

Groton Daily Independent

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Community Calendar

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.

Special School Board Meeting, 6 p.m.

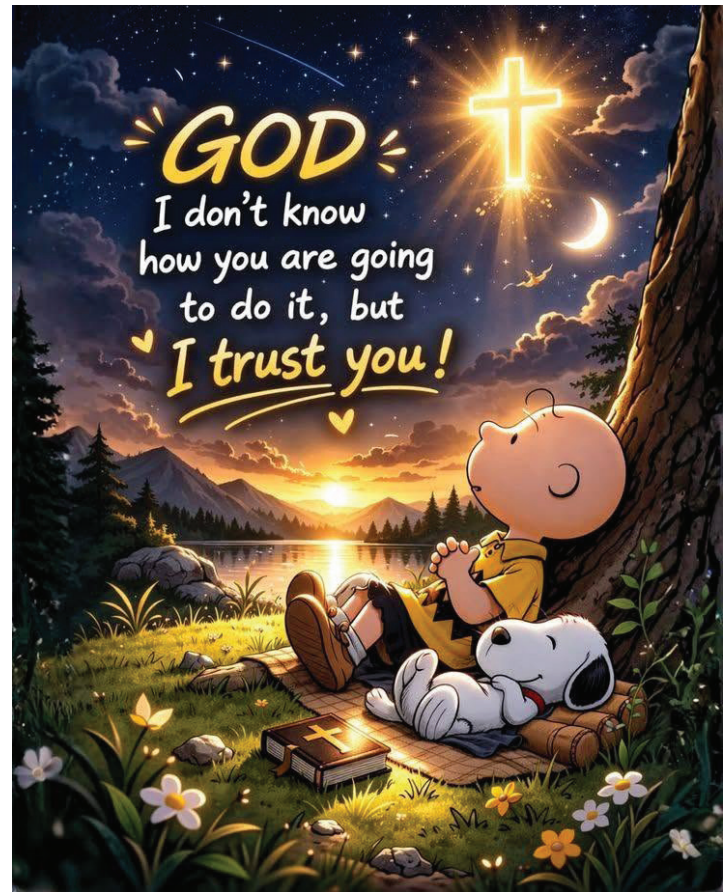
City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent

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

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Wednesday, Aug. 19

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

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

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

Thursday, Aug. 20

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

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

Friday, Aug. 21

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

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

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

Saturday, Aug. 22

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

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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.

Meta Trial Begins

Opening arguments begin today for a multistate trial against Meta that could be the most consequential yet. The social media company faces up to \$1.4T in penalties—approaching the company's total value—as well as forced product design changes.

California, Colorado, Kentucky, and New Jersey are accusing Meta of violating consumer protection laws, including those related to children's privacy, false advertising, and unfair competition. The company stands accused of more than 100 deceptive public statements, including some emphasizing children's safety, while designing products to be addictive to children, harming their mental and physical health. States also say Meta collected information on children under 13 without parental consent, violating federal law.

Meta has lost two similar lawsuits this year, approaching \$1B in payouts. While observers say the company is unlikely to be forced to make the maximum payout (causing bankruptcy), it could be forced to end its infinite-scroll design and "like" counts.

Ebola Toll Climbs

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is now experiencing its deadliest Ebola outbreak on record, with at least 2,325 deaths among 4,945 confirmed cases since May. The toll surpasses the Central African country's 2018-20 epidemic, which killed 2,299 people.

The outbreak is the second-deadliest globally, behind the 2014-16 West Africa epidemic that killed more than 11,000 people. The virus is spreading five times faster than previous outbreaks in the Congo, reaching 2,000 cases in roughly two months, compared with more than 10 months during 2018-20. Ebola is believed to be naturally hosted by fruit bats and spreads between humans through direct contact with bodily fluids.

The rare Bundibugyo strain is driving the current epidemic and has no approved vaccine or specific treatment. Clinical trials are underway for experimental treatments. Meanwhile, armed conflict, misinformation, poor infrastructure, and strikes by unpaid health workers have complicated efforts to contain the virus.

 Humankind: Shaded memorial built in honor of a heatstroke victim provides lifesaving refuge to another man stranded in record-breaking heat.

Sky-High Cancer Risk

Flight attendants and pilots are more likely to die of radiation-related cancers than workers in over 500 other occupations in the US, according to a study published yesterday. Researchers say the finding is likely linked, in part, to cosmic radiation.

Commercial planes typically cruise above 30,000 feet, where a thinner atmosphere offers less protection from high-energy particles from the sun and space. This radiation can damage DNA and increase the risk of certain cancers, such as leukemia and breast cancer. The study revealed that nearly 7% of flight attendants and pilots died from radiation-related cancers—more than nuclear technologists, whose workplace radiation exposure is monitored and limited. US aircrew are not subject to federal radiation limits or monitoring requirements.

A traveler who takes 10 cross-country round-trip flights a year absorbs roughly one-seventh to one-fifteenth as much radiation as an aircrew member accumulates in a single year.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Ohio State and Oregon lead AP Top 25 Football Poll, marking the first time the Big Ten Conference has held the top two spots in the preseason rankings since 1961.

Actress Hayden Panettiere, known for her roles in the TV shows "Nashville" and "Heroes," dies at age 36.

Ye, formerly Kanye West, to perform in Russia, becoming the first major Western artist to hold a concert there since its 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Motion Picture Association strikes AI copyright deal with TikTok creator ByteDance.

Science & Technology

Uber Eats plans to begin integrating drones into its food delivery services in Dallas and Houston by the end of 2026; company hopes to cut transit times to a maximum of 10 minutes.

Researchers identify genetic changes that help malaria-causing parasites resist several common drugs.

Greenland's Labrador Sea provides a critical source of oxygen for deep-sea life across much of the North Atlantic Ocean, new research finds.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.5%, Dow -0.5%, Nasdaq -0.3%) as 30-year Treasury yield tops 5.3%, the highest in 19 years.

OpenAI signs 20-year lease for Nvidia-backed 10-gigawatt Ohio AI data center—potentially among world's largest, with enough power for roughly 7 million homes.

Payments giant Stripe to acquire OpenRouter for over \$8B; OpenRouter allows developers to access different AI models through a single interface.

Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump reportedly threatens to bomb Oman if it interferes in US efforts to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and end the Iran war; comes as Trump's 60-day deadline to reach a deal with Iran ends.

House Ethics Committee investigates Rep. Jimmy Gomez (D, CA-34) for alleged inappropriate sexual contact with a House staffer; Gomez claims interactions were consensual.

Vaccine exemptions for children entering kindergarten reached a record high last year, estimated at 4.2% for one or more vaccines.

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Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

August 18, 2026 – 7:00pm
City Hall – 120 North Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY
CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Remote IT Management Proposal from IT Outlet
4. July Finance Report
5. First Reading of Ordinance No. 797 – Supplemental Appropriations
6. Surplus Old Seesaw from Groton City Park and Donate to James Valley Threshing Association
7. Surplus Pallet of Bricks
8. Project Rural Practice Funding Request
9. Minutes
10. Bills
11. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
12. Review Applications for Public Works Laborer, Hire, and Establish Wage
13. Adjournment

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BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA GENERAL MEETING

TUESDAY, AUGUST 18, 2026, 8:45 A.M.

COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS

COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Opportunity for Public Comment
 - ❖ *Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes or at Boards Discretion. Presentations will be limited to 3 minutes*
4. Dennis Jones – Discuss the Home Arts Building at the Fairgrounds
5. Richmond Dam Update
6. First Reading of the Following Ordinances
 - a. Ordinance #332 – Rezone for Michael & Caroline Sommers
 - b. Ordinance #333 – Rezone for Wayne & Janeen Haas
7. Second Reading and Possible Adoption of Ordinance #331 – Imposing a County Gross Receipts Tax and a Use Tax for Brown County, SD
8. Amend Resolution #2026-06 – Vote Center Locations
9. Dirk Rogers:
 - a. Right Of Way Northern Electric
 - b. Department Update
10. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of August 11, 2026
 - b. Claims
 - c. HR Report
 - d. Travel Request
11. Other Business
12. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
13. Adjourn

You can join the Brown County Commission Meeting via **your computer, tablet, or smartphone on the following:**

<https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>

You can also dial in using your phone in the United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311) - Access Code: 601-168-909 #

Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at [Commission Meetings | Brown County](#)

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Johnson leads Groton golfers at Sioux Valley Invitational

VOLGA — Jace Johnson turned in a strong round to place third individually and lead the Groton Area boys golf team to a tie for sixth place at the Sioux Valley Invitational held Tuesday at Meadow Creek Golf Course in Volga.

Johnson finished the 18-hole round with a 6-over-par 78 on the par-72 course. He went out in 37 and came home in 41.

Johnson's round included a birdie on the par-5 fourth hole, where he carded a three, and another birdie on the par-5 13th with a four. He also recorded pars on holes 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 11, 16 and 17.

Bentley Ehresmann was Groton's second-lowest scorer, finishing 34th with a 98. Ehresmann was consistent over the two sides, shooting 49 on both the front and back nine. His round included pars on the second, fourth and 10th holes.

Liam Johnson placed 36th with a 100. He opened with a 47 on the front nine before shooting 53 on the back. Johnson recorded pars on the fourth, ninth and 17th holes.

Graham Rose followed with a 101 to place 38th. Rose shot a 50 on the opening nine and a 51 on the back. He made par on the third, sixth and seventh holes.

Haden Harder finished 43rd with a 103. Harder carded a 50 on the front nine and a 53 on the back, with a par on the par-3 eighth hole.

Easton Larson rounded out the Groton contingent with a 107, placing 46th. Larson shot 52 on the front and 55 on the back and recorded pars on the third and 17th holes.

The four lowest scores counted toward the team total, giving Groton a 377, or 89-over par. That put the Tigers in a tie for sixth place with Sioux Valley Blue.

Brookings JV won the team competition at 39-over par, finishing three strokes ahead of Aberdeen Roncalli at plus-42. Sioux Valley Gold was third at plus-47, followed by Dell Rapids at plus-63 and Sisseton at plus-70.

Groton and Sioux Valley Blue were tied at plus-89, while Milbank finished eighth at plus-120 and Redfield was ninth at plus-130.

The tournament was played on the 6,344-yard Meadow Creek Golf Course.

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The Dahme Construction crew were busy working on the broken water service feeding the GHS Gym area. An old cast iron pipe is needing to be replaced and the crew was digging back to see where it meets up with PVC pipe. (Photos by Paul Kosel)

McCook County Fatal Crash

What: Two-vehicle fatal crash

Where: Interstate 90 at mile marker 354, 5 miles northeast of Bridgewater, South Dakota

When: 1:21 a.m., Monday, August 17, 2026

Driver 1: 53-year-old male from Pacolet, South Carolina, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2003 Harley-Davidson FXDWG Anniversary

Helmet Used: No

Passenger: 47-year-old female from Lewiston, Maine, fatal injuries

Helmet Used: No

Driver 2: 30-year-old male from Brooklyn, New York, no injuries

Vehicle 2: 2016 Volvo semi-truck

Seat Belt Used: Yes

McCook County, S.D.- Two people died Monday in a two-vehicle crash near Bridgewater, South Dakota.

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

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2003 Harley-Davidson motorcycle was traveling westbound on Interstate 90 near mile marker 354. At the same time, the driver of a 2016 Volvo semi-truck was also traveling westbound at the same location. The Volvo collided with the back of the Harley-Davidson. The driver and passenger of the Harley-Davidson 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.

2026 Sturgis Motorcycle Rally Vehicle Count – Through Day Ten

STURGIS, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) provided daily traffic counts at nine locations for vehicles entering Sturgis for the 86th Annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, from Aug. 7-16, 2026. The traffic counts to date for the nine locations entering Sturgis for the 2026 Rally were as follows:

Friday, Aug. 7, 2026: 54,515 vehicles entered
Up 2.9% from the previous five-year average

Saturday, Aug. 8, 2026: 58,519 vehicles entered
Up 2.5% from the previous five-year average

Sunday, Aug. 9, 2026: 55,448 vehicles entered
Down 7.5% from the previous five-year average

Monday, Aug. 10, 2026: 55,226 vehicles entered
Down 8.4% from the previous five-year average

Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2026: 51,742 vehicles entered
Down 11.8% from the previous five-year average

Wednesday, Aug. 12, 2026: 42,964 vehicles entered
Down 23.6% from the previous five-year average

Thursday, Aug. 13, 2026: 41,702 vehicles entered
Down 18.1% from the previous five-year average

Friday Aug. 14, 2026: 39,716 vehicles entered
Down 14.3% from the previous five-year average

Saturday Aug. 15, 2026: 28,679 vehicles entered
Down 17.4% from the previous five-year average

Sunday Aug. 16, 2026: 19,655 vehicles entered
Down 5.7% from the from the previous five-year average

2026 Total to Date (10-days): 448,166 vehicles entered (Down 10.0%)
Previous Five-Year Average (2021-2025) 10-day total to date: 498,042 Vehicles

Dockter is new band director

by Dorene Nelson

Megan Dockter, a native of Watertown, SD, is the new 5th-12th grade band teacher. "After graduating from high school, I attended Northern State University where I received my music education degree," she explained. "I then attended North Dakota State University to get my Master's of Music Degree."

"This is my first year of teaching, and I am looking forward to becoming acquainted with my students and teaching band to students in the fifth through the twelfth grade," Dockter stated.

"I will be teaching instrumental and marching band," she said. "I intend to quickly get the students playing their instruments as they march down the street. This will be something new for the incoming sixth graders, but they'll learn quickly!"

"In addition to class as a large group, I'll also give individual lessons," Dockter said. "This will help them be more comfortable and confident as the group plays together."

"Since this is my first year, all of us have a lot to learn," she admitted. "I really want my students to know that I truly do care about them and their success and enjoyment."

"One of the first things I will have them learn is how to play the school song," Dockter explained. "I want them to be engaged and happy to be in band."

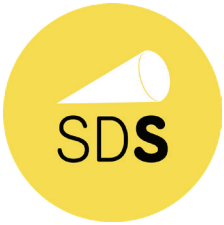
"I intend to be visible and easy to talk to," she said. "Hopefully I can get the kids ready to be outside marching by the second week of school."

"I already know a few of the students due to my junior field experience," Dockter stated. "I had some previous experience in several places, which helped me to become more self-assured."

"I aim to have the band ready to play in the beginning sports games," she said. "I am also looking forward to being in the classroom, working with my students as they learn life skills and enjoy playing music together."



**Megan Dockter is the new
GHS Band Director**



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Medical marijuana home cultivation licenses surge in South Dakota

BY MAKENZIE HUBER

A South Dakota Health Department official told lawmakers Monday that the number of medical marijuana patients in the state who are licensed to grow medical cannabis at home has grown by more than 1,000% over the past four years.

Whitney Brunner, administrator of the state's medical cannabis program, told the legislative Medical Marijuana Oversight Committee during a meeting at the Capitol in Pierre that the number of home cultivators grew from 61 in fiscal year 2022 to 715 in fiscal year 2026 — an increase of 1,072%. Medical marijuana has been legal in South Dakota since 2021, but recreational marijuana use remains prohibited.

Home cultivators may not grow more than two flowering cannabis plants and two non-flowering cannabis plants, according to state law.

Patients can add a home cultivation license to their medical marijuana card for \$20. Applicants must submit a photo of the grow room, a photo of the lock on the door and a diagram of the grow location. Brunner said those diagrams are often hand-drawn and lack detail.

"The lack of regulation in this area is a bit concerning for us," Brunner told lawmakers.

Brunner said she doesn't want to assume home cultivators are abusing the licenses, but said the department is considering tighter regulation.

"We have looked into if there is anything more that can be done, but I think that's a greater conversation to be had," Brunner said. "It does present some legal and safety considerations if we were to attempt to regulate this further."

Brunner did not say if new regulation would require legislation. Committee member Sen. John Carley, R-Rapid City, told South Dakota Searchlight after the meeting that lawmakers hope to learn more.

"We were glad the department had more information," Carley said. "Many of us will be looking at that exact item and will come back to that concern next meeting."

The rise in home cultivation comes amid growth in the overall program. At the end of June, there were 19,375 medical marijuana cardholders in South Dakota — a 30.5% increase from 14,843 last fiscal year.

"We did experience a true spike in early fiscal year 2026 but, by fall, that number had started to level off," Brunner said, adding that the number of cardholders in the state "remained fairly stable" most of the year.

Most cardholders are in their 30s and 40s, according to department data, and more than 70% report severe debilitating pain as a reason for their cannabis use.

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

COMMENTARY

Voters deserve a say as counties consider shifting property tax burden to sales taxes

by Brad Johnson

South Dakota's new optional half-percent county sales tax is being sold as property-tax relief. It is relief only in the sense of moving money from one pocket to another. The cost of county government does not fall. The law changes who pays it.

Meade, Pennington, Custer and Codington are among the counties that have enacted the tax. Codington County opponents are gathering signatures to force a public vote. Brown and Fall River counties decided voters should make the choice. Other counties are still studying it.

The benefit goes to owner-occupied homeowners, who will receive a reduction in the county government portion of their property taxes. In Codington County, the projected reduction is about 23% of the total property tax bill.

That is real money. But everyone who makes taxable purchases in the counties that enact the tax will help pay for it — including many who can least afford another tax.

Learn more

Black Hills counties among first to adopt new sales tax option for homeowner property tax reduction
How and when new South Dakota laws will reduce property taxes for homeowners
Here's how much South Dakotans could save on property taxes after accounting for higher sales taxes
Start with renters. About one-third of South Dakota households rent. They will pay more tax on clothing, furniture, restaurant meals and everyday purchases, but receive no direct property tax credit.

The renter share is higher in parts of western South Dakota. Census data show about 37% of Rapid City households rent and 52% rent in Box Elder. Those renters will help pay the county sales tax but are unlikely to receive a benefit. Nothing in the law requires a landlord to pass along property tax savings.

The tax also lands harder on lower-income South Dakotans. Households in the lowest 20% of income pay about 7.4% of their income in sales and excise taxes. Among higher-income households, the share falls below 4% and keeps dropping as income rises.

Same cash register. Very different bite.

Farmers and ranchers have another reason to look closely. Not every farm expense is taxable. Seed, fertilizer, livestock feed and agricultural fuel are exempt inputs, while machinery and titled vehicles are handled under separate tax laws.

But farms and ranches still make taxable purchases for fencing, tools, shop equipment, building supplies and other things most households never think about.

The first property tax benefit goes to the farmhouse and homesite. Agricultural land receives nothing until the county generates enough revenue to fully offset its owner-occupied levy.

Then there is geography. Tourism counties have an advantage. Black Hills visitors buy gas, eat supper and fill the backseat with souvenirs proving they survived Needles Highway.

Most counties, however, do not have Mount Rushmore or the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. Their outside shoppers are usually other South Dakotans.

A Hamlin County renter shopping in Watertown may help finance relief for Codington County homeowners. Sioux Falls, Rapid City, Aberdeen, Watertown and Mitchell pull spending from surrounding counties, while smaller counties have no similar advantage.

Tourism counties can shift part of the bill to visitors. Regional shopping counties mostly shift it among South Dakotans.

Same half-cent. Very different results.

That is why the potential Codington County referendum matters.

County commissioners may have the legal authority to impose a tax paid by a broad group in order to provide a direct benefit to a narrower group. But legal authority and political fairness are not the same.

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If the idea is sound, explain it. Put the numbers on the table. Tell renters, homeowners, farmers and businesses what they are likely to pay and who benefits.

Then let them vote.

A statewide Mason-Dixon poll commissioned by South Dakota News Watch and the Chiesman Center for Democracy found 49% of South Dakota registered voters opposed giving counties the authority to exchange higher sales taxes for lower property taxes, while 33% supported it and 17% were undecided.

That sounds like a conversation worth having before the tax is imposed, not afterward.

Brad Johnson is a certified general real estate appraiser and longtime journalist. He is past president of South Dakota Lakes and Streams Association, president of the South Dakota Wildlife Federation, a member of the National Wildlife Federation's board of directors, and served 16 years on the South Dakota Board of Water and Natural Resources. He lives in Rapid City and Watertown.

Trump visa policy leads to fewer international students at US colleges, report concludes

BY PIPER HUTCHINSON

A decline in international students at American universities is attributable, in part, to Trump administration immigration policies, according to a new analysis, and that loss could cost the U.S. more than \$3 billion, including \$5.4 million for South Dakota alone.

The Association of International Educators based its economic impact calculations on data colleges provided in response to an Institute of International Education survey. It estimates there are 111,000 fewer international students heading into this academic year than in 2024-25, before President Donald Trump began his second term in office.

The analysis projects the count of international students for 2026-27 could drop as low as 1.05 million, down from nearly 1.18 million enrolled in 2024-25.

"This downturn reflects the convergence of several headwinds: declining application volumes, persistent visa appointment bottlenecks and newly restrictive immigration policy changes," the association said in its analysis.

Specific policy the report mentions includes Trump's executive order in December that banned travel to the U.S. for residents of 39 countries. It effectively stopped the issuance of visas to students and participants in work- and study-based exchanges from those countries, among them Iran and Nigeria. Both send large numbers of students to the United States.

Visa access was also made more difficult ahead of this school year when the U.S. prioritized foreign ticketholders for the FIFA World Cup, which coincided with the peak period for student and exchange applicants, the analysis noted.

It also highlighted reports of limited and delayed appointments for international students at consulates in India and China — the top two countries sending international students to the United States. The same issue occurred across Europe, where many requests for expedited appointments were denied.

In addition to immigration, the Trump administration has also cut funding for academic research, which has resulted in fewer graduate student spots being available for international and American students.

The analysis cited recent data from the Association of American Universities that show international applications to U.S. doctoral programs for this fall declined 21%. It contributed to a 15% reduction in overall doctoral program admissions linked to uncertainty over federal research funding.

The Association of International Educators recommends the Trump administration prioritize interviews and processing for all student, work-training and study/work-exchange visa applicants. It also suggested exempting applicants from countries under current travel ban as long as they remain subject to the standard background checks and vetting required as part of the visa process.

The \$3.4 billion in projected losses for the U.S. economy from fewer international students is based on their "direct contributions," according to the analysis. It said the decline in international graduate students

was the “primary driver” of the economic losses.

International student enrollment increased by 23 students last fall at South Dakota Mines, a public university in Rapid City. But the overall enrollment of international students across South Dakota’s six public universities dropped by 76 students, from 2,233 to 2,157. The drop came after a 10-year high the previous fall that capped four straight years of increases.

The staff of South Dakota Searchlight contributed to this report.

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

Piper Hutchinson is a reporter for the Louisiana Illuminator. She has covered the Legislature and state government extensively for the LSU Manship News Service and The Reveille, where she was named editor in chief for summer 2022.

Reclassification eases taxes and banking for medical cannabis, but leaves state with questions

BY MAKENZIE HUBER

A federal change in medical marijuana’s legal classification should help South Dakota’s medical cannabis industry claim business tax deductions and gain access to banking, officials told state lawmakers Monday, but questions remain about the broader impact.

Whitney Brunner, administrator of the state’s medical cannabis program, told the legislative Medical Marijuana Oversight Committee during a meeting at the Capitol in Pierre that the federal government has shared little information about the change with the state — other than to request data.

“At the state level, we probably have more questions than answers,” Brunner said.

In April, the federal government moved medical marijuana from Schedule I to Schedule III under federal drug law. Schedule I drugs are considered to have no accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse. Schedule III drugs are recognized as having accepted medical uses and a lower potential for abuse.

Recreational marijuana remains a Schedule I drug under federal policy, even though 24 states and the District of Columbia allow recreational cannabis in various forms. South Dakota does not allow recreational marijuana use.

Medical marijuana has been legal in South Dakota since 2021, after voters approved it through a citizen-led ballot measure in 2020. Since then, South Dakota has built a regulatory framework — including licensing systems, testing requirements and oversight.

Brunner did not say whether South Dakota businesses will be required to register with the Drug Enforcement Administration to participate in the state program or what new compliance requirements they might face. Kittrick Jeffries, chairman of the Cannabis Industry Association of South Dakota and owner of Puffy’s Dispensary in Rapid City, said some businesses are taking the initiative.

“A lot of our establishments within our association are currently going through the DEA inspection process to become licensed under the DEA,” Jeffries said.

Cannabis businesses have long been blocked from taking certain federal tax deductions because marijuana was classified as a Schedule I substance — meaning they couldn’t deduct ordinary business expenses the way other businesses can. Banks have also largely avoided working with cannabis businesses because marijuana remains broadly illegal under federal law, exposing financial institutions to regulatory penalties even in states where it’s legal.

The reclassification will allow medical cannabis businesses to claim deductions, said Nicole Ezech, a presenter with the National Conference of State Legislatures. It should also ease banking access for the industry.

The federal changes come as South Dakota’s program is in transition. Brunner told lawmakers the department overhauled its medical cannabis inspection program over the last year, after inspectors were

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missing violations and citing establishments inconsistently.

"We realized last year, and it wasn't a difficult realization to make, that we had a lot of work to do on inspections and our processes," Brunner said.

The department created new procedures and training, reorganized its supervisor structure and added a formal process for businesses to challenge citations, Brunner said.

Rob Krogstad, who operates Bad River Cannabis in Fort Pierre, told lawmakers his business was fined \$3,000 for two "clerical errors" that were corrected before inspectors left the building.

"There will be human error," Krogstad said, adding that the fine forced the business to delay other operational expenses. He suggested a three-strikes approach for minor clerical errors, with immediate fines reserved for more serious violations.

A rules package moving through administrative review would "make this a little easier on establishments," Brunner said. The package would simplify language around inventory tracking training and reduce how long businesses must store security camera footage — changes Brunner said would be less expensive and less "cumbersome."

The rules package would also restructure the fines system, making first-offense minor violations result in a corrective action plan rather than an immediate fine.

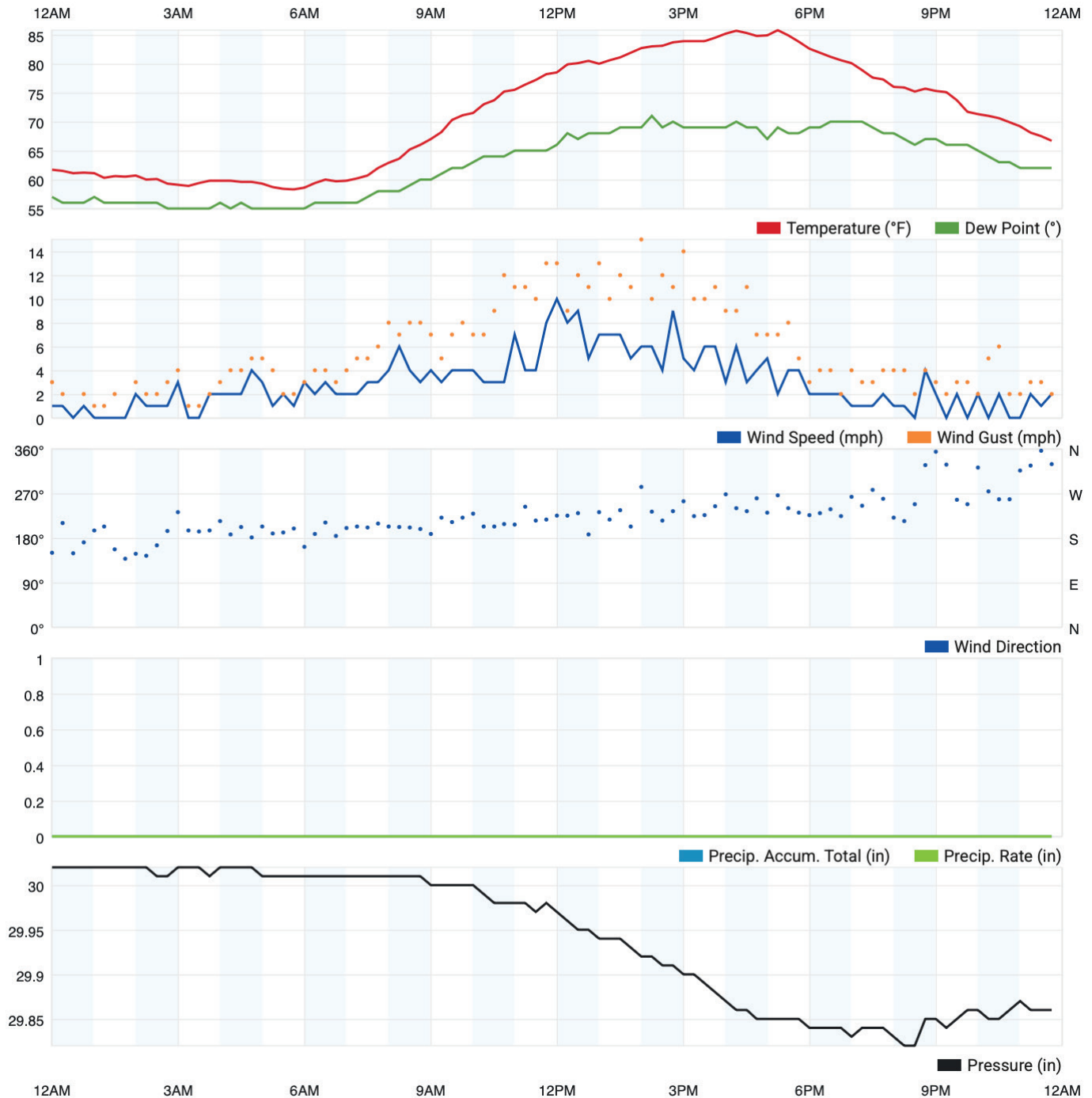
Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan who regularly reports on the intersection of politics and policy with health, education, social services and Indigenous affairs. Her work with South Dakota Searchlight earned her the title of South Dakota's Outstanding Young Journalist in 2024, and she was a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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

August 17, 2026



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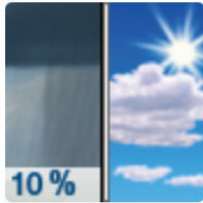
Tuesday

Tuesday Night

Wednesday

Wednesday
Night

Thursday



High: 80 °F

Slight Chance
Showers then
Mostly Sunny



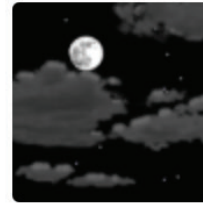
Low: 55 °F

Partly Cloudy



High: 82 °F

Mostly Sunny
then Slight
Chance
T-storms



Low: 59 °F

Partly Cloudy



High: 86 °F

Mostly Sunny

THREAT ASSESSMENT

HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

1

WHAT THIS MEANS:
Isolated Severe Storms
Possible

Late Afternoon & Evening
across south-central South
Dakota

PRIMARY THREATS

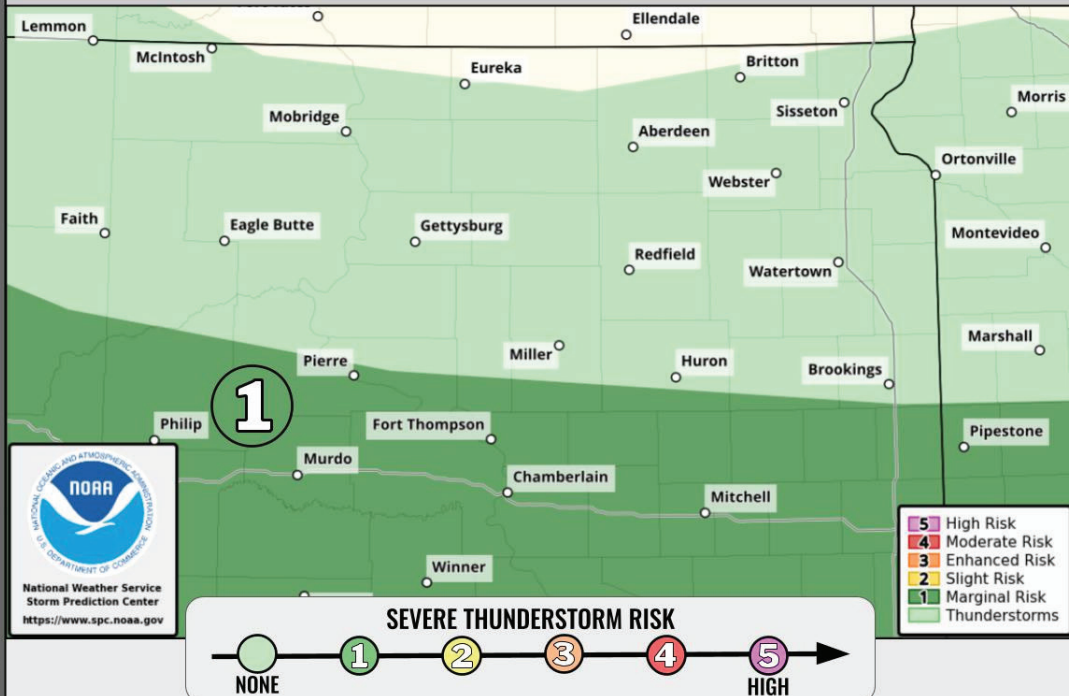

DAMAGING
WIND
GUSTS
of 60 mph


LARGE
HAIL of 1"
in diameter

NWS
Aberdeen, SD



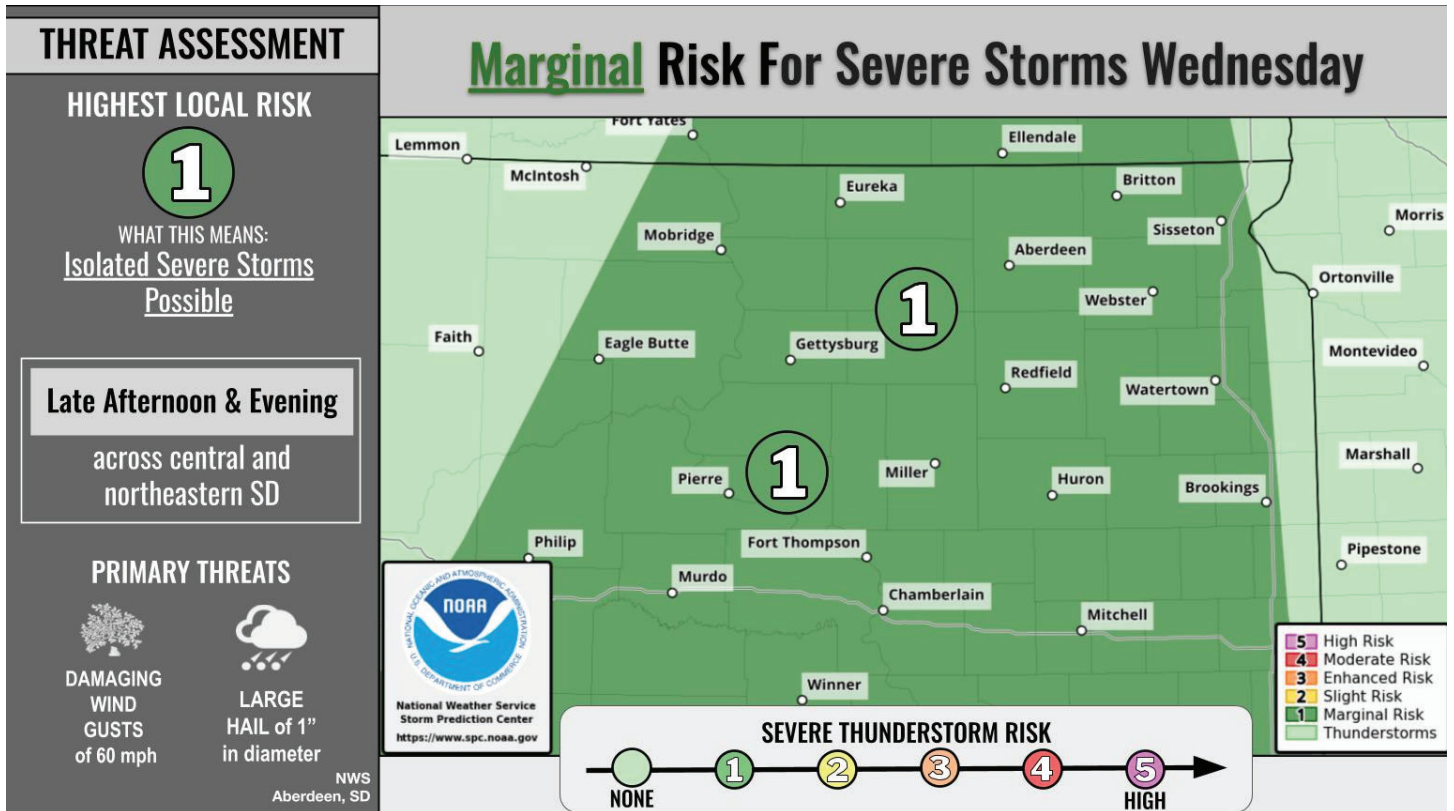
Marginal Risk For Severe Storms Today



There is a Marginal Risk (level 1 out of 5) for isolated severe storms across portions of south central SD this evening through late tonight. The main threats are wind gusts of 60 mph and 1 inch diameter hail.

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There is a Marginal Risk (level 1 out of 5) for isolated severe storms across central and northeast SD Wednesday afternoon and evening. The main threats are wind gusts of 60 mph and 1 inch diameter hail.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 86 °F at 5:13 PM

Low Temp: 58 °F at 5:33 AM

Wind: 15 mph at 1:58 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 109 in 1959

Record Low: 38 in 2002

Average High: 83

Average Low: 56

Average Precip in Aug.: 1.30

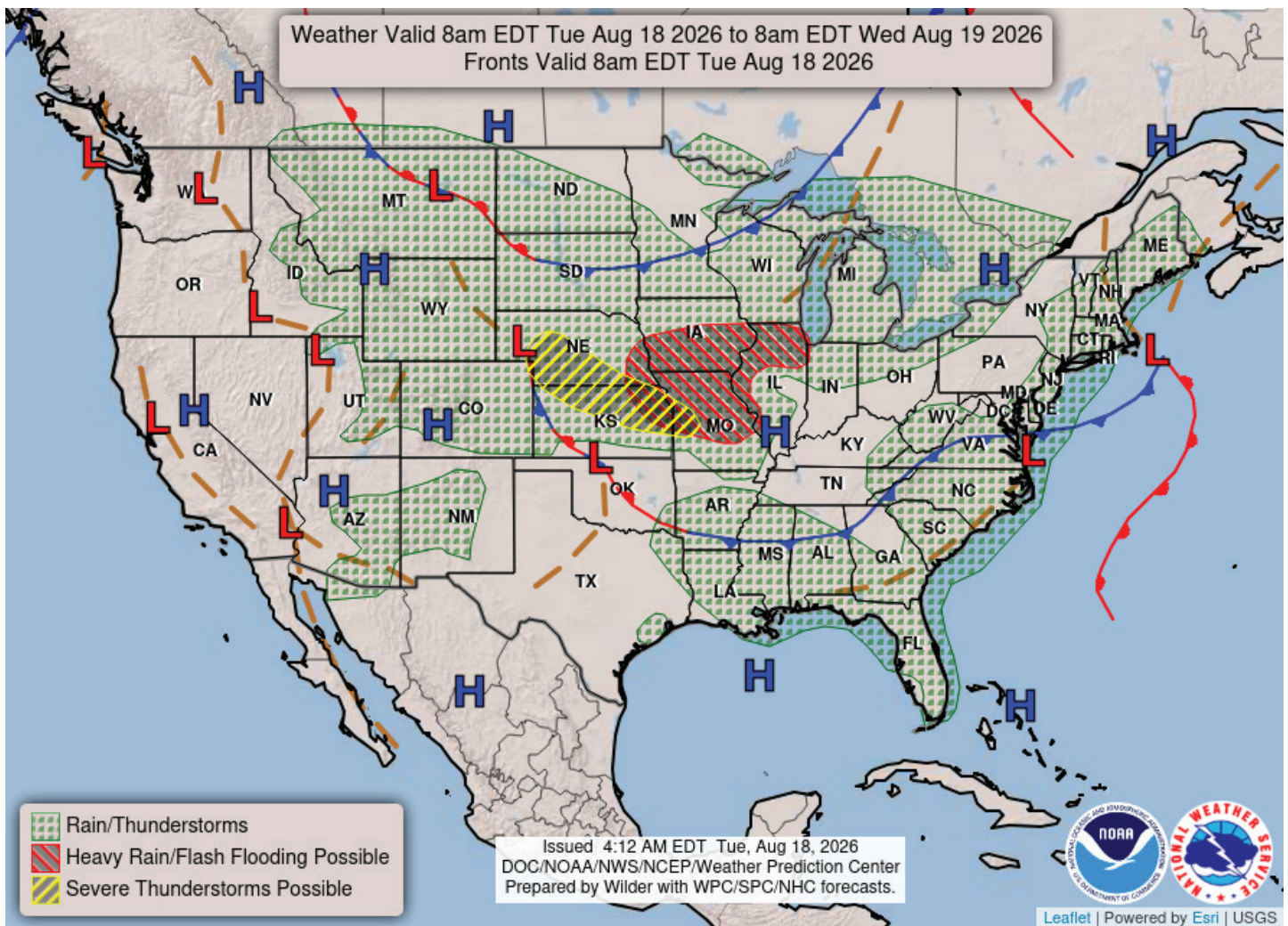
Precip to date in Aug.: 10.14

Average Precip to date: 15.40

Precip Year to Date: 19.61

Sunset Tonight: 8:37pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:38 am



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Today in Weather History

August 18, 1936: A tornado moved east, ending southeast of Gettysburg. A farmhouse and four barns were destroyed near Gorman, in Potter County. Property damage was estimated at \$20,000.

August 18, 1938: A tornado destroyed a barn, unroofed a gym, and damaged other buildings near Stephen, in Hyde County. The funnel moved northeast then curved to the northwest. There were two other tornadoes on this day. One moved northeast from near Worlsey and Broadland in Beadle County producing estimated F3 damage. The other was an estimated F2 and also started off in Beadle County and moved northeast into Kingsbury County. This storm injured three people.

August 18, 1983: High winds up to 80 mph caused extensive damage to trees, structures, and cars, in Lyman, Hyde, Faulk, and Brown Counties. In Presho, several homes lost their roofs. Hay bales were scattered, metal siding was ripped from outbuildings, and a ballpark lost three large fence sections. Gusty winds up to 75 mph were recorded at Ordway, in Brown County, causing damage to a mobile home. Two hangers at the Aberdeen airport received extensive damage, with roofs and doors torn off.

August 18, 2009: Numerous thunderstorms developed along a stationary front and trained over the same locations producing very heavy rains along with large hail. Nickel size hail falling for several minutes piled up to 6 to 8 inches deep near Harrold in Hughes County. Massive rains of 2 to nearly 5 inches resulted in the flash flooding of numerous roads. Several of the streets were washed out. Some rainfall amounts included 3.05 inches at Warner, 3.15 inches southwest of Bristol, 4.40 inches in Webster, and 4.50 inches east of Warner.

1925: During the late morning hours a severe hailstorm struck southeastern Iowa destroying crops along a path six to ten miles wide and 75 miles long. The hail also injured and killed poultry and livestock, and caused a total of 2.5 million dollars damage. The hailstorm flattened fields of corn to such an extent that many had to leave their farms in search of other work.

1931: The Yangtze River in China peaks during a horrible flood that kills 3.7 million people directly and indirectly over the next several months. This flood was perhaps the worst natural disaster of the 20th century.

1983 — Hurricane Alicia ravaged southeastern Texas. The hurricane caused more than three billion dollars property damage, making it one of the costliest hurricanes in the history of the U.S. Just thirteen persons were killed, but 1800 others were injured. The hurricane packed winds to 130 mph as it crossed Galveston Island, and spawned twenty-two tornadoes in less than 24 hours as it made landfall. (The Weather Channel) (Storm Data)

1987 — Thirteen cities in the eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Orlando FL with a reading of 98 degrees, and Portland ME with a high of 94 degrees. Newark NJ reached 90 degrees for the thirty-sixth time of the year, their second highest total of record. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — Twenty-two cities, from the Carolinas to the Upper Ohio Valley, reported record high temperatures for the date, pushing the total number of daily record highs since the first of June above the 1100 mark. Afternoon highs of 102 degrees at Greensboro NC and 105 degrees at Raleigh NC equalled all-time records. Evening thunderstorms in Montana produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Scobey. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Thunderstorms over the Middle Atlantic Coast Region and the Upper Ohio Valley produced torrential rains in eastern Virginia during the late morning and afternoon hours. Totals ranged up to twelve inches at Yorktown. Williamsburg VA was deluged with 10.78 inches of rain between 6 AM and 10 AM, with 6.72 inches reported in just two hours. Flash flooding caused nearly twelve million dollars damage in Accomack County VA. Early evening thunderstorms in the Central High Plains Region produced walnut size hail and wind gusts to 80 mph around Casper WY. Thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains in the Yellowstone Park area, causing fifteen mudslides. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



How Fellowship Differs From Salvation

Confessing our sins restores us to the joy of His presence..

1 John 1:5-7: 5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

John's first epistle isn't about salvation, even though it teaches the necessity of confessing sin. This letter was written to people who already had a relationship with God but needed a reminder of how to remain in fellowship with Him. The Father wants believers to enjoy His presence, but unconfessed sin can hinder that.

Christians have been made new (2 Corinthians 5:17) but aren't yet perfect and still struggle with temptation. Our physical bodies have natural desires for rest, food, and pleasure. When such yearnings are under the Holy Spirit's guidance, we live a joyful, God-honoring life. But when we allow them to control us, we step out of fellowship with Him and "walk in darkness" (1 John 1:6).

It's important to understand that "walking in darkness" does not mean a believer can lose salvation—those who have received Jesus Christ as Savior will never perish (John 10:28-29). Rather, it means we're choosing to live in a way that weakens our awareness of God's presence.

Our Father wants us to be in fellowship with Him so we'll experience fullness of joy. This happens when we spend time in His presence (Psalm 16:11), align ourselves with His will, and share Him with those around us. And if that fellowship is interrupted, confession can restore it, as we'll see tomorrow.

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.17.26

3 6 33 42 48 4

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 48 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.14.26

3 23 27 46 60 11

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$100,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 33 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.17.26

5 8 10 24 27 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,650,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 48 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.15.26

4 16 18 29 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$31,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 3 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.17.26

13 34 39 45 56 2

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 32 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.17.26

8 15 25 49 65 22

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$48,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 32 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

South Korea president stresses US alliance as many baffled by Trump order to cut exercises

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's president said Tuesday a solid alliance with the U.S. strengthens the foundation of national security, as many South Koreans were baffled and concerned about U.S. President Donald Trump's abrupt order to "substantially reduce" joint military exercises.

Trump made the surprise announcement in a social media post just before U.S. and South Korean soldiers began Monday's annual Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises, which are largely designed to sharpen readiness against North Korean threats.

Trump cited what he said was a good relationship with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and South Korea's refusal to join the U.S. war against Iran.

Trump's move was apparently taken without consultations with South Korea and meant to reach out to Kim, deepening concerns about the reliability of the U.S.-South Korean alliance forged in the turmoil of the 1950-53 Korean War.

Confidence in the U.S. has already eroded among many South Koreans because of Trump's tariff war and last year's immigration raid in the U.S. state of Georgia that led to the detainment of hundreds of South Korean workers.

Trump's announcement "reveals the stark reality of a faltering Korea-U.S. alliance, fueling public anxiety," South Korea's Hankook Ilbo newspaper said in an editorial Tuesday. "It's absurd that the U.S. appears to treat North Korea more respectfully than its ally South Korea."

South Korean leader calls for solid US alliance

In a regular Cabinet meeting, South Korean President Lee Jae Myung stressed the importance of a firm military alliance with the U.S., saying that "national security will be further strengthened when the alliance is solid."

"When we build up our strengths, our value and importance as an ally will further grow," said Lee, a liberal who has called for a stronger, self-reliant defense posture.

It was unclear which parts of the 11-day South Korea-U.S. exercises were being downsized. The South Korean and U.S. militaries earlier said their drills this year would be similar in scale to previous years and incorporate lessons from recent conflicts such as North Korea's battlefield experiences in the Russia-Ukraine front. They also said the drills are defensive in nature.

North Korea's Foreign Ministry accused South Korea and the U.S. of plotting more provocative drills this year and vowed to respond with "a new level of a deterrent."

Prospects unclear for reengagement between Trump and Kim

Kim has shunned any talks with the U.S. and South Korea since his earlier high-profile diplomacy with Trump fell apart in 2019.

Experts say Kim won't likely embrace Trump's overture and return to talks anytime soon unless he is promised bigger U.S. concessions. Kim has boosted his military and diplomatic credentials in recent years by enlarging his nuclear arsenal and aligning with Russia over its war against Ukraine.

Lee's presidential office on Monday expressed hopes that a "friendly relationship" between Trump and Kim would lead to "meaningful dialogue" between their countries to promote peace on the Korean Peninsula. That invited a backlash from conservatives, who criticized Lee's government for allegedly prioritizing resumption of Kim-Trump diplomacy over security concerns.

"South Korea's security bulwark is being shaken to its very foundations," Park Chung-kwon, a spokesperson for the main conservative opposition People Power Party, said in a statement.

A weakening of the U.S. defense commitment could shake South Korea's national security as it has no nuclear weapons and is under the so-called U.S. "nuclear umbrella" protection, which guarantees a dev-

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astating American response in the event of an attack on its ally by nuclear-armed North Korea. The U.S. has about 28,500 troops in South Korea.

Doubts about US alliance grow in South Korea

In his social media post, Trump said the military exercises with South Korea are not only costly but "send a signal that is totally inappropriate and hostile" to North Korea, which he said "has been unthreatening and respectful" during his time in the White House. Trump said he asked Lee if South Korea would join the U.S. in the "denuclearization" of Iran, "and they said, 'No thanks!'"

Lee's office said South Korea and the U.S. are closely discussing practical and military contributions that South Korea can make to help restore freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.

"Trump thinks of an alliance as an investment that should pay regular dividends, or a rainy-day fund he can withdraw from when another project isn't going well," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

"South Korean leaders understand that relations with the Trump administration will be a constant renegotiation linking economic and security issues. Seoul is thus cautiously responding to recent developments within that framework," Easley said.

A recent survey jointly conducted by South Korea's JoongAng Ilbo newspaper and the East Asia Institute, a Seoul-based research group, showed 46.4% of respondents in South Korea viewed the U.S. as "not a trustworthy partner" while 45.4% called it "trustworthy."

It was the first time that more Koreans said they could not trust the U.S. than said they could since the East Asia Institute began asking the question in 2017, JoongAng Ilbo reported.

Fear grips children after deadly earthquake in eastern Indonesia leaves thousands displaced

By FIRDIA LISNAWATI Associated Press

LAMBA LEDA, Indonesia (AP) — Thousands of people remained displaced on the Indonesian island of Flores on Tuesday, three days after a powerful earthquake killed at least 68 people, injured more than 200 others and damaged thousands of homes. The disaster left many children struggling with fear and trauma.

More than 19,000 people were sheltering in tents, evacuation centers and makeshift camps after the earthquake struck off Flores early Saturday, damaging at least 4,500 homes, according to the National Disaster Management Agency. The quake injured at least 213 people and caused widespread destruction across the island, damaging 122 health facilities, 252 schools and 84 places of worship, the agency said.

The quake occurred at a depth of 10 kilometers (6 miles) shortly before 6 a.m. Saturday, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, and residents fled in panic as tsunami warnings were issued but later lifted. Authorities have since recorded more than 2,100 aftershocks into Tuesday, though only 70 were felt by residents.

An aftershock that struck during an interview Tuesday prompted Vincentius Rano and his wife to instinctively duck and cover their heads. Nearby, their daughter began crying, a reminder of the fear that continues to haunt many survivors.

Rano is a resident of Lamba Leda, one of the hardest-hit villages in the lush hills of East Manggarai regency, where widespread damage was reported, with at least 50 homes shattered and trees toppled over. He recalled the terrifying moment the earthquake struck Saturday just after he and his wife had woken up.

"Suddenly, we felt a tremor that kept getting stronger," said Rano, the father of a 5-year-old girl. The couple rushed to grab their sleeping daughter, but before they could escape, part of the house came down, causing injuries to his back and shoulder.

"We didn't have time to get outside. Everything happened so fast. The roof collapsed on us, and all I could do was shield my wife and child with my back," Rano said, gesturing toward his flattened home, a modest house, built of timber rather than concrete.

At evacuation camps across Flores, children played under tarpaulin shelters while aid workers and volunteers provided psychosocial support alongside food and medical assistance.

"For many survivors, especially children, the psychological impact has lingered long after the shaking stopped," said local police chief Yudhi Franata, who organized trauma-healing sessions for children displaced by the disaster in Ende regency.

In Ende's village of Lokoboko, 17 children joined police counselors for games, educational activities and group interactions designed to help them cope with fear and anxiety. Parents at evacuation centers in the village said many children were afraid to return indoors and woke up frightened whenever aftershocks rattled the island.

"Children are among the groups that need special attention after experiencing a disaster," Franata said.

Indonesia, an archipelago of more than 17,000 islands, is prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions because of its location on the Pacific Ring of Fire. Flores experienced one of the country's deadliest disasters in 1992, when an earthquake and an ensuing tsunami killed about 2,500 people.

A dispute about fact vs. fiction at the trial over Tupac Shakur's 1996 killing in Las Vegas

By JESSICA HILL Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A prosecutor said Monday that while few have been willing to speak about the 1996 killing of Tupac Shakur, Duane "Keffe D" Davis is the "one person who has a hard time being silent."

"Let's be clear, Duane Davis did not pull the trigger. But he did plan the shooting in retaliation of the beating of his nephew," Chief Deputy District Attorney Binu Palal told jurors at the start of Davis' Las Vegas trial. "Remarkably, you will learn that from Duane Davis himself."

Davis, 63, could get life in prison if he's convicted of murder with a deadly weapon with the intent to promote, further or assist a criminal gang. He has pleaded not guilty. His lawyer in the defense opening called the prosecution's narrative "fiction."

Palal showed jurors video of Shakur's entourage attacking Davis' nephew Orlando "Baby Lane" Anderson outside the boxing match at the MGM Grand hours before the shooting on Sept. 7, 1996.

Davis spent the next two hours planning how to get even, said Palal, and Shakur was gunned down "in an act of revenge."

Shakur remains a cultural icon and is considered one of the most influential and versatile rappers of all time, despite dying at 25.

What he told the FBI and investigators

In a 2008 interview with a federal task force investigating the killing of Shakur's rival, the Notorious B.I.G., Davis instead talked about the Shakur shooting. He described handing a gun to the men in the backseat of a white Cadillac that fired on a black BMW with Shakur and Marion "Suge" Knight inside.

As prosecutors played audio of Davis explaining the moment Shakur was shot, members of Shakur's family, including his stepbrother Maurice "Mopreme" Shakur, stared ahead and listened intently from the audience.

Palal told jurors Davis held onto a visceral hatred for Shakur for decades that drove him to speak.

He said the defendant talked to the FBI in 1998 and again in 1999, admitting he had been in Las Vegas at the time of the shooting.

In 2009, he admitted to his role in the killing in an interview with Las Vegas police, Palal said.

"And now 30 years later, we're going to ask you to finally hold Duane Davis accountable," Palal said.

He also showed jurors the 2019 memoir that Davis co-authored, "Compton Street Legend," that the prosecution will use and that the defense fought to keep out of the trial, along with several of the defendant's interviews.

How Davis' legal team is defending him

Davis, wearing a blue suit and tie, sat quietly with his hands folded on the table in front of him, occasionally nodding along as his attorney gave his opening, and often scanned the room during testimony to see who was in the gallery.

"What they are telling you, they are representing as fact, when it's really fiction," Michael Sanft said.

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"There's no facts."

He said Davis wasn't previously charged because law enforcement knew that he was "full of crap."

The defense attorney also pointed to missing documents in the original investigation and distrust between police departments.

He called one detective's work "biased," "sloppy" and "incomplete."

Sanft said outside court at the end of the day that he thought the 30 years that had elapsed would help Davis.

"The length of time is going to be a huge problem for people trying to recall things, to remember things," the lawyer said. "That's just not how it works."

Asked about the oddity of calling his client "full of crap" and similar things, he said, "We all have a family member who's like that."

Briefly a suspect in Notorious B.I.G.'s death

Former Los Angeles Police Department detective Fred Miller — assigned to the investigation of the 1997 shooting death of the Notorious B.I.G., born Christopher Wallace — testified remotely and said that Davis had briefly been suspected in that shooting.

Davis admitted to being present at a party at the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles where Wallace and Sean "Diddy" Combs were guests. Wallace was shot as he was leaving.

Sanft objected to the inclusion of the testimony. The judge, with prosecutors' agreement, told jurors that police do not believe Davis was involved.

Most eyewitnesses are no longer alive

The story of the drive-by shooting has long gripped the hip-hop community, partly because no one was charged until Davis was indicted in 2023.

The other three men riding in the Cadillac have all died in the years since.

Retired Las Vegas police officer Garry Dale was the first of the 35 to 45 witnesses the prosecution plans to call at the trial expected to last about a month.

He testified that he and another officer stopped Knight and Shakur's car for missing a license plate, warned them and let them go.

About 10 minutes later the officers responded to a shooting call and found EMTs pulling Shakur from the car. Dale said Knight had been grazed by bullets, but told the officers to take care of Shakur.

Dale jumped in the ambulance and asked Shakur who shot him. The retired officer said that Shakur said something like "no, we'll take care of it."

Brent Becker, a former Las Vegas homicide detective, testified that Knight showed up to a police interview with attorneys, which he thought was odd because Knight was a victim. Knight was timid, his interview was practiced and he told investigators he knew nothing, Becker said.

"I thought he lied to us," Becker said in video testimony.

Becker said it was difficult to get other witnesses to talk and they "were leaning on" Davis, Anderson, Deandrae "Freaky" Smith and Terry "Bubble Up" Brown as the men in the Cadillac, but had no living witnesses who could identify them.

Witnesses describe the night Tupac was shot

Ingrid Stokes testified that she and her friends were heading home from Las Vegas when they encountered Shakur and Knight, who were friends with a woman in Stokes' group.

Knight invited them to a nightclub, she said, and they decided to meet them there.

The car Stokes was riding in was one lane over and a car length ahead of Knight's vehicle, when they heard gunshots.

Stokes said they drove off in fear and almost hit a white four-door vehicle in the process.

When they returned to the scene, police made them sit on the sidewalk and treated them like suspects, she said. Stokes was scared to be seen in public talking about the case, worried about poor treatment from law enforcement and the potential for retribution.

"Snitches get stitches," she said.

A physics graduate, a soccer player, a teen who couldn't swim: They died in the Ceuta migrant surge

By AKRAM OUBACHIR Associated Press

CASABLANCA, Morocco (AP) — Ayoub Akbili needed money for his mother's surgery. Hamza Haibouri wanted a shot at a professional soccer career. Abdelouahed Iken was chasing the glossy life a friend posted about on Facebook from Italy.

So when they heard rumors that Morocco's border with Spain was open, they decided to join the rush to try to reach Europe.

All three died attempting to cross, becoming victims of the deadliest migration crisis between Morocco and Spain.

Fueled by misinformation, poverty and lack of opportunities, more than 70,000 would-be migrants from Morocco and beyond swam or climbed over a breakwater last month to try to reach Ceuta, a Spanish exclave on the North African coast. At least 90 people died attempting to cross the border, according to official figures; rights groups reported a much higher toll. Many families still haven't been able to retrieve the bodies.

Nearly all the survivors have returned to Morocco, and both countries have intensified security measures. Moroccan and Spanish authorities blamed social media rumors and human smuggling networks for the surge, while migrants cited unemployment and low wages as major factors.

The pull of the crowd

Akbili, 31, lived in Tangier, about an hour from the coastal Moroccan town of Fnideq. Migration had been on his mind for some time, but friends and family said he had never considered crossing illegally.

He held a college degree in physics, but couldn't find a job in his field and worked at a car parts factory. He earned about \$421 a month, slightly above the median salary in the North African country.

Buoyed by ambitions to become a regional hub for the auto industry, Morocco's economy is expected to grow by 4.5% this year. But policymakers face a persistent challenge: turning that growth into jobs that offer higher wages.

Akbili was working the 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. shift when he saw Facebook posts about people crossing into Ceuta. He wanted to try his luck in hopes of finding a job that could help his mother pay for hernia surgery.

"His mind changed completely. He went from someone who wasn't thinking about illegal migration to wanting to go by all means," Abdelhakim Saadaoui, a relative and Akbili's apartment mate, told The Associated Press.

Akbili persuaded Saadaoui to go with him. On July 31, they paid a driver \$129 to take them near the border with Ceuta — the equivalent of two months' rent.

When they arrived, Saadaoui said, there was complete chaos. From a distance, the crowds looked like ants, he said, as streets filled with people heading toward the frontier. Police fired stun grenades and tear gas in an attempt to disperse them, he said.

Saadaoui decided not to continue. Akbili went on. The two remained in contact by phone.

Then Akbili stopped answering.

A Moroccan Interior Ministry document obtained by the AP says Akbili died at midnight on July 31. His death was classified as "unnatural," attributed to "severe head trauma." He was buried in his hometown of Khenifra.

His family was told he died after falling from a cliff. The Interior Ministry said one of the 11 deaths recorded on the Moroccan side was caused by a cliff fall.

But a cousin suspects foul play and wants further investigation.

"His phone and wallet stayed intact. How is it possible for someone who fell from a cliff?" Zakaria Akbili told the AP.

Soccer dreams drove one victim

Hamza Haibouri, who played soccer for Morocco's second-division Kenitra Athletic Club, was buoyed by dreams of making it big playing in Europe, said his childhood friend Bilal Ratib.

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The 28-year-old Haibouri was vacationing in Martil, a Moroccan beach town about 25 miles (40 kilometers) from Ceuta, when he saw people heading there and decided to join them. His death in the frenzied attempt to cross was announced by the soccer team's fan club.

Ratib said Haibouri visited France when he was young and had always wanted to return.

"He always had this idea of living abroad and going to France, to get better soccer and a better life," Ratib said.

"He was a great man, even when we were young and reckless, he would always go to the mosque early for the first prayer," Ratib said. "He was deeply religious."

Haibouri, whose income came entirely from soccer, earned around \$540 a month when he played, but he hadn't played at all this year, Ratib said.

Families learn of deaths through Facebook

Abdelouahed Iken, 19, was finishing high school in the southern city of Agadir. He regularly admired photos on Facebook posted by a friend who had migrated to Italy.

When he heard rumors the Ceuta border was open, he asked his mother for money to travel to his home village.

But instead of going home, Iken traveled more than 530 miles (850 kilometers) north to Ceuta with friends, according to family member Housine Zligui. Zligui said he learned about Iken's death on Facebook, and the family is now working to bring his body home.

Iken could not swim, so he bought a life jacket for the crossing. Friends who returned told the family they saw him struggling in the water before he drowned, Zligui said.

For many Moroccans, Europe represents the possibility of work, stability and a better future. Those who make it abroad often return home with designer clothes, cars and euros, becoming symbols of success — and envy.

Money sent home by Moroccans living overseas reached \$6.6 billion in the first six months of this year, according to government figures, equivalent to more than 3% of the country's GDP.

Families asked to pay huge repatriation costs

Families were asked to pay some 2,500 euros in repatriation costs to bring the bodies of their loved ones home from Ceuta, according to Ratib and Zligui.

The AP was unable to confirm the cost. But repatriating a body from Spain to Morocco generally requires authorization from the Moroccan Consulate and a Spanish mortuary transit document. Moroccan rules typically call for a sealed coffin and a certificate confirming the death wasn't caused by a contagious disease.

A spokesperson for Ceuta's government said Friday the paperwork to repatriate the bodies of those who died in the crossing was complete, but Morocco's government had not accepted it. The Moroccan government did not respond to an AP email with detailed questions about what was holding up repatriation, who was responsible for covering the costs and whether the Moroccan government would assist families in paying to have their loved ones returned.

Autopsies on 82 migrants brought ashore in Spain have been completed, said Manuel Aparcero, director of Ceuta's forensic team.

Haibouri's sister underwent DNA testing so that Ceuta authorities could confirm her brother's identity. Authorities in Ceuta gave Haibouri's sister his identification card and driver's license but did not allow her to see his body, Ratib said.

"It will take around 20 days or more" for the body to be returned, he said. "You can't imagine the families' suffering."

The Trade Union Network for Migration in Morocco called on Morocco and Spain to cover the costs of returning the dead to their families.

Back in Tangier, Saadaoui moved in with co-workers. He couldn't bear living without Akbili.

"He was telling me at the border, 'I will never come back,'" Saadaoui said. "And indeed, he will never come back."

Florida holds primaries for governor and Congress, testing Trump's grip on adopted state

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — A Republican attempting to become Florida's first Black governor faces a crowded field Tuesday while Democrats wage primary battles for a reduced pool of left-leaning seats under redrawn congressional maps.

U.S. Rep. Byron Donalds is banking on President Donald Trump's endorsement in hopes of securing the Republican nomination and advance to the fall election. His opponents include Lt. Gov. Jay Collins and political newcomer James Fishback.

Democrats' leading candidate for governor is David Jolly, a former Republican congressman who switched parties last year.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, a leading conservative figure who has clashed and collaborated with Trump over the years, is barred from running for a third consecutive term.

The primaries are giving final form to a November ballot whose races will test Trump's grip on his adopted state and Democrats' ability to resurrect Florida as a national political battleground. Florida has moved notably to the right since Trump won his first election in 2016, though Democrats hope to regain ground from his slumping popularity ratings.

Two Democrats are battling for nomination in a U.S. Senate special election to complete Marco Rubio's term after he became Trump's secretary of state last year. Progressive state lawmaker Angie Nixon matches up against retired Army Lt. Col. Alex Vindman, a former National Security Council official who testified in Trump's first impeachment case in 2019.

Meanwhile, Sen. Ashley Moody, the DeSantis appointee currently holding the seat, appears in a strong position as she seeks the Republican nomination with Trump's endorsement for the term's final two years.

For Congress, Tuesday's biggest nominating fight involves longtime Democratic U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, former U.S. Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick and others in a redrawn south Florida district.

Wasserman Schultz, who is white, wants voters in the new, plurality Black district to grant her a 12th term. Cherfilus-McCormick is seeking a comeback after resigning earlier this year under a pending federal indictment and threat of House ethics sanctions.

Donalds is trying to make history — and Jolly, too

There have been three elected Black governors in U.S. history. Yet the 47-year-old Donalds is more likely to tout his conservative credentials than the possibility of joining that select group.

He promises to push tax cuts, overhaul Florida's insurance regulations to lower consumer costs and seek greater price transparency from health care providers.

"The people of Florida want to make sure that the Florida dream is alive and well into the future," he said recently. "Affordability is a problem for all Floridians. It doesn't matter what your politics are. It doesn't matter what the color of your skin is."

Trump has had an inconsistent record on picks for governor in primaries this year, and a strong showing by Donalds would leave him, and Republicans in general, in a more commanding position for November. Though DeSantis coasted to reelection in 2022, he squeaked into office in 2018 by little more of 32,000 ballots out of 8.1 million cast.

Jolly is hoping ultimately to prove a party-switching former Republican can actually carry the Democratic banner in a state where that's failed before. Democrats nominated former Republican Gov. Charlie Crist in 2022 only to see him lose by nearly 20 percentage points to DeSantis.

Can Democrats make the Senate race interesting?

Moody, a former state attorney general tapped for Rubio's seat in 2025, is in a strong position seeking the GOP nomination. DeSantis, when he appointed her, praised her as a law-and-order prosecutor ready to help Trump "shut the border," tame inflation, and overhaul a federal bureaucracy "run amok."

Democrats face a familiar theme of 2026 primaries, with the progressive Nixon confronting Vindman from the party's center-left establishment. Vindman's testimony in 2019 was notable in the Democrat-led

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House impeachment case that led to Trump's acquittal in the Republican-led Senate. Trump ousted Vindman afterward.

Floridians haven't sent a Democrat to the Senate since 2012.

Wasserman Schultz runs in a new plurality Black district

Serving in Congress since 2005, she faces a new district — thanks to DeSantis' successful push for new congressional maps amid the national redistricting battle intended to boost Trump's midterm election prospects.

It's not the first time Wasserman Schultz has had to convince new voters after Republicans tinkered with boundaries. But this time she's the only white candidate in a plurality Black district. The redrawn Florida 20th is concentrated in the most Democratic and diverse parts of Broward County, and doesn't include her hometown of Weston, west of Fort Lauderdale.

Her four Black primary opponents — including Cherfilus-McCormick — have argued the district requires a Black representative. Wasserman Schultz disagrees.

"Representation matters and lived experience matters. But experience and making sure that you have someone who has the seniority and the seasoning to be able to deliver for a district, it matters as well," she said.

Cherfilus-McCormick, meanwhile, wants to return to Congress despite a pending federal indictment that accuses her of stealing \$5 million in federal disaster aid. She has plead not guilty and disputed alleged violations of House rules.

Republican Rep. Cory Mills faces primary challenges

DeSantis and other Republicans have bailed on Republican Rep. Cory Mills as he seeks a third term in Florida's 7th Congressional District at the same time he's denying domestic violence allegations. He faces three primary opponents.

"I have not endorsed Cory Mills, and I do not support Cory Mills," DeSantis said recently in Mills' district.

Turnout could offer clues to November

Registered Republicans now outnumber Democrats in Florida, a relatively recent flip. That puts the burden on Republicans to outperform Democrats comfortably in overall primary turnout. If it's close — with Democrats coaxing a clearly larger percentage of their voters to the polls — then the party would be more optimistic heading into November, as Democrats witnessed with primary turnout in other states this year. If Republicans buck national trends and dominate, then Democrats could be facing another rough fall campaign.

Miami-Dade will be especially notable. Democrats carried the county comfortably through 2016, when Trump lost it to Hillary Clinton by 30 percentage points. Four years later, Trump closed the gap to 7 points before carrying it in 2024 by more than 11 points.

What to watch Tuesday: Redistricting scrambles Florida as Alaska pits Dan Sullivan v. Dan Sullivan

By JILL COLVIN and MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

As a long and contentious primary season nears its end, attention is turning to Florida, Wyoming, California and Alaska, where primaries Tuesday will highlight Republican-led redistricting efforts that have scrambled congressional maps and new battles between the Democratic establishment and progressive left.

Also in the mix are a handful of scandal-plagued candidates, multiple people running with matching last names and several incumbents at risk of defeat.

Tuesday's contests will help shape the fiercely contested midterms this fall to determine control of Congress, where Republicans have a narrow edge, and offer a referendum on President Donald Trump's second term.

Here's a closer look at what to watch.

Historic slate of Black candidates for governor emerging

Trump-backed Florida Rep. Byron Donalds, a rising star in the Republican Party, is running to succeed

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term-limited Gov. Ron DeSantis to become the first Black governor of the state. If Donalds wins, he'll become part of a historic slate of Black gubernatorial nominees that includes Republican Rep. John James in Michigan and Lisa Demuth, who defeated pillow-selling conspiracist Mike Lindell in Minnesota.

On the Democratic side, David Crowley won a razor-thin primary against a democratic socialist in Wisconsin, joining Attorney General Aaron Ford in Nevada, State Rep. Jermaine Johnson in South Carolina, and former Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, who is running in Georgia to be the nation's first Black woman governor.

There is currently only one Black governor in the nation, Democrat Wes Moore of Maryland, who is seeking reelection in November.

The Florida GOP winner will likely face David Jolly, a former Republican-turned-independent-turned-Democrat.

Redistricting creates skirmishing for Democrats in Florida House races

A GOP-led redrawing scrambled Florida's congressional map, which has created some awkward matchups.

The most contentious pits veteran Democratic U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz against former U.S. Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick in a South Florida district that is almost majority Black. Cherfilus-McCormick resigned earlier this year under threat of House ethics sanctions, but now wants her seat back.

Wasserman Schultz, a former national party chair seeking a 12th term in Congress, is the only white candidate competing against four Black candidates in an area of Broward County that has helped send Black Democrats to Congress since 1992. Her decision to run has raised questions about representation and stirred deep animosity, including charges by one rival that "she stabbed us in the back."

Carpetbaggers and comebacks in the making in Florida?

The race to fill Donalds' House seat features a cast of characters akin to a reality show reunion, including several who have spent time in prison and a handful who have run in other states.

The field includes two former members of Congress who are mounting comeback bids after departing in scandal. Former North Carolina Rep. Madison Cawthorn's tenure was marred by repeat traffic stops, guns at airport checkpoints and a claim he had been invited to a Washington orgy. Former New York Rep. Chris Collins, who resigned before pleading guilty to insider trading charges, served prison time before he was pardoned by Trump.

Trump-endorsed Catalina Lauf ran twice for Congress in Illinois. She lost the 2020 primary to Jim Oberweis, a former state senator, who has also decamped to Florida and is running for the seat.

Another candidate, Ola Hawatmeh, previously ran unsuccessfully for Congress in New York, while Linda Sawyer once tried in Michigan.

Also in the race: John Strand, a former television actor, underwear model and romance novel cover model, who served prison time for his role in the Jan. 6, 2021 assault of the U.S. Capitol.

Progressive vs. establishment candidates at odds again

The internal battle between progressive and establishment candidates that has been roiling the Democratic Party in states like Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan, now arrives in more conservative territory.

Progressive state lawmaker Angie Nixon is facing retired Army Lt. Col. Alex Vindman, a former National Security Council official who delivered searing testimony against Trump in his 2019 impeachment trial. They're both running in the Florida special election to fill the last two years of Secretary of State Marco Rubio's former Senate term.

The winner is likely to face interim Sen. Ashley Moody, the Republican appointed by DeSantis to the seat.

Other races will also put fault lines on display. In South Florida, U.S. Rep. Jared Moskowitz is running for reelection in a new Republican-friendly district against union organizer and democratic socialist Oliver Larkin.

Meanwhile, Republican incumbents are facing their own challenges. Rep. Cory Mills, running for a third term, has been plagued by an ethics investigation stemming from allegations of assault, domestic violence and campaign finance violations, which he denies.

Double-checking the name in Alaska

In a Senate race that is expected to be one of the country's most closely watched this fall, incumbent

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Republican Sen. Dan Sullivan, a Trump ally seeking a third term, is facing another candidate also named Dan Sullivan.

Republicans have argued the second Sullivan, who'll be appearing on the ballot as "Daniel J. Sullivan Jr.," is a sham candidate running at the behest of Democrats to cause confusion. Dan J. Sullivan Jr., a retired teacher, has denied the charge.

Also in the race is former U.S. Rep. Mary Peltola. She was the first Alaska Native to serve in Congress, and she would become the first Alaska Native senator if she wins in November.

Under Alaska's open primary system, all candidates appear on the same ballot, and the four who receive the most votes move on to a ranked-vote general election.

There are other surnames for Alaskans to keep straight.

Republican Rep. Nick Begich faces a crowded field in his bid for a second term in the state's lone congressional seat. His uncle, former state Sen. Tom Begich, and former state Rep. Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins are the two Democrats in the race. Tom Begich is the brother of Mark Begich, a former Democratic U.S. senator whom Sullivan defeated in 2014.

Seats open up in Wyoming

For the first time in more than 30 years, Wyoming has open seats for governor, U.S. Senate and U.S. House all up for grabs in a state where registered Republicans outnumber Democrats by a 7-to-1 margin.

Republican Sen. Cynthia Lummis' decision to retire after a single term has set off a chain reaction, with Rep. Harriet Hageman running to replace her.

She has an overwhelming fundraising advantage and became well-known after defeating former Rep. Liz Cheney, one of Trump's harshest Republican critics, in 2022.

Nine Republicans, meanwhile, are competing to replace Hageman as the state's lone U.S. representative.

Wyoming's current governor, Republican Mark Gordon, considered seeking a third term and challenging a state term limit law but ultimately decided not to.

Pro-Israel group spending in former Swalwell seat

In California's Bay Area, voters will be picking a replacement for Democratic Rep. Eric Swalwell, whose resignation amid sexual assault allegations ended his run for governor.

California's 14th District will remain under Democratic control as state Sen. Aisha Wahab and Bay Area Rapid Transit Board President Melissa Hernandez advanced from a special open primary.

The race is reprising a theme that cropped up in other Democratic primaries this year: outside spending, particularly from pro-Israel lobbying groups. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee's super PAC has spent more than \$2 million against Wahab and backing Hernandez, and another group with funding from the super PAC has spent nearly \$2 million in support of Hernandez.

Pro-Israel group spending seemed to backfire in Michigan's recent Democratic Senate primary, where Abdul El-Sayed emerged victorious despite tens of millions of dollars backing his opponent Rep. Haley Stevens.

Opening arguments set to begin in Meta's federal trial over child safety

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

Oakland, Calif. (AP) — Opening arguments are set to kick off Tuesday in a pivotal trial for Meta Platforms in a California federal court.

Attorneys general from California, Colorado, Kentucky and New Jersey are seeking extensive financial damages plus changes to how the company operates Facebook and Instagram. Twenty-nine states sued the tech giant in 2023 over child safety and privacy — the other 25 will go to trial later. The company also faces lawsuits in state courts.

The lawsuit accuses the social media giant of contributing to the youth mental health crisis by knowingly and deliberately designing features that get children addicted to its platforms. It also argues that Meta routinely collects data on children under 13 without their parents' consent, in violation of federal law.

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"This week, we're in court with the largest consumer protection lawsuit in American history. We'll show a jury that Meta concealed what it knew about the harm its products cause young people because looking away was more profitable," said Kentucky Attorney General Russell Coleman in a statement.

Meta said it believes it has a strong case.

"We are proud of our record in protecting teens on our platforms and the amount of effort that we've put into developing protections over the years, even before these cases were ever filed, and continuing to the present day. We look forward to showing the judge and the jury those facts in court," the company said in a statement.

U.S. District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers in Oakland will oversee the proceedings, which are expected to last six to eight weeks, with Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg and other executives and former employees testifying. Gonzalez Rogers, appointed to the bench by President Barack Obama in 2011, has overseen a bevy of complex, high-profile cases involving Big Tech. These include Elon Musk's lawsuit against OpenAI and its founders as well as Epic Games' lawsuit against Apple over its app store.

The trial is the latest in an avalanche of lawsuits against Meta Platforms and other social media companies including Google's YouTube, TikTok and Snap, over arguments that their platforms harm young people, illegally collect their data and are deliberately designed to addict them.

1 death linked to Tropical Storm Lala as more than 100,000 remain without power in Hawaii

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Thousands were without power Monday after Tropical Storm Lala uprooted trees from downtown Honolulu to the Big Island, where intense flash-flooding and strong winds isolated already-remote communities.

In the hard-hit southern end of the Big Island, communities were isolated as they were cut off from communication and roads were blocked by debris. Floodwaters disturbed some grave sites.

Officials announced one fatality blamed on the storm — a 90-year-old woman who had been reported missing in Naalehu and then found dead on Monday. Additional details about the death weren't immediately available.

Lala weakened from a hurricane to a tropical storm Sunday after lashing the state without making land-fall. Intense rainfall and flooding caused a muddy mess as the storm moved past Hawaii's main islands.

Destructive flooding

The flooding proved to be more destructive than the wind, said Gov. Josh Green, who flew over and walked through the south part of the island Monday.

"It's the flood and the mud and the rock the poured through Naalehu, Pahala, Waiohinu," he said. "These communities have a lot of cleanup to do and they're going to need a lot of support."

The storm was projected to continue moving westward and was forecast to become a hurricane again at sea and far from land by Wednesday.

Public schools statewide, some private schools and state offices were closed Monday. Schools and county offices on the Big Island will remain closed Tuesday. Cleanup efforts began in earnest with crews repairing bridges and clearing fallen trees.

The Hawaiian Electric utility said nearly 104,000 customers were without power as of Monday afternoon. The passing storm's strong winds took down trees, utility poles and transmission towers. The Big Island's power transmission system suffered "extensive damage," the utility said.

The 911 emergency service number was temporarily out of service on the Big Island because hurricane impacts were affecting radio and telephone communications, the Hawaii Police Department said, but was back up by the afternoon.

Cut-off communities and damaged cemeteries

"My district is in shambles," said state Rep. Jeanné Kapela, who represents the Kau district on the south-

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ern end of the island. Her voice quivered with emotion as she described communities trapped by collapsed and debris-blocked roads, including the small community of Punaluu, home to about 100 households and popular among tourists for its black-sand beach.

Two cemeteries in Naalehu were "washed out," she said.

Kapela was working to get satellite internet connections near communities without power and cellular service.

"Most people when you think of Hawaii, you think of Lahaina or you think of Waikiki," she said of some of the state's most popular tourist destinations. "You don't necessarily think of the southern point of the United States, but at the end of the day, we are the southernmost point in the United States. That's the community that got hit. And it's probably one of the most rural communities in the entire country."

The governor said he was hopeful the area would become accessible within days, and not weeks or longer.

"Please respect those people who were deceased and buried in the cemetery there where there was some dispersal of the 'iwi kupuna', Green said, using the Hawaiian term for sacred ancestral skeletal remains of Native Hawaiians.

Tom Callis, a spokesperson for Hawaii County, which is also known as the Big Island, said those areas have been cordoned off and no work is happening there.

The damage was not as catastrophic as feared, governor says

Green vowed that recovery will be "somewhat brisk."

"And in spite of this loss of one beautiful person," he said of the storm-related death, "it could have been a lot worse."

While he said he saw a lot of devastation he also saw many houses that survived and bridges that weren't as badly damaged as feared.

Some 100 homes were swept from their foundations and washed away on the Big Island, authorities said previously.

Officials advised people to stay out of the ocean anywhere water appears brown or murky.

There were no coastal watches or warnings in effect for Hawaii on Monday, but life-threatening surf and rip current conditions remained, according to the National Hurricane Center. Saturation caused by heavy rainfall could still cause some landslides, but winds were no longer a threat, National Weather Service meteorologist Patrick Blood said.

"There's no real looming hazards that we're facing now," he said. "Lala's off to the west."

Laupahoehoe, on the northeast coast of the Big Island, saw the heaviest recorded rainfall at 43.54 inches (1.1 meters). The highest winds were atop the towering Mauna Kea volcano, where gusts hit 140 mph (225 kph). At the lower elevations, residents all across the island chain experienced tropical storm force winds of 30 to 40 mph (48 to 64 kph) with gusts up to 60 mph (97 kph), Blood said.

Federal officials have pledged recovery help. U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz said Monday he spoke with Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy about federal support and urged him to approve a forthcoming request for emergency funding to help clear debris and repair damaged roads and highways.

Flooding risk remains as storms move from the Midwest to the mid-Atlantic

By OBED LAMY and HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Indiana residents remained on alert while returning to their flood-ravaged homes Monday as repeated rounds of thunderstorms and heavy rain moved east from the Midwest into the mid-Atlantic and high heat scorched much of the South and Southwest.

In central and east central Indiana, emergency operations were still ongoing after days of punishing storms, Gov. Mike Braun said at afternoon news conference, while other areas were shifting to recovery. He said the state had launched a disaster relief fund to provide \$5,000 to individuals needing to buy basics such as clothing and food.

"We're tracking your needs, and we will get you resources," he said. "We want displaced Hoosiers to

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have a hot meal, comfortable bed and get into air-conditioning.”

The National Weather Service said heavy rain would continue one more day before a cold front sweeps the weather pattern off the East Coast on Tuesday. Meanwhile, flash flood warnings were issued over parts of waterlogged West Virginia, where residents were cleaning up Monday after more than 4 inches (10 centimeters) of rain fell over the weekend, causing mudslides, tearing up roads, prompting water rescues and contributing to at least one death.

Elsewhere, hot weather posed more of a problem, particularly across the South and Southwest. The weather service issued extreme heat warnings for portions of Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Georgia, South Carolina, Arizona, Nevada and California.

Indiana is seeking recovery after days of deadly storms

In Indiana, where days of storms and flooding left at least seven people dead, floodwaters receded in Indianapolis’ White River and rains eased around the state Sunday. But a flood warning remained in effect Monday night for several rivers, including part of Randolph County in east central Indiana, where thunderstorms had dropped between 1 and 2 inches (2.5 to 5 centimeters) of rain. Residents of half a dozen counties were urged to stay off the roads except for essential travel.

“While we have seen encouraging trends, the work is far from over,” said Jacob Spence, director of the Metropolitan Emergency Services Agency in Indianapolis, where city officials launched a website to support affected residents.

Oliver Riggle, 33, said he had just moved into a camping trailer in Indianapolis a few months ago after living in his car.

“Just having privacy again was a huge deal. I mean, I had a door that locked. I had a roof that was mine,” he said. “No one was gonna take it from me, except for apparently Mother Nature.”

A neighbor told Riggle the trailer nearly tipped over as it floated in the flood waters. It was still full of water Sunday, but by Monday, the water had receded and he was busy throwing away waterlogged belongings.

A handyman whose trailer flooded wants to help others salvage their homes

A handyman who works for a general contractor, Riggle said he hopes to help others salvage their own homes.

“I’ve got tools that I can use to help be a part of the community,” he said. “We’re just gonna have to have faith that we’re going to be able to pull through because it’s not like we’ve got a safety net.”

Michael Daily, 23, said he won’t be moving back into his rental home after it flooded and instead has moved in with his parents about half an hour away.

“It’s not helpful that you see everything you’ve worked for get destroyed. I’m definitely out a good chunk of change,” he said. “You can already see mold growing in spots in there, just like little white fluff balls everywhere. It’s pretty gross.”

South of Indianapolis, officials in Madison Township said firefighters and others rescued 10 people from their homes Sunday night. Others had to be rescued from cars after attempting to drive through flooded roadways.

A 4-year-old boy, three men and three women were among those who had died since the storms that began Aug. 11, said spokesperson Liz Woods with the state Department of Homeland Security.

A cyclist is found dead on a washed-out road after the flooding

Also among the seven victims was a 31-year-old cyclist found dead early Sunday in a hole that opened up on a washed-out road east of Indianapolis. Henry County Coroner Brian Clark said the man, James Briar, appears to have gone around a barricade and fallen into the collapsed road.

Heavy rains hammered Indiana over the past week, causing rivers to crest and setting records as roads and bridges were seriously damaged or washed out entirely.

More than 94,000 utility customers statewide remained without power as of Monday night, down from a peak of around 300,000, according to utility tracker PowerOutage.us.

The drenching rains and destructive flooding were among the impacts of severe storms that have wreaked havoc across the Midwest and beyond in recent days. Tornadoes, heavy rains and flash flooding brought

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serious damage to communities from Illinois to western Pennsylvania.

In southern West Virginia, authorities on Monday found the body of a woman whose vehicle was swept away in floodwaters. Witnesses told police that the vehicle made a wrong turn and entered a flooded area Sunday. A tree branch broke the vehicle's glass and the woman tried to escape but she fell into the floodwaters and was carried away by the current, according to a statement by Fayette County Sheriff Jess McMullen.

The National Weather Service forecasts heavy rain and thunderstorms across the upper Ohio Valley to the central Appalachians, with the possibility of severe storms late Monday across eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina.

Trump's slight of South Korea in favor of the North raises broader US security concerns

By MATTHEW LEE and BEN FINLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's decision to scale back joint military exercises with South Korea does not just slight a longtime ally but raises broader concerns about the security interests of the United States in Asia and elsewhere.

Trump explained his decision by citing South Korea's refusal to join his war against Iran and pointing to what he said was his good relationship with North Korea's reclusive dictator, a transactional and personal approach to foreign policy that has defined the Republican's presidency.

"There is no American interest that I can see in this," said Dan Fried, an assistant secretary of state for European affairs in the George W. Bush administration. "On all levels it makes no sense. It undermines the South Koreans, undermines the Japanese, frightens the Taiwanese, unnerves NATO and emboldens the Chinese, not to mention the North Koreans."

Danny Russel, former assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific in the Obama administration, said Trump's decision to side with North Korea, which strongly objects to the annual joint military exercises, is "firmly in the 'hard-to see-how-it-could-be-worse' category."

"It is tragically upside-down. Trump is punishing an ally while encouraging an adversary," said Russel, now a scholar at the Asia Society Policy Institute in New York. "He is protecting Kim Jong Un's sensitive feelings from an unfriendly signal at the expense of U.S.-South Korean security."

The message it sends to South Koreans

Trump on Sunday ordered the U.S. military to downsize the 11-day Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises, which began Monday as scheduled. It wasn't known which parts of the training were being scaled back.

His announcement baffled many in South Korea, which has been closely allied with the U.S. for decades and where national security is a top priority due to threats from nuclear-armed North Korea.

It also drew instant criticism from many Democrats in Congress.

"Treating one of America's closest allies like an adversary weakens our alliances and benefits China and North Korea," said Rep. Greg Meeks of New York, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, in a statement.

Trump on Monday doubled down, posting a photo of North Korea's leader speaking on a phone. The caption read: "HEY DONALD ... WE COOL, RIGHT?"

Retired U.S. Ambassador Robert Wood, who served under Republican and Democratic presidents, said the joint military exercises are critical to deterring North Korea, which has shunned any talks with the U.S. over its nuclear program and has accelerated weapons testing.

"We also don't want South Korea to draw the conclusion that a nuclear weapons capability is the only guarantee it has to ensure its security," Wood said.

Matthew Kroenig, who previously served in defense and intelligence positions in Republican and Democratic administrations, said polls show that South Koreans have increasingly supported the idea of pursuing their own nuclear weapons.

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"The United States has been working really hard to try to persuade South Korea that they are protected," said Kroenig, who is now with the Atlantic Council, a Washington think tank. Scaling back the exercises "potentially undermines that message," he said.

Seoul tried to flatter Trump

Trump's turnabout came even after the South Koreans worked to flatter the American president, eager to gain favor on critical issues such as trade and defense.

As soon as he sat down in the gilded Oval Office for his meeting with Trump last year, new President Lee Jae Myung praised the room's elaborate decor. Laying it on thick, Lee affirmed Trump's assertion that Kim would not have pursued his nuclear ambitions had Trump won a second consecutive term in 2020, while dangling the prospect of an eventual Trump Tower in North Korea.

Trump just hours earlier had appeared to show sympathy for Lee's predecessor, Yoon Suk Yeol, who had been ousted from office after imposing martial law in December 2024.

Charles Kupchan, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, said Trump's scaling back of the exercises may prompt longtime allies to think more about their own security without U.S. help.

"They are hoping that the American umbrella is there for the future," said Kupchan, who worked on the National Security Council under Democratic Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, "but they have to at least contemplate the idea that Uncle Sam won't be there for them."

'It's like he wants to burn it all down'

Kupchan said Trump is not mistaken in wanting to have South Korea, as well as the Europeans, contribute more to their defense. But, he said, the president's unpredictable approach cuts through the solidarity that undergirds those alliances "because he ends up insulting allies."

Fried said Trump seems unwilling to "take a win" after brow-beating NATO members and Asian allies into increasing their defense spending.

"NATO is building up, South Korea is building up, Japan is building up. Trump has a problem with taking the win," said Fried, who is currently at the Atlantic Council. "It's like he wants to burn it all down."

John Herbst, a former ambassador to Ukraine under President George W. Bush, said the Korea decision shows how inconsistent the Trump administration can be in its policy pronouncements. But in general, he said, the U.S. has maintained long-term alliances.

"If these things grow in frequency and in importance, obviously we will be in the process of taking apart the alliance system, which has served us so well since the end of World War II," said Herbst, who also is with the Atlantic Council. "But despite some statements which seem to head in that direction, we have not headed there in a consistent, strong way."

Kupchan agreed.

While the president's language could be taken as "we're done with you," Kupchan said, "the reality is that, at least as of today, Trump has left intact America's forward bases and its core alliance relationships."

Whether Trump's message to South Korea will amount to a meaningful policy change or a fleeting social media post is up in the air.

"He's an unpredictable president," Kroenig said. "If we move on and the exercises go as planned and we never hear anything about this again, I wouldn't be surprised."

The 60-day deadline for an Iran peace deal is expiring. Here's where things stand

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

The deal that U.S. President Donald Trump signed at Versailles in June set an ambitious 60-day deadline for ending the war with Iran and reaching an accord on its nuclear program.

The deadline was Monday, and the two sides are further apart than they were then.

Talks, such as they are, have focused on reopening the Strait of Hormuz and lifting a U.S. blockade on Iran, both of which were supposed to have happened under the interim deal. There has been no sign of any compromise on the strait, or that detailed nuclear talks have even begun.

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The U.S., meanwhile, has no good options for getting out of the war it started alongside Israel.

Acceding to Iran's latest demands would mean giving it control over a critical international waterway that carried a fifth of the world's traded oil and gas before the war — and would be tantamount to admitting defeat. Escalating the deeply unpopular war would further draw down U.S. supplies of advanced missile interceptors, jolt the world economy, and drive up gas prices ahead of U.S. congressional elections.

So both sides have dug in, hoping the other will blink first. So far, neither has.

The interim deal collapsed weeks later

The June deal, known as the Memorandum of Understanding, called for a halt to all military operations and set a 60-day deadline for an agreement to permanently end the war and resolve the longstanding dispute over Iran's nuclear activities.

It called for the Strait of Hormuz to be reopened but gave Iran a vaguely defined role in facilitating traffic, leaving open the possibility it could charge fees after the 60-day deadline. Iran has seized on that clause to claim control over the waterway.

A week after the deal was signed, Iran began firing on vessels using a route along the coast of Oman, on the other side of the strait, that is overseen by the U.S. military and intended to bypass Tehran's control.

The U.S. responded by striking Iran, which retaliated by attacking Arab countries hosting American forces, like Jordan, Kuwait and Bahrain. The U.S. canceled waivers issued as part of the deal that had allowed Iran to sell its oil internationally and Trump restored a blockade of Iran's ports.

Each side accused the other of violating the June agreement, of which almost nothing remains.

The fighting eventually died down. A related truce in Lebanon between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah has mostly held, even as Israeli troops occupy large areas in the country's south. Lebanon's "territorial integrity and sovereignty" were to have been ensured under the June deal.

Iranian officials say they stopped negotiating with the U.S. in June, while acknowledging that messages have been relayed by intermediaries. Trump says the talks have continued, occasionally claiming progress after pulling back from threatening major strikes.

Pakistan, which played a key role in brokering the June agreement, noted last week that the deadline was Monday while expressing hope it would be extended.

"We are not closing the chapter," Foreign Ministry spokesman Tahir Andrabi said. "Pakistan is making all-out efforts to bring the two parties to the negotiating table."

Iran's leaders think they can force Trump to give up the strait

Earlier this month, Iran issued a list of demands for reopening the strait, including the lifting of the American blockade, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from around Iran and the payment of reparations for damage inflicted in the war started by the U.S. and Israel on Feb. 28.

Even then, Iran has said it would control the strait — and potentially charge fees — through an agreement it is negotiating with Oman, and that the strait will not go back to being an open, toll-free waterway as it was before the war.

Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen have meanwhile begun attacking Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea, threatening another crucial trade route that had been used to relieve some of the pressure from the strait being closed.

Trump has rejected Iran's demands — saying it's Tehran that should pay war reparations and claiming the U.S. controls the strait. He appears to be banking on economic pressure — in the form of the blockade and longstanding sanctions — to bring Iran's rulers to their knees.

Iran's economy has been battered by the war and isolation, and inflation has soared. The crisis could stoke renewed anti-government protests, like those that were brutally crushed in January.

Traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, which rose immediately after the interim deal, is back to a small fraction of what it was before the war. Rising prices of fuel and other goods are expected to climb further the longer this continues with effects far beyond the Middle East.

The clock is still ticking for both sides.

US school vaccination rates inch down yet again and exemptions reach record high

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. kindergarten vaccination rates inched down again last year and the share of children with exemptions rose to an all-time high, according to federal data posted Monday.

The fraction of kids exempted from vaccine requirements rose to 4.2%, up from 3.6% the year before. That's an estimated 155,000 children nationally during the 2025-2026 school year.

It's the fourth consecutive year that the national average exemption rate has reached a record, and the vast majority are parents withholding shots for nonmedical reasons. Exemptions increased in 41 states and the District of Columbia.

Experts point to turmoil caused by federal health officials.

U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. was a leading voice in the antivaccine movement before President Donald Trump put him in charge of federal health agencies. In the last 18 months, Kennedy and other federal officials have repeatedly tried to revise and reduce childhood vaccination guidance. Earlier this month, Trump called for revamped childhood vaccination recommendations that promote his discredited theory that childhood shots should be spaced out into separate medical visits.

"The root cause of this is primarily because there's so much chaos and confusion in vaccination recommendation systems in the last year or so," said Dr. James Campbell, of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Vaccination rates fell for many diseases

The CDC reported that 92.4% of 2025-26 kindergarteners got their required measles-mumps-rubella shots, down slightly from the previous year. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the vaccination rate was 95% — the level that makes it unlikely that a single infection will spark a disease cluster or outbreak.

Vaccination rates also fell for polio, for the combination shot against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis, and for the first dose of the vaccine against chickenpox.

The rate held steady for protection against hepatitis B. But that's a vaccine given shortly after birth, and it will take a few years before recent federal efforts to upend infant hepatitis B vaccine recommendations would appear in the vaccination rates of kindergartners, Campbell said.

The vaccination numbers were posted as the U.S. experiences its worst year for measles since 1991.

The numbers indicate that more than a quarter of a million children entering kindergarten are susceptible to measles, said Campbell, a University of Maryland researcher who is chair of the AAP's infectious diseases committee.

Those at-risk kids are not evenly distributed — concentrations of unvaccinated children are higher in some places than others, which helps explain why measles waves vary in intensity.

This is when public health officials typically tout vaccines' benefits

The CDC data is coming out as school and health officials across the country are encouraging parents to get their children vaccinated as the school year starts.

"Back-to-school season is an important reminder that protecting our children's health is both a shared responsibility and a shared goal," North Carolina Health and Human Services Secretary Dev Sangvai said in a statement. "Vaccines help keep our children and teens healthy and in the classroom."

In the past, the CDC has released the vaccination coverage data in its flagship publication, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. CDC officials usually speak to the trends and stress the importance of vaccinations.

But since the Trump administration took office early last year, the agency has posted the data online. This year, the agency issued a three-sentence statement that noted a small decline in vaccination coverage among children entering kindergarten and said: "CDC continues to encourage parents to discuss vaccination options with their doctors."

Medical exemption rates are steady

Public health officials focus on vaccination rates for kindergartners because schools can be cauldrons for germs and launching pads for community outbreaks.

For years, those rates were high, thanks largely to school attendance mandates that required key vaccinations. All U.S. states and territories require that children attending childcare centers and schools be vaccinated against a number of diseases, including measles, mumps, polio, tetanus, whooping cough and chickenpox.

All states allow exemptions for children with medical conditions that prevent them from receiving certain vaccines. And most also permit exemptions for religious or other nonmedical reasons.

In the last decade, the percentage of kindergartners with medical exemptions has held steady, at about 0.2%. But the percentage with nonmedical exemptions has risen.

According to the CDC data, 17.5% of kindergartners had an exemption to one or more vaccines in Idaho in the last school year. But fewer than 0.5% did in Connecticut.

ICE pitches legal insurance to help shield local officers who make immigration arrests

By RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is pitching a plan to help shield local police officers who make immigration arrests from possible financial consequences if they are accused of on-duty misconduct.

The agency is proposing to subsidize liability insurance for state and local officers who are trained and deputized to enforce federal immigration laws, according to a planning document published Friday.

ICE's partnerships with local departments have soared since President Donald Trump returned to the White House last year and may get an additional boost with liability insurance by removing a hurdle that has made some local police departments reluctant to join. The Associated Press is the first to report on this insurance proposal.

Under the plan, officers would purchase insurance covering up to \$500,000 in personal liability, which typically funds legal fees, settlements and judgments. Officers would be reimbursed up to \$250 annually — roughly what the insurance is expected to cost.

One prominent critic of ICE's immigration crackdown said the program would be yet another way for officers to avoid personal accountability for misconduct.

"The concern here is that ICE is going above and beyond to guarantee law enforcement does not have even the slightest risk of liability for violating Americans' rights while helping ICE arrest people," said David Bier, director of immigration studies at the Cato Institute, who has called on Congress to make it easier to sue ICE agents for wrongdoing.

ICE outlined the plan in a document informing industry officials that it is considering hiring a contractor to help provide outreach, training and communications support for its so-called 287(g) partnerships with local departments, which are named for a section of a 1996 immigration law. The contractor would hire the insurance vendor and process the reimbursements, among other tasks.

ICE has asked for industry feedback by Thursday. The proposed timeline for launching the program and its estimated cost are unclear.

ICE had no immediate comment on the plan.

Arrests by ICE's local partners have spiked since last year

During Trump's second term, ICE has offered generous financial incentives to participating local agencies, increasing the number who have partnered with the federal government, as well as the number of arrests.

Nearly 1,600 agencies in 32 states now have agreements to participate in ICE's task force model, in which trained local officers can interrogate, arrest and charge people suspected of being in the country illegally, according to ICE data.

Departments qualify for funding to help cover expenses like their officers' pay, equipment and vehicles. With encouragement from state and local Republican officials, agencies in Florida, Texas, Oklahoma and Georgia have been among the leaders.

Arrests made through such programs jumped to an average of 3,000 per month in the first two months of 2026, according to the most recent ICE data provided to the University of California Berkeley's Depor-

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tion Data Project. That compares to a monthly average of 250 in 2024 under President Joe Biden.

Local departments, officers worried about liability for ICE work

As local officers increasingly carry out federal immigration work, they and their departments have expressed concerns about the civil liability that could result from claims alleging excessive use of force, wrongful arrest and illegal search and seizure, among other things.

That's because insurance policies that cover their local work may not apply. Pennsylvania's risk pool, for instance, recently made clear that it would exclude "proactive immigration enforcement activities" from coverage, forcing several participating counties to search for other insurance options.

Butler County Sheriff Michael Slupe said he found insurance to cover his 13 deputies participating in the program at a cost of \$20,000 in annual premiums.

"I want to make sure the guys are additionally covered, so we had to spend the money," he said, adding that federal funding would cover the cost.

Federal officers usually enjoy legal immunities and a government-funded defense when they face lawsuits. But those protections may not always apply to local officers, which has heightened their concerns over liability and the need for insurance.

While civil lawsuits are the main concern, professional liability insurance typically helps cover legal fees for officers facing criminal investigations as well.

Sheriffs' group says ICE's insurance idea sounds promising

Justin Smith, a former Colorado sheriff who is executive director of the National Sheriffs' Association, said ICE's plan sounds promising and that he was anxious to speak with ICE about how the plan would work.

Smith said he has shared concerns with ICE that some sheriffs are reluctant to join the partnerships because of the potential liability at a time when immigration enforcement faces intense public protests and media scrutiny. Smith said others who are partnering with ICE have already started facing legal claims tied to their immigration work, which can be costly whether or not deputies are ultimately found to have done anything wrong.

"Right now, any time you are working on immigration there is going to be a much higher potential for there being problems and having suits and issues," he said. "They're recognizing that it is a different environment. And I think trying to be good partners with us as best they can."

Under their agreements, ICE warns local departments that they are responsible for the costs of incidents that give rise to liability. But it seeks to reduce the risk by saying local officers performing ICE-authorized functions are "acting under color of federal authority," which would bar lawsuits against individual officers.

The agreements also state that local officers who face civil lawsuits can ask the U.S. Department of Justice to represent them, and that ICE will generally support their requests. But the final decision on whether to do so rests with DOJ.

Luigi Mangione's state murder trial postponed indefinitely amid double jeopardy fight

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Luigi Mangione's state murder trial in the killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, which was slated to begin Sept. 8, has been postponed indefinitely as his lawyers seek to have the case thrown out on double jeopardy grounds following his guilty plea last week to federal charges.

Judge Gregory Carro issued an order Monday canceling the trial and giving the Manhattan District Attorney's office, which is prosecuting the state case, until Oct. 9 to respond to the defense's double jeopardy claims. A hearing will be held on Dec. 10, Carro said, about a week before Mangione is scheduled to be sentenced in the federal case.

Mangione, 28, pleaded guilty Friday in Manhattan federal court to a pair of stalking charges and admitted trailing Thompson to UnitedHealth Group's investor conference and gunning him down outside a Manhattan hotel in 2024. Federal prosecutors said they would seek life in prison when Mangione is sentenced Dec. 18, though federal sentencing guidelines call for a term of 24 to 30 years.

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"On the morning of Dec. 4, 2024, I shot Mr. Thompson in Manhattan, and he died," Mangione said.

Immediately after his plea, Mangione's lawyers filed paperwork seeking to have the state case thrown out on double jeopardy and due process grounds. They described him as a "pawn in parallel prosecutions" and accused state and federal prosecutors of "trying to punish him twice for the exact conduct."

Mangione has pleaded not guilty in the state case, which also carries the possibility of a life sentence.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office said in a statement that it would fight efforts to end the state case, in part because Mangione's federal sentence isn't yet known.

Compared with federal law and that of other states, New York has uncommonly strong protections for defendants facing multiple prosecutions. A state prosecution can be barred if a federal case involving the same course of conduct or criminal transaction ends in a guilty plea or if a jury is sworn.

It will be up to Carro to decide if that applies to Mangione. However Carro rules, his decision will be subject to appeal.

Mangione pleaded guilty to federal charges that accused him of traveling across state lines by bus to stalk and kill Thompson. The charges alleged that he used a cellphone, the internet, interstate highways and a hostel serving out-of-state customers to plan and carry out the attack.

"The full range of conduct that comprises the stalking offense is coterminous with the conduct committed as part of the murder offense," Mangione's lawyers wrote in their double jeopardy filing.

That Mangione traveled from out of state "to be at the crime scene at the time of the shooting does nothing to eliminate the stalking of Mr. Thompson from the acts constituting his murder," they added. "They are all part of the same criminal incident or criminal transaction."

Bragg's office contends that the state charges, including murder and firearms offenses, involve different legal elements and criminal conduct. In a letter last month, Assistant District Attorney Joel Seidemann objected to the possibility of a federal guilty plea wiping out the state case.

Any guilty plea, Seidemann wrote, "must account for the seriousness of defendant's offenses" and for the state's interests in prosecuting Mangione, "including the sanctity of life principle that underpins the state homicide charges."

Marathon US-Israel meeting produces optimism but no firm commitment to American plan for Gaza

By JULIA FRANKEL, SAMY MAGDY and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — A marathon meeting Monday between U.S. negotiator Jared Kushner and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu left the fate of the Gaza ceasefire unclear, with officials signaling moderate optimism but offering no concrete commitment by Israel to the latest U.S.-proposed plan.

Hamas has already agreed to the proposal. American negotiators appeared to acquiesce to Israeli demands that Hamas disarmament must come before any reconstruction of the devastated Palestinian enclave. They did not publicly signal that Israel had made any commitments to withdraw from the 60% of Gaza that Israeli troops currently occupy.

That's a major sticking point in the plan and one that Hamas had pressed negotiators to compel Israel to fulfill prior to the meeting. The talks came days after Netanyahu rejected the 15-point, U.S.-backed road map to move the ceasefire deal forward, saying there would be no withdrawal without disarmament.

A day earlier, Kushner met for two hours with Hamas' leader in Egypt.

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and the director of the U.S.-created Board of Peace, Nikolay Mladenov, were also in the meeting with Netanyahu, according to a source familiar with the plans and a diplomatic source. Both spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a closed-door meeting.

At stake are the lives of some 2 million Palestinians in Gaza, rebuilding plans and future control over the territory.

Netanyahu says talks were 'deep and constructive'

In a statement, Netanyahu's office said the talks were "deep and constructive." Israel and the board

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agreed to establish two working groups — one on the disarmament and demilitarization of Gaza and another focused on public health issues for Gaza.

Israel and the board agreed that the demilitarization “should be prompt and completed before any reconstruction,” the statement said.

A Board of Peace official said they also agreed that the demilitarization must include “every weapon, light and heavy, and every tunnel.” The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door meeting.

“Backed by President Donald Trump, the parties share clear goals: a fully demilitarized and deradicalized Gaza that poses no threat to Israel, and where Gazans can pursue prosperity and dignity peacefully,” the official said.

Another Board of Peace official said the meeting was “very productive” and resulted in agreement on “a path forward.”

“The Israelis are going to give this a chance. Now it’s up to Hamas to show if it truly intends to comply,” said the official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity.

Asked if Israel had committed to the U.S. plan for Gaza, a spokesperson for Mladenov said it was a “work in progress.”

Meeting followed Kushner’s conversation with Hamas

Kushner, who is Trump’s son-in-law, met Sunday with Hamas chief Khalil al-Hayya in Cairo on disarmament, according to a regional official and a Hamas official, who both spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to reporters.

Officials from mediating countries Egypt, Qatar and Turkey also were there.

The Hamas official said the Hamas leader demanded that Israel halt its attacks on Gaza and withdraw to the so-called “yellow line” dividing the territory before beginning implementation.

The yellow line was never precisely defined. Israeli forces have moved beyond it and now control about 60% of Gaza. In May, Netanyahu said the next step was to move to 70% control, with Israel “tightening the grip” on Hamas “from every direction.”

Several regional powers including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates issued a statement Sunday condemning Israel’s rejection of the road map. They said Israel “now bears responsibility for obstructing the efforts to bring peace in Gaza.” Other signers included Jordan, Pakistan, Indonesia and the ceasefire mediators.

The foreign ministers’ statement called on the Board of Peace and the U.S. to take “immediate and concrete measures” to keep any party from obstructing the plan’s implementation.

Talks spark hope and doubt in Gaza

While some in Gaza hope that efforts to implement the road map will bring an end to the war sparked by the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, others are skeptical.

Mohammad Abu al-Qombuz cast doubt on all talks and visits currently taking place.

“A conference here and there, it is all lies. We need a definitive solution that would work for everybody,” said Abu al-Qombuz, who lives in a Gaza City tent camp, part of the territory’s vast displaced population.

Under the road map, Hamas would hand over weapons to the Palestinian technocratic committee meant to oversee daily operations in the territory. The committee has not yet entered Gaza.

But Hamas has linked the surrender of its heaviest weapons to the creation of a Palestinian state, and the road map entails the creation of a “credible pathway toward achieving Palestinian self-determination and statehood,” something Israel’s current government rejects.

Until the road map is agreed to, other elements of the ceasefire are on hold, including reconstruction and the deployment of international forces to separate Israeli forces from committee-controlled areas.

Netanyahu faces a challenging election on Oct. 27 as he tries to hold onto power with a coalition that includes ministers taking a harsh line on Gaza, and it’s not clear whether he will take decisive steps on the ceasefire before then.

Also coming up is the anniversary of the 2023 attack.

Supreme Court again rebuffs Trump's push to toss out \$5 million verdict in E. Jean Carroll case

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Monday again rebuffed President Donald Trump's push to throw out a jury's \$5 million finding that he sexually abused the writer E. Jean Carroll at a New York City department store in the mid-1990s and later defamed her.

The Republican president's lawyers had asked the justices to reconsider their refusal to hear his appeal. The court denied Trump's petition along with several others.

It's unusual — although not unheard of — for the court to grant such requests. Trump paid the judgment shortly after the court declined to take up his appeal in June.

Trump and the Justice Department are also asking the high court to toss out a second Carroll verdict totaling \$83 million. They argue he's immune from being sued over comments he made about her in 2019, when he was president. The court has not yet acted on that appeal.

Carroll is a longtime advice columnist and former TV talk show host. She testified at a 2023 trial that Trump turned a friendly 1990s encounter into a violent attack in the dressing room at Bergdorf Goodman, a luxury retailer across the street from Trump Tower in Manhattan. The jury found Trump liable for defaming Carroll when he denied her allegation in 2022.

Carroll's attorney, Roberta Kaplan, said they were pleased by the Supreme Court's decision.

"As a result, the jury's unanimous verdict that Donald Trump sexually assaulted and then defamed E. Jean Carroll is now final and cannot be challenged in any court," Kaplan said in a statement.

Trump has denied any wrongdoing.

The Associated Press does not identify people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they come forward publicly, as Carroll has done.

Justice Department creates a new pathway to restore gun rights for some convicted of felonies

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department finalized a rule Monday that will pave the way for people who've been barred from owning firearms because of criminal convictions to apply to have their gun rights reinstated.

The process launched by newly confirmed Attorney General Todd Blanche is a victory for Second Amendment advocates who have long pushed for nonviolent people with felony convictions to be given a pathway to regain their legal right to own firearms.

"The Second Amendment is not a second-class right, and the federal government should not permanently deprive Americans of a constitutional right without regard to whether they pose a danger to public safety," Blanche said in a statement. The attorney general said the new process will protect "public safety while giving deserving Americans a real path to restoration."

It's the latest move by President Donald Trump's administration to ease firearms restrictions. The Justice Department moved earlier this year to roll back and modify a slate of gun regulations. Separately, the department recently decided against challenging a court ruling that struck down regulations on firearm suppressors and certain guns.

Federal law has long allowed people who've had their gun rights stripped because of felony convictions to petition the government for the ability to own firearms again, but Congress since 1992 has effectively barred the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives from processing applications.

The Trump administration's rule aims to circumvent that by establishing a new application system using an online portal.

The Justice Department says restoration will be granted on a case-by-case basis, weighing a person's record and reputation to determine whether they pose a likely threat to public safety. Officials say people

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who have been convicted of violent crimes, registered sex offenders, people living in the country illegally and others whom officials believe pose a danger to society will be denied "absent extraordinary circumstances."

Kris Brown, the president of Brady, which advocates for stronger gun laws, said her group is still reviewing the administration's final rule but has stressed the need for a "robust and thoughtful system that minimizes the risk to public safety."

"Yet the Trump administration has consistently shown us they have no such discretion, including by restoring gun rights to convicted domestic abusers and violent January 6 insurrectionists, and by tirelessly rolling back broad policies proven to prevent crime and gun violence," Brown said in a statement.

Hayden Panettiere, who starred in 'Heroes' and 'Nashville,' dies at 36

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

Hayden Panettiere, a onetime child star who soared to fame in the TV shows "Heroes" and "Nashville" while enduring struggles with alcohol addiction and depression, has died. She was 36.

Police said Panettiere was found unresponsive in an apartment in Greenville, South Carolina, shortly before 2 p.m. Sunday. Lifesaving measures were performed but she was pronounced dead at the scene.

No cause of death has been determined and Panettiere's death remains under investigation. An autopsy found no signs of trauma and police said officers saw no signs of foul play.

The television and film performer, who would have turned 37 on Friday, had been open about her private battles and wrote at length about them in the memoir, "This Is Me," which came out in May. She described lifelong scars from her early fame, and acknowledged being addicted to alcohol and enduring postpartum depression after the birth of her daughter, Kaya, with Ukrainian boxer Wladimir Klitschko in 2014.

"It is with profound sadness that we share the tragic passing of our beloved Hayden," her father, Skip Panettiere, said in a statement provided to ABC. "She was an incredible light and a force of nature who brought immeasurable love and joy to all who knew her — and to the millions who watched her onscreen."

A publicist for Panettiere did not provide any additional details in response to inquiries from The Associated Press.

Panettiere started out as a child actor

Panettiere was one of two children born to Skip Panettiere, a former New York City fire captain, and Lesley Vogel, a former soap opera star who had been the prime force behind her early career before the two became estranged. Panettiere began acting in commercials and soap operas, including as the ever-troubled Lizzie Spaulding on "Guiding Light." In "This Is Me," she wrote that the traumas her character endured, from being kidnapped to killing her mother's boyfriend, led her to associate "catastrophe with adoration."

"Grown-ups gave me positive attention when — as an actor — I failed, got sick, screamed and cried, killed, grieved, and suffered," she wrote. "Is it any wonder why I've faced so many real struggles in my life? I've often wondered whether — unintentionally — I've brought on my traumas because I'm wired to think they're good for me."

She had much warmer memories of her role as a cheerleader with supernatural powers in "Heroes," which propelled her to fame in 2006. The series revolved around the mantra: "Save the cheerleader, save the world."

"I think 'Heroes' is really hot because it's just a really great combination of everything that people love — they love reality, they love sci-fi and things like 'X-Men' where they get to dream of something bigger," Panettiere told the AP in 2008. "And at the core of it are these human stories that people can relate to, very rugged. And it's just grabbed everyone in every age group."

She went on to win three Teen Choice Awards for that role and was nominated for a Grammy for a children's spoken word album, "A Bug's Life: Read-Along," also voicing a role in the Disney animated movie.

Panettiere later played a brash country upstart opposite Connie Britton on "Nashville," which aired on ABC

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for four seasons before being canceled and revived on CMT. She did her own singing in the show, which scored some hits on country charts, spawned U.S. tours and earned Panettiere two supporting actress Golden Globe nominations. Eleven songs that Panettiere recorded for "Nashville" appeared on Billboard's Hot Country Songs charts during the show's run, including two featuring Britton.

She checked herself into rehab

Panettiere's daughter, now 11, began living with Klitschko full-time in Ukraine when she was 2. At the time, the actor was struggling with mental health and addiction.

"I think there's been this very common misconception that I just gave up my child," she said in an interview with podcaster Jay Shetty in May. "That could not be farther from the truth."

She said she was in a "horrible cycle for years of battling depression and anxiety and alcoholism and substance abuse" while "just trying to find my way back, my way out of the darkness."

She entered rehab in 2015, while filming "Nashville."

"I was the one who put myself in the first treatment center. I was drowning," she said in a 2023 interview with Women's Health magazine.

Panettiere had endured numerous family struggles, and tragedy. Her parents' marriage was strained, and eventually ended. Her younger brother, Jansen Panettiere, who was also an actor, died of a heart condition in 2023, at age 28. Years earlier, Hayden had made the painful decision to part professionally with her mother, who throughout her childhood had "defined and driven her" and watched her "struggle, learn, grow, fall apart, and triumph."

"She and I spent so much time together, so deeply enmeshed in each other's lives, that we started grating on each other," Panettiere wrote in her memoir. "I hated when Mom whispered about other actors during auditions, positive that they could hear her compare them to me. I hated when Mom went to industry parties and got tipsy on the merlot she loved."

In recent years, she had been in a tumultuous relationship with actor Brian Hickerson.

On Shetty's podcast, Panettiere recalled how she exploded into the public eye through "Heroes," including the first time she was tracked by the paparazzi. She described her response as "sheer terror." In her memoir, she would remember unwanted encounters with fellow celebrities — from an Oscar-winning actor-director exposing himself to her to being forced into bed with a "famous thirtysomething British singer-songwriter."

She had spoken positively about her experience filming "Remember the Titans," saying she felt similar to the character she played — Sheryl Yoast, the opinionated, football-loving daughter of Will Patton's Coach Bill Yoast. Panettiere also appeared in two of the "Scream" movies, and starred as the title character in the 2009 film "I Love You Beth Cooper."

In her memoir, Panettiere described herself as an "optimist to the core" who refused to be defined by tragedy.

"One thing I know from my 36 years in the public eye is this: Life is a process that evolves day by day, year by year and — like it or not — you are engaged in a cycle of growth until the moment you take your last breath," she wrote.

Parsing the AP Top 25: Things to know about the preseason college football rankings

By The Associated Press undefined

The 90th season of The Associated Press Top 25 rankings has arrived with the preseason poll released on Monday. Here are some things to know:

-- Five teams received first-place votes from the Top 25 voters, who number 69 this season: No. 1 Ohio State (40 top votes), No. 2 Oregon (14), No. 4 Notre Dame (6), No. 6 Indiana (8) and No. 7 Miami (1).

-- The Southeastern Conference has nine ranked teams in the preseason poll. The Big Ten has eight. The Big 12 has four and the Atlantic Coast Conference has three, with the final spot filled by Notre Dame, an independent. No Group of Six teams are ranked.

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— No. 3 Georgia is in the preseason top five for the ninth straight year. Fellow SEC power Texas has now done it for a third year in a row.

-- Ten of the 12 College Football Playoff teams from last season are ranked. The two that aren't are James Madison and Tulane, though both received votes.

-- Ohio State enters a season at No. 1 for the ninth time, and first since 2015. The Buckeyes are now tied with Alabama for second-most preseason No. 1 rankings (Oklahoma, 10).

-- No. 2 Oregon has its highest preseason ranking ever after opening at No. 3 four times. No. 4 Notre Dame has its highest preseason ranking in 20 years (No. 2 in 2006).

— The only other time the Big Ten had the top two teams in the preseason rankings was 1961 (Iowa, Ohio State). The league has won three straight College Football Playoff championships (Michigan, Ohio State, Indiana) and will be going for an unprecedented fourth straight national title.

— Eleven have started and finished No. 1 in the AP poll since the preseason rankings began in 1950. The last team to do it was Alabama in 2017.

Ohio State and Oregon are 1-2 in the AP preseason Top 25, SEC leads conferences with 9 ranked teams

By ERIC OLSON AP College Football Writer

Ohio State and Oregon were 1-2 in The Associated Press Top 25 released Monday, giving the Big Ten Conference the top two teams in the preseason rankings for the first time in 65 years and just the second time ever.

The Buckeyes received 40 first-place votes and Oregon received 14 in voting by 69 media members who cover college football.

Ohio State will go into a season No. 1 for the ninth time, and first since 2015. The Buckeyes are now tied with Alabama for second-most preseason No. 1 rankings behind Oklahoma's 10.

Oregon has its highest preseason ranking in program history after having opened No. 3 four times.

Georgia, Notre Dame and Texas round out the top five. Defending national champion Indiana starts at No. 6 and is followed by Miami, Texas A&M, Mississippi and Oklahoma.

Notre Dame received six first-place votes, Indiana got eight and Miami one.

This is the first year a conference has held down the top two spots in the preseason poll since Oklahoma and Nebraska of the Big Eight were 1-2 in 1987.

The last time the Big Ten had the Nos. 1 and 2 teams in the preseason was 1961, when Iowa and Ohio State topped the poll. The Hawkeyes lost four of their last five games after a 4-0 start and finished that season unranked. The Buckeyes went 8-0-1 and ended the season No. 2 behind unbeaten Alabama.

The Big Ten has won three straight College Football Playoff championships (Michigan, Ohio State, Indiana) and will be going for an unprecedented fourth straight national title. This is the fourth consecutive year the Big Ten has had two of the top three teams in the preseason rankings.

The Southeastern Conference leads all conferences with nine teams in the preseason Top 25, marking the third straight year it has had at least that many. Five of the top 10 teams are from the SEC for the first time since 2013.

Four Big 12 teams are ranked, with conference champion Texas Tech the highest at No. 12. The Atlantic Coast Conference has three ranked teams, with the Hurricanes joined by No. 19 SMU and No. 24 Louisville. There are no Group of Six schools in the Top 25.

Top-ranked Buckeyes

The offense is loaded. Heisman Trophy finalist Julian Sayin was the most accurate passer in the nation by a wide margin last season, Jeremiah Smith leads the nation in receiving yards and receiving touchdowns over the last two years and Bo Jackson is coming off a 1,000-yard rushing season as a freshman.

There is little concern about the defense even though eight starters must be replaced for a second straight year. At least six transfers are projected to start or play major roles.

Ohio State will get tested early and often. The Buckeyes visit Texas on Sept. 12 and five of their nine

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conference games are against preseason ranked teams, including at Indiana and against Oregon at home. The Buckeyes have ended a season No. 1 in the AP poll six times (1942, 1954, 1968, 2002, 2014, 2024). Bulldogs best of the SEC

The beat goes on for Kirby Smart's Georgia Bulldogs. They're in the preseason top five for the ninth straight year. The two-time defending SEC champion Bulldogs are favored to play in a sixth straight conference title game and appear in the CFP for the sixth time in 10 years.

Texas, the preseason No. 1 last year, opens in the top five for the third straight year. No. 8 Texas A&M is in the preseason top 10 for the first time since it was No. 6 in 2022, the year that marked the beginning of the end for coach Jimbo Fisher.

Pete Golding's first full season as Mississippi head coach starts with the No. 9 Rebels in the preseason top 10 for the second time in three years and third time since 1970. No. 10 Oklahoma is in the preseason top 10 for the first time since 2022, when it was in the Big 12.

What about the Hoosiers?

Indiana is the seventh returning national champion in 40 years, and second in three years, to be ranked outside the top five in the preseason (Michigan went into the 2024 season ranked No. 9 after winning the national title).

The Hoosiers became the first team in the modern era to go 16-0, and they return lots of talent and signed a top-10 transfer class. The move from Heisman Trophy winner and No. 1 NFL draft pick Fernando Mendoza to TCU transfer Josh Hoover at quarterback apparently put doubts in the minds of voters.

Poll nuggets

— Ohio State will try to become the 12th team to start and finish No. 1 since the AP preseason poll debuted in 1950. The last team to do it was Alabama in 2017.

— Notre Dame has its highest preseason ranking since it was No. 2 in 2006. The Fighting Irish, who have a Heisman candidate in quarterback CJ Carr, bring a 10-game winning streak into the season and are still smarting from being left out of the playoff.

— Lane Kiffin's first LSU team is No. 11 after finishing 7-6 and unranked under Brian Kelly and Frank Wilson.

— Ten of the 12 CFP teams last season are ranked. The two that aren't are James Madison and Tulane from the Group of Six.

— No. 23 Houston has its first preseason ranking in four years and third since 1991.

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

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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 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

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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. Laura 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.

Ukraine takes aim at Russia's economy and morale by attacking online retailer

By The Associated Press undefined

The attacks began on a July weekend and have continued for a month, stretching from Moscow and St. Petersburg, to cities in the south, and eastward to the Ural Mountains. The targets weren't oil refineries, maritime hubs or arms plants hit by other Ukrainian strikes, but warehouses that bring the convenience of online shopping across the breadth of Russia.

Ukraine's drones have pummeled the giant depots belonging to Wildberries, Russia's biggest online retailer, burning billions of dollars' worth of merchandise and bringing the war home to the broad public.

The attacks on about 20 Wildberries facilities have underlined Kyiv's ability to strike far and wide inside Russia and posed a new challenge to President Vladimir Putin nearly 4½ years into his full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

They have badly shaken the empire built by Tatyana Kim, the country's richest female entrepreneur, whose fortune has been estimated at \$8.1 billion.

Hundreds of thousands of individual sellers have lost their merchandise, sending shock waves across Russia's economy. Wildberries has drawn massive loans from VTB and other banks as it expanded and likely will have trouble repaying them, putting more pressure on the financial system.

An online giant began in a Moscow apartment

Kim, 50, was born in Grozny, the capital of the province of Chechnya, to an ethnic Korean family of an engineer and a teacher. She launched Wildberries in 2004 from her Moscow apartment soon after giving birth to her first child while working as an English teacher.

"The idea was born from my own needs, and turned out to be needed by hundreds of thousands," said Kim, now a mother of seven. "If a product or service makes your own life easier, you're on the right track."

Wildberries initially sold clothing before expanding to appliances, household items, cosmetics, books and more. The platform with its distinct purple logo has become an undisputed leader in e-commerce, accounting for about half of all online orders in Russia. Businesses big and small use it to store, ship and deliver merchandise across the country's 11 time zones.

An estimated 500,000 to 800,000 sellers use Wildberries, often described as Russia's Amazon. After Western brands fled following the war in Ukraine, online retailers filled the void with merchandise from China, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and elsewhere.

The company also acquired a bank, expanded to tourism and even considered buying an airline.

In 2024, Kim divorced her husband, Vladislav Bakalchuk, triggering a fight for control of the company. Bakalchuk sought the support of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and his feared paramilitary forces but eventually lost the battle, which peaked in a shootout at a business center near the Kremlin that left two people dead and several wounded.

Wildberries depots are easy targets

Unlike smaller competitors Ozon and Yandex Market, the company has prided itself on relying on about two dozen mammoth warehouses as the core of its vast logistical network, stockpiling the goods before

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shipping to about 100,000 storefront distribution points.

As Ukraine embarked on a strategy of long-range drone attacks deep inside Russia, it has expanded from striking military bases, oil refineries and other infrastructure to Wildberries warehouses, which provided particularly soft targets.

Since the first attack July 18 in Elektrostal, just east of Moscow, and in the southwestern Tambov region, Wildberries depots burned one after another in massive fires that flooded social media.

The depots, some as big as 300,000 square meters (about 3.2 million square feet) were unprotected. It took three days to extinguish the fire in Elektrostal, a key Moscow region hub.

On Sunday, Ukraine set ablaze another such hub in Podolsk, also near the capital.

Seven of Wildberries' 10 largest logistics centers have been knocked out of operation, Ukraine's Defense Ministry said. Wildberries did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"These are not military and high-value political targets, therefore they're not especially secured, they're not really built to be able to shrug off drone strikes," said podcaster Mark Galeotti, a Russia expert who heads the Mayak Intelligence consultancy.

The strikes have stretched from the European part of Russia to Yekaterinburg, over 2,000 kilometers (1,250 miles) from Ukraine's border.

There's scarce public data, but some estimates indicate up to 20% of the company's total warehouse space has been destroyed, with assessments of losses running as high as \$6 billion.

Kim said Wildberries' sites have been "reinforced and strengthened" defensively, but the attacks continued. Some warehouses suffered only minor damage, and Ukraine tried to hit them again.

Wildberries said it's rearranging supply chains to create "partner hubs" for storing merchandise — a challenging process, given its dependence on big depots.

Attacks cause a ripple effect

Ukrainian officials have said Wildberries sells gear and technical components, including drones, to the military. Moscow denied it, but such dual-use items as drone components, flak jackets or thermal weapon sights remain available on the platform.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said the attacks were designed to disrupt military supplies, breed popular discontent and cause a domino effect in the Russian economy by putting stress on major banks, including VTB and Sberbank, that made massive loans to Wildberries.

Wildberries' debts were estimated at the equivalent of about \$15 billion at the end of 2025.

Russia's small and medium businesses already have been hit hard by tax increases, regulatory hurdles and, most recently, a fuel crisis from attacks on oil refineries.

Chris Weafer, CEO of Macro-Advisory Ltd. Consultancy, said Monday the attacks have exacerbated Russia's business environment and are an attempt by Kyiv "to undermine public confidence."

"There is a segment of the manufacturing sectors in Russia and elsewhere that are definitely suffering significantly from that," he said.

Wildberries had recently changed its seller policy, exempting it from liability for stock damaged by a "force majeure" that includes drone attacks.

Kim pledged to support sellers with discounts on storage, free transfer of goods to other sites, discounted loans and other measures. Wildberries also issued some reimbursements that covered only a fraction of the losses.

Russia's Central Bank has asked lenders to restructure loans to small and medium businesses that lost merchandise.

Meanwhile, many owners of Wildberries pickup points face lost revenue amid the plunging deliveries. Some vented frustrations on social media about going out of business.

The lost goods mean tens of thousands of small businesses can't continue to operate, service their loans or pay taxes. Many are pleading for government support.

Galeotti said the strikes reflected Kyiv's effort to bring the war home to Russia.

"It's not just about seeing great clouds of black smoke over your cities because of some oil refinery

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on the outskirts being hit," he said. "You might be a small business whose inventory has just gone up in smoke in one of the Wildberries' warehouses. Or else you just simply might be an ordinary consumer who just suddenly is no longer going to get the goods that you plan to buy."

Some analysts warn the attacks could fuel stronger anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western fervor.

The Wildberries attacks have played into the hands of Russian hawks who urge escalating the war, said pro-Kremlin political expert Sergei Markov.

"It strengthens the view that it's necessary to hit Europe," he said. "And better sooner than later."

Former President Dmitry Medvedev sought to stir up anger at Ukraine for trying to destroy an essential daily routine for millions.

"Our enemy is fighting not the Russian leadership or the army, but ordinary citizens," he said.

South Korea hopes for talks between US and North Korea after Trump downsizes military drills

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea on Monday expressed hopes for resumption of diplomacy between the U.S. and North Korea to ease animosities on the Korean Peninsula, as U.S. President Donald Trump's order to cut military exercises with South Korea caused concerns it might hurt the allies' readiness against North Korean threats.

Trump cited his good relationship with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un for the decision, a likely bid to reengage with Kim, who views U.S.-South Korean military exercises as invasion rehearsals. But experts say the North Korean leader, now emboldened by his advancing nuclear arsenal and expanding military cooperation with Russia, won't likely return to talks unless he is assured of serious U.S. concessions.

The 11-day, summertime Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises began Monday morning as scheduled and it wasn't known which parts of the training were being downsized. Trump's announcement baffled many in South Korea, a key U.S. ally in Asia where national security is a top priority due to threats from nuclear-armed North Korea.

Trump orders military to 'substantially reduce' drills

Trump said in a social media post that the exercises are not only costly but "send a signal that is totally inappropriate and hostile" to North Korea, which he said "has been unthreatening and respectful" during his time in the White House.

Trump instructed Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to "substantially reduce" the exercises. He added that he recently asked President Lee Jae Myung if South Korea would join the U.S. in the "denuclearization" of Iran, "and they said, 'No thanks!'"

Trump's move is the latest example of the American president appearing to turn against an ally in favor of a leader cast by previous administrations as an adversary. Trump and others in his administration also have railed against NATO allies over a perceived lack of support for his war against Iran, even as they seek to confront an increasingly aggressive Russia in the Baltic region.

The trust many South Koreans have in the U.S. has eroded following a tariff war instigated by Trump's administration and his transactional approach to security.

South Korea hopes for talks between US and North Korea

The office of South Korea's president said later Monday that the government hopes "friendly relationship" between Trump and Kim would lead to "meaningful dialogue" between the U.S. and North Korea and start discussions on promoting peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. It said that South Korea will make necessary diplomatic efforts for that.

South Korea and the U.S. are closely discussing practical and military contributions that can be made to restore freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, according to South Korea's presidential office.

Lee is a liberal who espouses improved ties with North Korea. Since taking office last year, his government has taken proactive steps to improve ties with North Korea, including turning off front line loudspeakers that blared K-pop music and world news. On Saturday, Lee offered to hold talks to formally end the 1950-

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53 Korean War, which ended with an armistice, not a peace treaty.

The conservative People Power Party, the main opposition party, lambasted Lee for allegedly “turning a blind eye on the public’s security concerns” caused by Trump’s announcement and prioritizing hopes for U.S.-North Korea diplomacy.

North Korea has shunned any talks with South Korea and the U.S. and accelerated weapons testing activities since Kim’s high-stakes nuclear diplomacy with Trump broke down in 2019. Kim also has bolstered his diplomatic credentials by aligning with Russia over its war against Ukraine and taking steps to deepen cooperation with China.

In September 2025, Kim suggested he could resume talks with the American president if the U.S. drops “its delusional obsession with denuclearization” of North Korea. Experts say Kim likely aims to use his enlarged nuclear arsenal to win major concessions like extensive sanctions relief.

“Trump’s recent social media posts about Kim Jong Un suggest a willingness to reengage, but North Korea is busy profiting from Russia’s war against Ukraine while modernizing its own military,” said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

Downsizing the U.S. and South Korean drills “can damage alliance coordination, slow the process of South Korea taking on greater responsibility for its own defense, and weaken deterrence against possible conflicts in Asia,” Easley said.

Duyeon Kim, a senior analyst at Washington’s Center for a New American Security, said “reducing joint drills weakens military readiness over time against another potential North Korean attack.”

Military drills test tactics and anger North Korea

South Korea’s military earlier said the Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises this year would be similar to previous years in scale, with about 18,000 South Korean soldiers taking part.

The U.S. military said the drills would incorporate lessons from recent conflicts such as North Korea’s battlefield experiences in the Russia-Ukraine front, while including a live-fire exercise to test joint precision targeting and maneuver, a wet gap crossing and distribution of prepositioned military equipment.

North Korea’s Foreign Ministry on Friday accused the U.S. and South Korea of plotting more provocative drills this year and vowed to respond with “a new level of a deterrent.” Earlier this month, North Korea fired two ballistic missiles into the sea in a likely protest of the drills.

Duyeon Kim, the analyst, said North Korea uses U.S.-South Korean drills “for domestic propaganda purposes to create a false narrative of a hostile America and justify its nuclear weapons program.”

This is not the first time Trump has sought to suspend the drills. After his first summit with Kim in 2018, Trump unilaterally announced the suspension of the U.S.-South Korean summertime exercises, calling them “very provocative” and “tremendously expensive.”

Kim Dong-yub, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said North Korea feels less urgency to return to talks with the U.S. and South Korea now than when it entered talks with its rivals in 2018, but is unlikely to completely ignore Trump’s overture.

He predicted North Korea will likely say it has noted Trump’s post but will wait for further action showing the U.S. intends to drop hostilities against North Korea.

In Florida, Wasserman Schultz sparks a debate over what representation means in diverse districts

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

TAMARAC, Fla. (AP) — Sporting red-white-and-blue sneakers and a matching bedazzled manicure ahead of Florida’s primaries on Tuesday, Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz smiles and tells voters she is “running for reelection to Congress.”

That’s true — with a caveat. Wasserman Schultz is seeking her 12th term by running in a new district after Republicans scrambled the state’s congressional map earlier this year.

The fallout pushed Wasserman Schultz, a former national party chair with powerful ties in Washington, to cross district lines from her Fort Lauderdale exurb and be the only white candidate against four Black

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candidates in an area of Broward County that has helped send Black Democrats to Congress since 1992. That's yielded an uncomfortable fight following the U.S. Supreme Court decision that gutted the Voting Rights Act provisions undergirding minority voting strength and effectively cleared Old Confederacy states, including Florida, to reshape House districts.

"For her to come in like this is just another Broward seat, it's a complete erasure of our history, our fight for Black access," said former Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, 47, who resigned from the seat in April while facing an ethics investigation but now wants it back.

Another candidate, 27-year-old progressive organizer and substitute teacher Elijah Manley, said Republicans' redistricting ploy is not Wasserman Schultz's fault. But she "had other options," Manley added, including running in her new home district, which was gerrymandered to include the more conservative Gulf Coast.

"Instead, she stabbed us in the back, trying to take away Black representation," Manley said, pointing to Congressional Black Caucus warnings that it could lose more than a quarter of its 60-plus members this fall.

Wasserman Schultz, 59, is by far the best funded out of five Democratic candidates and benefits from Florida rules that do not require a majority to win primaries.

She argued that she can ably advocate for the whole region after representing wide swaths of Broward as a state and federal legislator across three decades. "I'm not air dropping myself into this district," she told The Associated Press. "I have represented diverse communities. I know how to tailor my service to them and represent a district more broadly."

A win by Wasserman Schultz would be a rarity

President Donald Trump started pushing Republican-run states to redraw House boundaries last year to help preserve the party's fragile majority. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis responded with an effort that clusters southeast Florida Democrats together, intending to reduce five Democratic seats to three. Broward, the state's most Democratic county, situated between Miami-Dade and Palm Beach, now has just one presumed-Democratic district anchored in and around Fort Lauderdale.

Nationally, white lawmakers typically hold some of the 115-plus House seats where the voting-age population is majority non-white. Wasserman Schultz does it in her existing north Broward-Palm Beach district, which was drawn after the 2020 census to be 42% Hispanic, 18% Black and about 6% Asian American. White voters compose the remaining third.

But a white lawmaker is a rarity for majority or plurality Black districts, like the new Florida 20th. The district is 42% Black, 23% Hispanic and 4% Asian, the rest white. The Black share includes a large Caribbean population, most notably Haitian Americans.

Going into November, an Associated Press analysis found that Wasserman Schultz is the only white Democrat positioned to represent any of the remaining districts with a Black majority or plurality.

Cherfilus-McCormick said she can win, despite losing Black constituents she previously represented in Palm Beach County. She dismissed concerns over federal criminal charges accusing her of stealing \$5 million in federal disaster funds. She has pleaded not guilty and has denied alleged violations of House rules.

The criminal case and redistricting fit together, she insisted, and "the people see what's going on — them trying to silence the only Haitian member of Congress and take away our voice."

Manley, though, was more circumspect about Wasserman Schultz's status as the favorite. He mused about upsetting the veteran congresswoman on Tuesday yet looked ahead to the 2028 elections, hoping Black Democrats rally around one candidate rather than four. The current field also includes former 2 Live Crew rapper Luther "Uncle Luke" Campbell and real estate broker and former local elected official Dale Holness.

Von Howard, a Black resident of Plantation, said the choice was wrenching. He declined to disclose his vote but said he wanted someone who "understands the totality of the district."

"If you're not of the people, and you just want this for the clout, in some instances, that could be a turnoff," the 47-year-old said.

Broward NAACP President Marsha Ellison was more direct, without endorsing any candidate.

"The whole mission was to take away Black power, so we don't have representation to understand our

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lived experience," she said. "That may not be important to Debbie, but it's certainly important to us."

There's a debate over what representation means

Wasserman Schultz said she occasionally hears those concerns from voters. Her response is that "lived experience matters, but experience broadly matters" as well.

She notes her Appropriations Committee seat, which could be even more influential should Democrats win a House majority. She recalls programs impacting Black communities she helped create and fund since her first years in the Florida Legislature.

"I fight every single day to help improve the lived experience of the people that I represent," she said.

Wasserman Schultz also said she's worked to connect across race and culture in Broward. Because of her existing district makeup, "I spent six years learning Spanish," to converse with individuals and in town halls, news conferences and interviews broadcast on Spanish-language stations.

"Out of respect," she said, "anything I can do to inspire people's confidence that the person representing them understands them."

Wasserman Schultz is a recognizable figure

Several times outside of early voting sites, Black, white and Hispanic voters waved or stopped to talk to the congresswoman. Among them were Broward County sheriff's deputies who wanted photos and a trio of women who lamented they had been drawn into a new Republican-leaning district.

Yusdef's Delgado, a naturalized citizen from Colombia, told Wasserman Schultz that he enjoys her social media posts but wants to hear more about policy and less about the president.

"We know Trump sucks," he told her, smiling and confirming that he voted for her. "I don't agree with her on everything, but she's closest to where I am, and I trust her to try to do the right thing for us," Delgado explained later.

Cherfilus-McCormick and Manley said that's not enough given the environment after the Supreme Court decision, Trump's attacks on diversity initiatives and his push to rewrite how the U.S. tells its history on race and racism.

"We're not at a place in this country where we can be completely colorblind politically," Manley said. "We're just not."

Wasserman Schultz said the new district "is drawn in a way that the plurality population has the ability to elect the person of their choice" — language that alludes to the now-diminished Voting Rights Act. Voters, she said, can "consider all of the qualities that matter to them."

As for putting herself on the ballot again, she remained unapologetic.

"Trump and DeSantis did this to our community," she said, adding, "I'll be damned if I'm going to let them steal Broward's political power, de-unify us and prevent us from standing up for our community's values."

Today in History: August 18 **19th Amendment gives women the vote**

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, Aug. 18, the 230th day of 2026. There are 135 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Aug. 18, 1920, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, guaranteeing American women's right to vote, was ratified as Tennessee became the 36th state to approve it.

Also on this date:

In 1590, John White, the governor of the Roanoke Island colony (in present-day North Carolina), returned to Roanoke after nearly three years abroad only to find the settlement deserted; the fate of the "Lost Colony" remains a mystery.

In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson issued his Proclamation of Neutrality, aimed at keeping the United States out of World War I.

In 1958, Vladimir Nabokov's novel "Lolita" was published in the United States.

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In 1963, James Meredith became the first Black student to graduate from the University of Mississippi.
In 1969, the Woodstock Music and Art Fair in Bethel, New York, wound to a close after three days and nights with a mid-morning set by Jimi Hendrix.

In 1983, Hurricane Alicia slammed into the Texas coast, leaving 21 dead and causing more than a billion dollars' worth of damage.

In 2004, in Athens, Paul Hamm (hahm) won the men's gymnastics all-around Olympic gold medal by the closest margin ever in the event; controversy followed after it was discovered that a scoring error cost Yang Tae-young of South Korea the title.

In 2005, a judge in Wichita, Kansas, sentenced BTK serial killer Dennis Rader to 10 consecutive life terms, the maximum the law would allow.

In 2014, Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon ordered the National Guard to Ferguson, a suburb of St. Louis convulsed by protests over the fatal shooting of a Black 18-year-old, Michael Brown.

In 2023, a former neonatal nurse in a British hospital was found guilty of murdering seven babies and trying to kill six others over a yearlong campaign of deception as she preyed on the vulnerabilities of sick newborns. Days later, Lucy Letby was sentenced to life in prison with no chance for release.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Carole Bouquet is 69. Actor Denis Leary is 69. Actor Madeleine Stowe is 68. ABC News reporter Bob Woodruff is 65. Actor Edward Norton is 57. Actor Christian Slater is 57. Actor Kaitlin Olson is 51. Actor-comedian Andy Samberg is 48. Artist-model Frances Bean Cobain is 34. Actor-singer Maia Mitchell is 33. Actor Madelaine Petsch is 32. Actor Josephine Langford is 29, Singer Clairo is 28. Olympic gold medal swimmer Summer McIntosh is 20.