust accused the White House of trying to "outrun the courts" by accelerating construction work, pointing to the administration's plans to install 1 million pounds of rebar and pour another 3,000 cubic yards of concrete in the next week alone.

"The Administration's transparent efforts to evade the rule of law, frustrate judicial review, and limit the availability of meaningful relief in the courts must stop here," the plaintiffs said in a statement.

During an appeals court hearing in early June, an administration lawyer defended a broad view of presidential control over iconic public facilities. The government could bulldoze the Statue of Liberty and the White House, Justice Department lawyer Yaakov Roth said in response to a hypothetical question, and the descendants of immigrants who came through Ellis Island and the enslaved people who built the White House would not have standing to sue.

The D.C. Circuit panel upheld a ruling by U.S. District Judge Richard Leon, who was nominated by Republican President George W. Bush. Leon concluded that a pause wouldn't jeopardize national security. He also exempted any construction work that is necessary for the safety and security of the White House.

The ballroom has been under construction for 10 months. The administration says the work is roughly 65% finished.

"Given those developments, the injunction promises chaos in service of nothing," Sauer wrote.

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 blamed 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 moving cargo through the critical waterway that connects 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.

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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.

"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," the Foreign Ministry said.

There was no immediate response from Iran.

Activists bring food and water to Palestinians under siege by Israeli settlers

Activists from Israel and other countries marched through the occupied West Bank, bringing food and water to Palestinians who have been under siege by Israeli settlers for days.

Three Palestinian families in the town of Qusra have been unable to leave their homes for nearly a week after settlers surrounded the area. Israeli troops intervened multiple times, but the settlers have kept returning.

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

Defense Minister Israel Katz instructed the army to prepare a plan to transfer power to the police to enforce civilian-related matters, the Defense Ministry said in a statement.

Yemen says it disrupted a Houthi attack as fighting continues

Yemen's military said its forces thwarted Houthi attacks early Friday in southwestern Yemen amid ongoing fighting with the Iran-backed rebels.

Forces affiliated with Yemen's internationally recognized government said in a statement that dozens of Houthis were killed and injured in fighting that disrupted plans to attack military reinforcements in Taiz province with drones, explosives and artillery.

The Associated Press was unable to independently verify that toll.

A fire broke out Friday at the port in Mokha, where Houthis launched missiles targeting the port's infrastructure, according to a spokesman for Yemen's joint military forces. The spokesman, Wadah al-Dubaish, could not immediately say if anyone was killed or wounded.

The Houthis said Friday they targeted Saudi Aramco, Saudi Arabia's state-owned oil company, with a drone strike in the city of Najran near Yemen's border. There was no immediate comment from Aramco or Saudi Arabia.

Recent Houthi attacks on government-held areas across Yemen have raised fears that the country's civil war could reignite and open another front in the Middle East.

Kushner will head to Middle East for talks on Gaza

U.S. 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 Nikolay 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.

With US-Iran talks stalled, diplomatic efforts expand to unlikely European players

By MATTHEW LEE and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Faced with an increasingly bellicose Iran as talks to end the war have stalled, the Trump administration appears to be reaching out to a broader swath of countries that might be able to

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help pressure Tehran or ease its hardline position where traditional mediators have not succeeded so far.

While discussions between Iran and Oman, as well as between Iran and Pakistan, Turkey and Qatar, persist at an uneven and unpredictable pace, the U.S. administration quietly has expanded its outreach to include perhaps unlikely interlocutors in Europe.

Just this week, Secretary of State Marco Rubio met in person in Washington with the foreign minister of Austria on Tuesday and held a call with the foreign minister of Greece on Wednesday.

Those interactions were not notable beyond the normal course of relations between the U.S. and two close European allies. The official State Department readouts of the discussions were bland and vague and did not mention Iran by name as a topic of conversation.

But it then emerged that both foreign ministers — almost immediately after their talks with Rubio — spoke Thursday with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

The apparent new tack to break the negotiation logjam comes as the U.S. and Iran are both pushing for control of the Strait of Hormuz, the crucial oil shipping corridor. President Donald Trump faces little wiggle room in his next steps as the economic fallout from the war and dwindling stockpiles of key weapons pose political problems for Republicans ahead of November's midterm congressional elections.

A desperate push is on to break the diplomatic logjam between the US and Iran

The entry by Austria and Greece is likely less of a formal mediation attempt, analysts say, and more reflective of a desperate push to halt the conflict because of the impact it has on an increasing number of countries, beyond those in the Middle East.

"Everyone is just urging both sides to stop this reckless game of chicken," said Ali Vaez, Iran project director at the International Crisis Group.

It also shows how much Iran's effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz has forced countries, which otherwise were neutral bystanders to the larger conflict, to exercise any diplomatic sway they may have on their Iranian and American counterparts to kick-start a lasting resolution.

Mona Yacoubian, director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, warned that any efforts by Greece, Austria or any other non-mediating country could prove to be futile.

"While the calls to both sides may entail encouraging both Iran and the U.S. back to the negotiating table, such efforts fall short of mediation, which is a very complex endeavor and requires trust to be built by the mediator with both sides," Yacoubian said.

She added that it's not something that any country can "just jump into."

Rubio discussed Iran with his Austrian and Greek counterparts

The State Department said Friday that it could not comment on the timing of calls by other countries' foreign ministers and maintained that Rubio had made no requests of either to get in touch with Iran or pass messages to Araghchi.

One European diplomat, who was briefed on the matter and spoke on condition of anonymity to detail sensitive diplomatic conversations, said the timing of the calls was not an accident.

The State Department did allow, however, that Iran had been a topic of conversation in Rubio's discussions, which occurred as Trump is facing serious political headwinds over a war for which he has offered shifting objectives.

No longer purely about making Iran incapable of producing a nuclear weapon, the immediate goal has become reopening the Strait of Hormuz, where a fifth of the world's oil usually passes through and which was open before the U.S. and Israel launched attacks on Iran on Feb. 28.

"That's goal number one: keep oil and gas cheap for Americans all over our country," Vice President JD Vance said in an interview Thursday on Fox News Channel. But he did not say anything about the strait being open and toll-free for transiting ships, as he had in the past.

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

The two European countries have key connections to the war's fallout

Austria and Greece may not be obvious choices to assist on the Iran portfolio, but Vienna is home to the International Atomic Energy Agency, which will play a key role in any resolution to the Iran's nuclear

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program, and hosted the final negotiations that resulted in the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. Greece is a major maritime nation in the Mediterranean and has significant shipping interests in the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea.

In statements from the Austrian, Greek and Iranian foreign ministries, it was clear that Iran had been a top topic in all of the conversations this week.

The Greek foreign ministry said Foreign Minister George Gerapetritis had been briefed by Araghchi on "regional developments, and in particular on the ongoing talks regarding the Strait of Hormuz." It said Gerapetritis "underlined the importance of freedom of navigation and maritime security."

The Austrian foreign ministry offered Austria's services as a venue for further potential talks with Iran and said Foreign Minister Beate Meinel-Reisinger had stressed to Araghchi "the urgency of restoring stability in the region through serious diplomatic efforts."

"There can be no military solution," it said. "A diplomatic solution remains possible. Our priority is to safeguard freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz."

Iran's foreign ministry, expectedly, took a different tack in explaining the calls.

It said Friday that in Araghchi's calls with his European counterparts they discussed "mechanisms for the future management of the Strait of Hormuz," which he said had been disrupted by the "unlawful aggression by the United States and the Israeli regime against Iran."

In both calls, he accused the U.S. of violating the interim deal signed by both sides in June to end the immediate hostilities and begin broader talks to end the war.

Suspect arrested in World War II Memorial vandalism in Washington

By GARY FIELDS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A person has been arrested in connection with vandalism at The World War II Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia Jeanine Pirro announced Friday.

Pirro announced on X that her office was filing two felony charges against Melissa L. Farris. Pirro said the felony charges are "Depredation Against Property of the United States and Destruction of Veterans' Memorials." The offenses carry penalties of up to 10 years in prison.

On Thursday, the words "Clean hands dirty \$" were found painted on the monument and bubbles filled a fountain.

"Vandalizing our World War II Memorial is a despicable attack on a sacred monument honoring the Americans who fought and died for our freedom. Those Americans include my father and grandfather," Pirro wrote.

A woman identified on her Facebook page as Melissa Lovewell posted a video Thursday in which she is seen taking cans of spray paint from her bag and then painting the monument.

"I will wait here to be arrested for spraying our veterans' fountain," she says. "It was me, I'm doing it, it's on camera."

In a video posted Friday, the woman, who in a separate post said she had been in Washington for three weeks, said she was turning herself in.

The arrest warrant filed in the case indicated that witnesses took pictures of the vandalism occurring, which were circulated among U.S. Park Police officers.

One officer recognized the suspect as someone they arrested Aug. 10 "for unlawfully camping on federal property" just blocks away. She livestreamed that arrest, the warrant said.

The suspect was identified by her Kentucky driver's license as Melissa L. Farris, of Elizabethtown, Kentucky. Farris was expected to be arraigned Friday. The Public Defender's office said she was not yet listed in the system and had not been assigned an attorney.

The incident sparked harsh rebukes from both Pirro and President Donald Trump and comes after the president blamed damage to the nearby Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool on vandals, without providing

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evidence. That case prompted charges against multiple people which were dropped when Pirro said evidence showed the damage came from botched repairs after Trump's renovation at the site.

"Our beautiful World War II Memorial was just hit by Spray Painting Vandals," Trump said on Friday on his Truth Social site. "First the Reflecting Pool, now this."

The Interior Department said that the U.S. Park Police were on the scene following the Thursday vandalism and an investigation was ongoing. "The public should know we will find the person responsible for this disgusting act," the department said.

The Friends of the National World War II Memorial, a nonprofit organization that helps maintain the site, said: "There are many places in our country for expression, debate, and disagreement. A national memorial honoring those who served and those who never returned home should never be used as a canvas for vandalism."

The Veterans of Foreign Wars called the vandalism "an act of profound disrespect, a slap in the face to the veterans who served and sacrificed and to the families who carried that burden at home."

A former Olympian was charged in late July with deliberately damaging the Reflecting Pool, but the Justice Department later moved to dismiss that case, saying evidence prosecutors had received refuted the idea that vandals were to blame.

Trump sharply criticized Pirro's assessment that damage to the Reflecting Pool was the result of shoddy construction and not the work of vandals, as he claimed.

The case dismissal was an embarrassing setback for a Justice Department that had previously echoed Trump's claims and billed the prosecution as accountability for damage at a Washington landmark, a pet project of Trump. Pirro's decision to drop the case was also a rare moment during Trump's second term of an aide or political appointee openly defying him.

AP Exclusive: US military base schools put new emphasis on Western civilization and Christianity

By ANNIE MA and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Department of Defense is introducing a course centered on Western civilization and Christianity this fall in the schools it operates for military families, part of an effort by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to redirect the education system toward patriotic values and classical learning.

The Department of Defense Education Activity operates about 160 schools across 11 countries and educates roughly 70,000 students who are children of active-duty military or civilian service members. Conservatives have eyed the schools — which, unlike most public schools, are run by the federal government — as a testing ground for reshaping education.

The Western civilization course planned for this fall will use a textbook published by Encounter Books, a conservative publishing house. Titled "The Golden Thread: A History of the Western Tradition, Volume I: The Ancient World and Christendom," it includes suggested lesson plans created in partnership with Hillsdale College, a conservative Christian school in Michigan that has also developed influential materials for K-12 schools.

Historians and educators who reviewed excerpts of the text told The Associated Press it depicts points throughout history in misleading ways, representing Western civilization and Christianity as one and the same and casting Islam as a threat to both.

"You've got to wonder a bit whether Western civilization is a Trojan horse for classical Christian education," said Phil Gorski, a historical sociology professor at Yale University.

The course is part of a wider reshaping of the Defense Department's schools. They have begun hiring classical learning teachers, and the department has brought in new academic chiefs with ties to classical learning charter schools and to Republican-led efforts to promote more patriotic education.

In a written statement, the Pentagon said it "remains committed to providing all of its military-connected students with the best possible education and opportunities." It did not respond directly to a series of questions about the textbook and the broader push for classical learning.

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Classical education broadly refers to a teaching style built on the liberal arts, with an emphasis on critical thinking and citizenship. Students are taught to imitate the rhetoric and style of great thinkers and writers. While some classical educators have pushed to incorporate diverse scholars, critics have argued the movement focuses too heavily on foundational texts from Greek, Roman and other Western writers and gives short shrift to achievements in Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Conservatives see classical learning as an antidote to unflattering depictions of US history

Conservative politicians have embraced classical learning, especially as the Trump administration and Republican-led states have pushed schools to emphasize patriotism and put boundaries around how they teach unflattering parts of American history.

In his writing and public remarks since before becoming defense secretary, Hegseth has advocated for parents to embrace classical Christian education.

In his 2022 book "Battle for the American Mind," Hegseth, a former Fox News host, describes a history of progressives working to remove God and religion from public and private schools. For parents, he writes, not sending their children to classical Christian schools would be to admit defeat.

"It is certainly not sustainable, merely passing the same losing hand to the next generation," Hegseth writes. "With this approach, we lose. We lose America — and Western Civilization."

Many classical Christian schools focus on reclaiming Western civilization from external threats. But across the broader field of classical education — including secular private schools — the field is increasingly split on this point, said Susan Wise Bauer, the author of a popular classical homeschooling program. She said there is a range of approaches on which texts are worth studying.

"Whenever you have a system of education where that is the impulse, ... 'This is us, and they are them over there,'" she said, "then the idea of a shared literary heritage becomes a weapon."

Textbook casts Western civilization as under threat

In the Pentagon's system, high school students can take the new course, Western Civilization to 1500, to fulfill a world history graduation requirement, according to a news release. The course is offered through the department's virtual school.

In the textbook's introduction, the authors write: "The dangers presented by the neglect of Western history are not trivial."

"When citizens of Western countries are utterly ignorant of history, as most now are, they are left unarmed against the general hostility to their own tradition that has become so destructive a force in contemporary culture," they write.

The idea that external forces will displace the dominant culture is a common right-wing political narrative, said Curtis Dozier, a professor of Greek and Roman studies at Vassar College.

"It's this right-wing idea that when immigrants come to a country, they care more about their own traditions and history and seek to replace the tradition of the place," he said.

The textbook's authors credit early Christianity with promoting the idea that all people must be treated humanely. It argues that "Christian faith also supported a humane cosmopolitanism."

The book describes Islam as inherently more violent than Christianity. In a chapter on the Middle Ages, the text describes Arabs as resentful or bitter toward Christians and Jews.

In a section titled "Holy War and Martyrdom in Battle," the book describes wars fought by Christians, such as the Crusades, as intended to defend and protect other Christians. Islam, in contrast, glorifies violence and war, the book says, invoking the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks and 9/11.

"In recent decades, Islam as a religion has, understandably, aroused acute hostility from a great many non-Muslims around the world thanks to the behavior of radical Muslim terrorists. Sometimes referred to as Islamists, their atrocities have been applauded by depressingly large numbers of ordinary Muslims," the book says.

Matthew Gabriele, a history and religion professor at Virginia Tech, said the book's description of the Crusades and the conflicts with the Islamic world strips out important details and context to depict Islam as an aggressive religious tradition and downplays the religious motivations and violence of the Christian

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church.

"It's trying to make a contemporary political point by continuously referencing things that happened in the 21st century," Gabriele said. "The fact that (the book) does this very selectively and only when it suits a particular political project suggests to me that this is not a scholarly history in any kind of real sense."

The book's publisher, Roger Kimball, said it was peer-reviewed by 15 experts. "As the proud publisher of this incomparable work, I stand behind it in every detail," he said.

One of the book's co-authors, Harvard emeritus professor James Hankins, said the text does not attempt to characterize Christianity and Western civilization as one. Segments of the book acknowledge the West's cultural debts to the Islamic world, said Hankins, who now teaches at the University of Florida's Hamilton School for Classical and Civic Education, a conservative-backed project to teach Western civilization.

An emphasis on the study of Western civilization was standard until the 1970s, Hankins said. He criticized the move away from teaching it, noting that other countries such as China study their own civilization.

"Abandoning it has been foolish in my view, and is one cause of the growing cultural disorientation of the last couple of generations," he said in an email. "People no longer know where they come from or where they belong in the story of our civilization."

The Trump administration aligned the military's education system with its political vision

In speeches and interviews, Hegseth has drawn a line from the country's founding to Western civilization and early Christianity, a religion he describes as under attack by outside forces. He often argues the U.S. was founded as a Christian nation and troops should embrace God.

At an event last September recognizing a civics education initiative, Hegseth emphasized the need to teach these values to children early on.

"That type of brilliance didn't come out of thin air," he said of the Founding Fathers. "It was first inspired by God (and) inspired by an understanding of human history, an understanding of biblical history (and) an understanding of Western civilization philosophy and theology and civics poured into a generation of men and poured into an American experiment — it wasn't an accident."

President Donald Trump's administration also has moved to align the military's education apparatus with its broader vision for American schools. Admissions offices at U.S. military academies now accept the Classical Learning Test, a college entrance exam that positions itself as a classical alternative to the SAT. And last year, the ACLU sued the defense school system over its decision to ban hundreds of books that covered topics like race, gender and democracy.

In March, the department abruptly changed the leadership of Department of Defense Education Activity schools, replacing Beth Schiavino-Narvaez with Paul Craft as director. In a news release at the time, Hegseth described Craft as the right leader to reorient the school system "toward patriotic values and classical learning."

The Pentagon also replaced the education activity's chief academic officer, hiring Tiffany Hoben, who previously worked in the Florida Department of Education under Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis. In Florida, she oversaw the rollout of a civics curriculum that was criticized for claiming America's founders did not intend for a full separation of church and state.

This summer, the department announced the hiring of Matthew Kirby as the system's Americas regional director. Kirby is the CEO of Liberty Classical Schools, an Atlanta-based network of charter schools.

In an all-hands meeting after his appointment, Craft described classical learning as a priority that came directly from Hegseth.

"He has tasked us with taking the best that we can from the lessons learned from classical learning in a private school setting to say, 'How do we expose our kids to that in a public school setting like us?'" Craft said.

US missionary kidnapped in Niger is released after 9 months in captivity, his organization says

NIAMEY, Niger (AP) — An American missionary who was kidnapped in Niger in October has been released, his organization said Friday.

Kevin Rideout "is in good health in the care of U.S. officials," SIM International, an Evangelical mission organization, said in a statement.

He will soon be reunited with his extended family, the statement added.

Rideout was back in U.S. custody on Friday, the country's President Donald Trump said in a post on social media.

"Kevin, the United States of America looks forward to welcoming you HOME. Glad to have helped!" Trump wrote.

Rideout was kidnapped in the West African country's capital, Niamey, on Oct. 21 by three armed individuals and was probably driven out of town, according to information provided by a security official at the time.

No armed group claimed responsibility for the abduction.

Niger has long faced attacks from armed groups including jihadis linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State organization.

The U.S. Embassy in Niamey issued a security alert a day after Rideout's kidnapping, warning that U.S. citizens "remain at a heightened risk of kidnapping throughout Niger, including in the capital city."

Niger is ruled by a military junta that took power in 2023 after deposing the democratically elected president, Mohamed Bazoum. The new authorities ousted Western partners including the United States, which had soldiers in Niger, and forged a new security and diplomatic alliance with Russia.

In June, more than 30 people were killed when gunmen attacked the main airport in Niamey. It was the second attack this year at the airport, a strategic hub that serves as the ruling military's command, hosting its air force base and most of its drones and aircraft. It's also the headquarters of the regional alliance that brings together troops from Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso.

The violence is the latest sign of armed groups increasingly targeting cities and urban centers in Africa's Sahel region.

Reform UK's Nigel Farage beats a slate of fringe candidates in election boycotted by major parties

By BRIAN MELLEY and KWIYEON HA Associated Press

CLACTON-ON-SEA, England (AP) — Nigel Farage regained his seat in Parliament on Friday, beating a field of fringe candidates led by trash-can-wearing comic Count Binface in a special election boycotted by mainstream parties that called it a farce.

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 an overseas crypto billionaire.

He denied wrongdoing and ran again for the seat to prove he had voters' support, regaining it with 63% of Thursday's vote in an unusual election on the hottest day of the year. Binface, a serial candidate who has challenged prime ministers past and present, represented a protest vote and finished second in a field of 34 candidates — many of them also jokers — with about 27%, according to the results announced Friday.

Farage hailed the result as an "overwhelming win" that increased his vote share over the last election, but it's hard to draw broad conclusions from the election given the lack of genuine rivals and the fact that Farage has long been popular in the conservative constituency on the east coast of England.

"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 result will send him back to the House of Commons, but an investigation by a parliamentary watchdog that was suspended when he stepped down was resumed hours after the result was announced. That

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means Farage could be forced out of Parliament — and face yet another election.

Farage reshaped UK politics

Farage, the chief cheerleader in getting Britain to vote to leave the European Union a decade ago, has shattered the country's longstanding two-party system by positioning himself to the right of the Conservative Party.

With Farage's win, Reform has just eight of the 650 seats in the House of Commons, but he has made the party a major political force by drawing on a mix of cultural grievances and a vow to stop what he has called an invasion of migrants crossing the English Channel in inflatable rafts. The party has frequently changed the national conversation and forced the governing center-left Labour Party and the Conservatives, long the dominant parties, to address Reform's key issues.

But with Farage under scrutiny and a Labour leadership shake-up that installed Andy Burnham as prime minister, there's room for Labour to regain some ground.

Farage still faces investigation over an undeclared donation

Pressure will continue to mount on Farage as Parliament's standards watchdog investigates an undeclared donation he got 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.

When he resigned on July 7, he complained of an "establishment hit job" and a media-driven "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 remains close to Farage and has reportedly given him money for security and staff. Farage has denied wrongdoing and stood by the man he calls "Posh George."

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 Cottrell.

"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 was a no-show at the vote count

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.

Farage declared victory in the early morning and blew off the official declaration where he would have had to stand alongside the other candidates — a time-honored tradition in British politics.

"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 also 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.

Fiona Byrne, who wouldn't say who she voted for, said Farage shouldn't have called the election, which she said was an expensive joke.

"It's just been a complete waste of money and time for everybody here, and he just needs to face the music," she said.

But John Fairclough said he was happy Farage won because he's what the country needs.

"To my mind he hasn't done anything wrong," Fairclough said. "He's a threat to the main media and government who want to just control us and control everything."

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, declared himself the "winning candidate of the candidates who bothered to turn up for the results."

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 spent most of the campaign doing media

interviews and trying to stay cool in the costume during a sweltering summer.

Binface has hinted that if Farage faces another election, he could return to run again.

"Over one in four people in this constituency would rather have Count Binface as their MP than the leader of Reform UK," Binface said in a video on X. "Stay tuned for Part 2 of the Clacton by-election." _____

Melley reported from London.

European countries battle multiple wildfires as record heat grips the continent

By ANGELA CHARLTON and SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

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

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

More evacuations in France as fire affects more regions

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.

France also has shut down six nuclear reactors in recent days because of extreme heat and drought — and because a mass of jellyfish washed up outside one power plant on the English Channel coast, utility company EDF said. Large numbers of jellyfish are appearing on many French beaches in connection with unusually warm sea temperatures.

In a statement, the company said the shutdowns had minimal impact on France's electricity production. It said extreme weather poses no safety risks to the reactors themselves.

UK wildfires come as London records its hottest day of the year

In the central English town of Stourbridge, where a huge blaze started Thursday, TV footage showed the fires consuming houses, with many left without roofs as flames burned inside the charred walls. About 20 to 30 homes were completely destroyed, Stourbridge lawmaker Cat Eccles told the BBC.

A woman who was evacuated from her Stourbridge home said police knocked on her door and urged her to leave immediately.

"They thought the fire was changing directions, and they didn't know which direction it was going in," Jane Baxter told BBC Radio. "So, it was literally 'grab what you need and get out.'"

Simon Tuhill, chief fire officer of West Midlands Fire Service, said an investigation will be launched but the fire was believed to have started in the grassland before spreading to homes nearby.

Nineteen people and six firefighters were hospitalized for smoke inhalation and other injuries from multiple wildfires in the West Midlands region. In nearby Stoke-on-Trent, a 23-year-old man and a 24-year-old woman were arrested Friday on suspicion of arson over a large grass fire that spread quickly.

The Met Office, the official weather agency, said 38.1C (100.6 F) was recorded in west London on Thursday, marking the hottest day of the year. While temperatures cooled slightly on Friday, many parts of the country have seen little to no rain for weeks. This July has been the driest in England and Wales since records began in 1836.

Spain moves kings' remains to avoid fire

Spanish authorities on Thursday night transferred the remains of three 11th Century kings from a monastery in the northeastern Aragón region near an active wildfire.

The remains were taken to a museum about 80 kilometers (50 miles) south of the 10th-century San Juan de la Peña monastery, which remained unharmed Friday, according to regional authorities.

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Paintings, liturgical objects and the clothes of a notable 18th-century Spanish count were among the other items removed from the monastery.

The wildfire was not yet contained midday Friday with some 800 residents evacuated. Temperatures were expected to cool slightly Saturday.

A separate, much larger wildfire in southern Spain has burned more than 300 square kilometers (120 square miles) in the province of Huelva, also forcing evacuations.

Firefighters battle forest fire in Germany

All 1,800 residents of the village of Gey in western Germany were evacuated after a wildfire with shifting winds in the nearby Hürtgen forest threatened to reach their homes. Nearly 300 hectares (1.16 square miles) of forest were ablaze on Friday morning, local authorities said.

Unexploded ordnance from World War II in the forest hampered firefighting efforts, German news agency dpa reported.

The fire advanced to within 300 meters (1,000 feet) of Gey, which sits on the edge of the forest near the Belgian border. The cause of the blaze remains unknown.

Germany has set a new record for heat-related deaths so far this year, surpassing the 2018 level for the entire year, the Robert Koch Institute said Thursday. An estimated 12,500 people died from heat-related causes between Jan. 1 and Aug. 2.

Fire in Croatia leaves 1 dead, 14 hospitalized

In Croatia, one person was killed and 14 people were hospitalized, of whom seven 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 person's body was found as police combed through the burned-out area.

The fire erupted late Thursday in an Omis suburb and quickly spread because of strong wind. The regional maritime authorities said 194 people, including children, were plucked from the sea and from various boats as they tried to flee the 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.

Firefighters keep Albania's largest wildfire from spreading to homes

Albania has been battling dozens of wildfires in recent weeks, with 11 active fires reported across the country Friday.

The largest fire is in the Gure-Lure area, where the perimeter near residential homes has been brought under control.

Three people have been prosecuted over that fire, which engulfed Lura National Park. They are suspected of failing to take measures to protect the territory from fire, authorities said.

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.

Belgium expected to set another heat record

Belgium was expecting to hit its highest temperature of the summer on Friday, climbing to 37 C (98.6 F) in the capital, Brussels.

The mercury was also set to hit 37 C (98.6 F) in the neighboring Netherlands. The country is suffering from severe drought, with water shortages in some areas, but Dutch authorities have held off declaring a water crisis as rain is expected in the coming days.

Today in History: August 15, Woodstock music festival begins

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, Aug. 15, the 227th day of 2026. There are 138 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Aug. 15, 1969, the Woodstock Music and Art Fair opened in upstate New York; more than 460,000 people attended the three-day festival, which would become a watershed event in American music and

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culture.

Also on this date:

In 1057, Macbeth, King of Scots, was killed in battle by Malcolm, the eldest son of King Duncan, whom Macbeth had killed 17 years earlier.

In 1914, the Panama Canal officially opened as the SS Ancon crossed the just-completed waterway between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

In 1935, humorist Will Rogers and aviator Wiley Post were killed when their airplane crashed near Point Barrow in the Alaska Territory.

In 1947, India gained independence after nearly 200 years of British rule.

In 1961, as workers began constructing a Berlin Wall made of concrete, East German soldier Conrad Schumann leapt to freedom over a tangle of barbed wire.

In 1989, F.W. de Klerk was sworn in as acting president of South Africa, one day after P.W. Botha resigned because of a power struggle within the National Party.

In 1998, 29 people were killed by a car bomb that tore apart the center of Omagh (OH'-mah), Northern Ireland; a splinter group calling itself the Real IRA claimed responsibility.

In 2003, bouncing back from the largest blackout in U.S. history, cities from the Midwest to Manhattan restored power to tens of millions of people.

In 2021, the Taliban regained control of the Afghan capital of Kabul after the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the country.

In 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in a much-anticipated summit in Alaska but failed to secure an agreement to end Russia's war in Ukraine.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Jim Dale is 91. Retired Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer is 88. U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., is 88. Author-journalist Linda Ellerbee is 82. Songwriter Jimmy Webb is 80. Actor Phyllis Smith is 77. Britain's Princess Anne is 76. Actor Tess Harper is 76. Celebrity chef Tom Colicchio is 64. Film director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu (ihn-YAH'-ee-tu) is 63. Philanthropist Melinda French Gates is 62. Actor Debra Messing is 58. Actor Anthony Anderson is 56. Actor Ben Affleck is 54. Olympic gold medal beach volleyball player Kerri Walsh Jennings is 48. Rock singer Joe Jonas (The Jonas Brothers) is 37. Actor Jennifer Lawrence is 36.