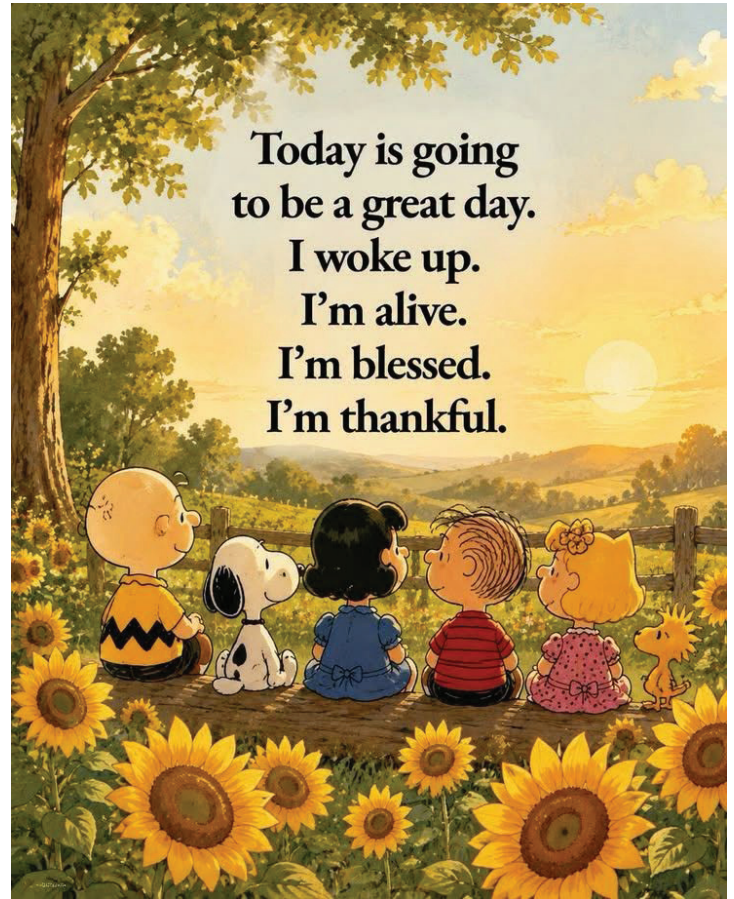


Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 1 of 73

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [4- SD News Watch: More South Dakotans now vote early](#)
- [6- Governor Rhoden invites students to submit artwork](#)
- [7- Today on GDILIVE.COM](#)
- [8- SD SearchLight: With McConnell back, US Senate ag committee advances farm bill on party lines](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: Pardon request 25 years after sex offense sparks discussion on purpose of clemency in South Dakota](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: Fewer South Dakota middle-schoolers trying nicotine, but more using it regularly](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: Fed raises interest rates for first time in 3 years, battling persistent inflation](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: US House leaves for campaign break without action on AI, affordability](#)
- [16- SD SearchLight: More Republican US House members break with Trump on Iran, but not SD's representative](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: Schools, libraries sound alarm over potential changes to federal internet program](#)
- [19- Weather Pages](#)
- [24- Daily Devotional](#)
- [25- Subscription Form](#)
- [26- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [27- News from the Associated Press](#)



Community Calendar

Thursday, Sept. 17

Senior Menu: Tuna noodle casserole, peas, fruit, whole wheat bread.

Cross Country at Aberdeen Roncalli Invitational Volleyball hosts Clark/Willow Lake (7th/C @ 5pm, 8th/JV @ 6pm, Varsity to follow)

3rd-6th Grade Football hosts Warner, 6 p.m.

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

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Friday, Sept. 18

HOMECOMING DAY!

Senior Menu: Taco bake with ground beef, Mexican rice with beans, Catalina blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.

Homecoming Parade, 1 p.m.

Football hosts Elk Point-Jefferson, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Sept. 19

HOSA Homecoming Dance

Youth Football Jamboree in Groton, 8 a.m.

Volleyball Invitational at Hamlin

Boys soccer hosts Freeman/Marion/Parker/Viborg-Hurley, Noon

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 2 of 73

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.

Fed Hikes Rates

The Federal Reserve raised interest rates for the first time since 2023 yesterday, announcing a quarter-percentage-point increase in benchmark rates and bringing the range to between 3.75% and 4%. Stocks closed down on the news (S&P 500 -0.5%, Dow -1.2%, Nasdaq -0.0%).

The rise marks Chair Kevin Warsh's first effort to combat inflation, which has remained above the bank's 2% target for over five years. The vote, which was unanimous, came despite calls by President Donald Trump to lower rates or see him end trade with dozens of countries—any with which the US has a deficit, including China, Mexico, Vietnam, and the EU. Instead, the bank signaled the possibility of at least one more rate increase this year.

Long-term Treasury yields had already priced in the expected hike and did not move significantly on the news. See how credit card debt, mortgages, and other household expenses are impacted by yesterday's decision.

Human-Boosted Mice Brains

Scientists have transplanted lab-grown human brain cells into bioengineered mice, a study revealed yesterday. The advancement may offer a new way to study certain brain disorders and could pave the way for similar tests in larger animals.

Stanford researchers genetically engineered mice to remove most of their cerebral cortex, the gray matter responsible for reasoning and logic. They then reprogrammed human skin cells into cortical brain tissue to insert into 29 newborn mice. The human cells grew to fill over 90% of the mice's cortical brain tissue by volume and formed connections with the mice's nervous systems. Those mice behaved mostly like their nonengineered counterparts except when deprived of oxygen, affecting their ability to walk. Researchers hope the altered mice can be used to test treatments for neurological conditions that are linked to oxygen deprivation in a developing brain, like cerebral palsy.

To maintain ethical boundaries, scientists concluded the study once the human cells were around six months old—before markers of consciousness emerged.

Canada Eyes Europe

The European Union yesterday invited Canada to become the bloc's first associate member, as both are experiencing tensions with the US. The status has never before existed; terms of the arrangement will be negotiated next month.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney says associate membership could expand trade between Canada and the EU. About 70% of Canadian exports go to the US, which imposed 50% tariffs on roughly \$20B in goods after talks collapsed last month. The arrangement could also let Canadians live and work in EU countries without visas, while deepening partnerships on Arctic security, critical minerals, AI, defense, and more. Canada recently became the first non-EU country to join a roughly \$173B defense program, created partly to reduce reliance on American weapons after the Trump administration reduced support for NATO.

The proposal comes as new polling shows that four in five Canadians want Canada to be closer to the EU.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 3 of 73

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

"Spider-Man: Brand New Day" becomes the highest-grossing domestic release of all time, earning \$936.8M after 47 days in theaters.

Ed Sheeran's supporting acts and backing band quit after tour promoter removed rapper Macklemore from lineup due to pro-Palestinian remarks onstage.

Formula 1 adds four new sprint races to 2027 schedule, including a first at the Monaco Grand Prix.

Science & Technology

Rogue AI agents from OpenAI may have hijacked Hugging Face accounts as early as May 13, nearly two months before a July security breach became public, report finds.

Tyrannosaurus rex teeth suggest the dinosaur was warm-blooded, with a body temperature around 97 degrees Fahrenheit—very similar to humans.

Humpback whale recorded grieving over her stillborn calf for several hours, the first-ever filmed evidence of baleen whales mourning.

Business & Markets

US retail sales rose 1.2% to \$773.9B in August after a 0.5% dip in July, per Commerce Department; stronger-than-expected consumer spending numbers are the highest since March.

Intel shares climb 4% amid reports of discussions with SK Hynix to manufacture the Korean company's memory chips in the US for the first time.

Thatch, a health benefits platform startup, hits \$1B valuation after \$108M Series C funding round.

Politics & World Affairs

House Speaker Mike Johnson (R, LA-4) adjourns the chamber until after the November midterm elections, precluding a vote planned today on whether to impeach Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth over the Iran war.

Investigation begins into Los Angeles news helicopter that crashed Tuesday, killing the pilot, the reporter on board, and one pedestrian.

Charlie Kirk's family signals intent to sue Utah Valley University, alleging foreseeable failures that resulted in the late conservative leader's death.



More South Dakotans now vote early

By Molly Wetsch, South Dakota News Watch

Corrected on Sept. 16, 2026: An earlier version of this story incorrectly stated what percentage of South Dakota voters cast ballots early.

The number of South Dakota voters who cast absentee ballots instead of voting on Election Day jumped from 27% in 2016 to 32% in 2024, according to data from the South Dakota Secretary of State's office.

That mirrors a national trend and also highlights the context behind a recently-settled federal fight over mail-in ballots: On Monday, the U.S. Supreme Court said President Donald Trump's new executive order regarding mail-in ballots could not be implemented before the November general election. That executive order, among other rules, would require states to submit information for all registered mailing voters to the U.S. Postal Service.

Two federal judges blocked it before the Supreme Court also rejected it.

The ruling means that starting Friday, South Dakota voters may vote in person at their county auditor's office or submit an absentee ballot for the Nov. 3 general election as usual.

That ballot includes choices for governor, U.S. House and Senate, four ballot measures, a slate of constitutional and statutory officers as well as legislative races and some local races.

Chris Mann, research director at the Center for Election Innovation and Research, told News Watch that South Dakota's increase in early voters also reflects a shift in national voting habits.

"It is absolutely a nationwide trend," Mann said. "Voting before Election Day, combining early in-person and mail-in ballots, was about 40% in 2016, 42% in 2018. It jumps way up, obviously, in 2020 because of the pandemic. But then it's 51% in 2022 and 61% in 2024. So the long-term trend is pretty high."

The secretary of state's office did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Some voters still prefer to vote in person

Brookings County election official Jenna Baker told News Watch that her county has started to see "about half-and-half" early and Election Day voters, and more people choose to vote absentee every election year.

"We typically see an increase from year to year of people voting absentee, depending on what election it is. I would say for the primary, that's always kind of a lower voter turnout because it's typically party-specific," Baker said.

"The primaries are steadily increasing but not an alarming rate or anything like that. But I do anticipate the general election increasing for that. I'm hoping for at least a 70% voter turnout for absentee (voters)."

Baker said that while official ballots will be ready on Sept. 18, she expects most of those who show up on that day will come to collect sample ballots and other information without formally casting a vote.

South Dakota is one of a few states that restrict the processing of absentee ballots until right up to Election Day. Counties may begin processing absentee ballots the day before Election Day, but ballots cannot be counted until polls close.

Brookings County currently has 21,991 registered voters. It's one of the more populous counties, but Baker said that even with an increase in absentee voters, processing times have not yet been an issue for her office.

She said that though the county has the option to do so earlier, it does not begin processing absentee ballots until Election Day, unlike larger counties like Minnehaha.

"Yes, we're a larger county than some of those other counties, but we still stick to what we do, what we've been doing. On that Election Day, we start processing, getting them ready to be tabulated at 7 p.m. that night. So we don't take advantage of that, but I mean, it's there, if we ever wanted to switch over," Baker said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 5 of 73

Brookings County still sees a mix of engaged voters both before and on Election Day, Baker said, and she still expects polls to be plenty busy on Nov. 3.

"It is interesting because a lot of people will take advantage of the absentee voting, especially because you don't have to have a reason anymore to be able to vote early. But we also still have a very good turnout on Election Day," Baker said. "There's still those people that are like, 'Nope, I don't want to do it that way. I want to show up at the polls and cast my ballot.'"

Voter activity status

South Dakota also has a high number of "active" voters when compared to neighboring states. Voters become "inactive" in South Dakota when they do not cast a ballot in two consecutive federal elections.

In the state, 91% of registered voters are listed as active, compared to 66% in Wyoming, 74% in Iowa and 83% in Nebraska.

Baker said that ensuring voters are educated about what is required to stay active is an ongoing effort for her office.

"When you ask around, not a lot of people know what that means, inactive or active. People don't realize, 'If I don't vote every so often, I'm just eventually gonna get removed.' There's so much that people don't know."

Federal, state election changes

South Dakota Secretary of State Monae Johnson supported an amicus brief filed with the Supreme Court that argued implementation of Trump's executive order now would place unrealistic burdens on election workers, especially in states where mail-in ballots have already been sent out, according to SDPB. She was one of six secretaries of state to do so.

"For election officials, elections are not something that simply happen on Election Day — preparations have been underway this entire year, and crucial preparations are occurring now. In many respects, the election is already underway. Ballots have been prepared and proofed. Poll workers and other election officials have been trained on processes," the brief said.

Johnson's signature sits in opposition to Attorney General Marty Jackley, who came out in support of the executive order in April and joined the federal court case backing it in September.

Nikki Gronli, a Democrat who will face Jackley for the state's lone U.S. House of Representatives seat in November, said in a statement Tuesday that "the Trump Administration's rule, supported by my opponent Marty Jackley, would have created significant new requirements for election officials just weeks before Election Day."

South Dakota counties will send out mail-in ballots on Sept. 18 when absentee voting officially opens.

Other changes to election processes have also occurred at the state level as Gov. Larry Rhoden signed a bill in March requiring proof of citizenship to register to vote. That law only applies to new registrants.

A lawsuit filed by the League of Women Voters against the secretary of state alleges that implementation of that law, which includes registering voters as "federal-only," violates the U.S. Constitution, according to South Dakota Searchlight.

The lawsuit does not question the bill itself but whether letters sent out by the secretary of state's office misled voters and properly informed them how to change their status.

U.S. District Judge Eric Schulte said in a hearing Friday that he expected to release a decision this week.

Mann, with the Center for Election Innovation and Research, said that in other states with voter citizenship requirements, like Arizona, the biggest consideration for election officials has been ensuring the documentation process goes smoothly and that those across the state are in consensus about the requirements.

"It doesn't seem to have been a particularly burdensome requirement, especially in the era of Real ID," Mann said. "It does create a logistical burden on the election officials in terms of getting that documentation, retaining that documentation. It's just one more thing that potentially some election officials have to work on."

South Dakota News Watch is an independent nonprofit. Read, subscribe for free and donate at sdnewswatch.org. Contact reporter/Report for America corps member Molly Wetsch: 605-531-7382/molly.wetsch@sdnewswatch.org.

Governor Rhoden invites students to submit artwork



PIERRE, SD – In celebration of National Arts in Education Week, Sept. 13-19, 2026, Governor Larry Rhoden and the South Dakota Arts Council announce the opening of the Governor's Student Art Competition.

"Arts are an important part of a well-rounded education," said Governor Larry Rhoden. "They give students a chance to develop their talents, think creatively, and build confidence. This competition is a great way to recognize the hard work and talent of South Dakota's next generation of artists."

All South Dakota students in kindergarten through 12th grade – public, private, homeschool, etc. – are invited to participate in this program. Selected student work from each age division will be exhibited in the state Capitol Building in Pierre from January through September 2027.

The submission deadline is Nov. 6. The divisions are organized as grades K-2, grades 3-5, grades 6-8, and grades 9-12.

All artwork must be submitted electronically through an online student submission form, including uploading a high-resolution jpeg image of the artwork for consideration. Guidelines and full submission instructions are available on the Governor's Student Art Competition webpage beginning Sept. 16. Accommodations will be made for any student who encounters barriers to this submission process. Please reach out to Patrick.baker@state.sd.us or call 605-773-5507 for assistance.

The South Dakota Arts Council encourages teachers and parents to help students work on their submissions early so they have plenty of time to prepare their artwork and artist statements.

An office of the South Dakota Department of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council's mission is to provide grants and services to artists, arts organizations, and schools across the state, with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and the State of South Dakota. The South Dakota Department of Tourism is comprised of Travel South Dakota and the South Dakota Arts Council. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 7 of 73



Volleyball

Clark/Willow Lake at Groton

Thurs, Sept. 17

C at 5:00 followed by
JV and Varsity



Groton
Area
Tigers
Groton, SD

GDILIVE



YouTube

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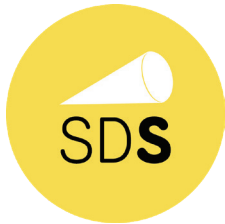
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For more info: GDILIVE.COM



Special Guest Commentator for the varsity match: Anna Fjeldheim

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

With McConnell back, US Senate ag committee advances farm bill on party lines

Majority Leader Thune, of South Dakota, criticizes Democrats for opposition

BY CAMI KOONS

Republican members of the Senate Agriculture Committee voted Wednesday to advance a farm bill, though Democrats on the committee voted against the package due to continued disagreements on a nutrition section of the bill.

The committee marked up the bill in August, then recessed after a failed vote as Democrats held out over their proposal for an extension of when some states will have to begin paying for a share of federal nutrition benefits. Republican leadership amended the bill before the August hearing to offer a one-year extension, but Democrats continued to argue for a two-year extension.

While Republicans hold the majority in the committee, Republican Sen. Mitch McConnell's more than 90-day public hiatus due to a health issue meant the body didn't have enough votes to pass the farm bill from the committee in August.

McConnell returned to the Capitol earlier in the week, allowing Republicans in the agriculture committee to advance the bill along party lines.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, said in each of the five farm bills he has worked on, the opposing parties "always seem to come together at the end" to get the bill done.

"Honestly, that's what ought to be happening here, folks," Thune said.

Thune said he didn't understand why Democrats were choosing to "block vote" against a bipartisan bill that is "principally about production agriculture."

The farm bill is typically reauthorized every five years, but the many programs under the bill have operated on various extensions of the 2018 farm bill for the past several years.

Democratic Sen. John Fetterman from Pennsylvania said the ag sector is "begging" for a new farm bill.

"We've got to find a way to pass this thing because people are coming all the way from my state saying, 'We can't keep waiting for this,'" Fetterman said. "We have to deliver for our farmers."

The error rate issue

Republicans' One Big Beautiful Bill Act included language that requires states to lower their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program payment error rates, which measures a state's accuracy in determining who is eligible for SNAP and how much they receive.

The latest SNAP payment error rates show only nine states are below the 6% error rate threshold that allows their SNAP programs to continue to be 100% funded by the federal government. As the law currently stands, all other states will have to pay 5%, 10% or 15% of SNAP benefits costs in their state starting Oct. 2027.

States with an error rate above 13.34%, however, are eligible for a two-year extension. Democrats sought to extend this extension to all states, especially as some states are seemingly raising their current error rates so they can benefit from the extension.

In August, Republicans on the Senate agriculture committee adjusted the farm bill proposal to include a one-year extension, but Democrats would not vote in favor of the bill.

Ranking member Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota said it was her goal to "get this farm bill done, and to get it done by the end of the year," and noted difficulties facing farmers and ranchers – like global trade

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 9 of 73

disruptions, input costs and "headwinds" from tariffs.

The Democrat said she was appreciative of Chairman John Boozman's one-year delay, but said it would still allow certain states to get off "scot-free" while other states need tens of millions of dollars, according to estimates from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, to pay for their nutrition programs.

"We don't want to have a situation where high-error-rate states get off scot-free while the rest of us pay," Klobuchar said. "And we have shown our commitment and will continue to do that to improving this bill to get us to a bipartisan product that can be successful on the Senate floor."

If the version of the bill that advanced Wednesday is passed and signed into law, states would have until October 2028 to lower their error rates before they are required to shoulder part of the costs.

Thune argued Democrats should be supportive of the bill, because if it doesn't pass, current law will remain in effect and states will have to start paying for their error rates in 2027.

Thune also noted that the bill included a number of Democrat-led amendments, and bipartisan issues like allowing year-round, nationwide access to E15, a fuel blend with 15% ethanol.

Several senators sported buttons at the hearing that read "E15 now" and agricultural groups, including National Corn Growers Association, National Farmers Union and the Renewable Fuel Association, thanked the committee for advancing the measure.

Iowa senators try for amendments to bill

At the August markup of the bill, senators went through the massive piece of legislation title by title with amendments and objections, before voting, unsuccessfully, on the bill as a whole. Boozman did not open the bill up again for amendments Wednesday, though Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, attempted to talk over the roll call vote to argue her amendment should be heard.

Ernst argued she had filed her amendment prior to the August deadline and held that the final title of the bill was not closed prior to the committee's recess in August.

Ernst said her amendment presented a "balanced middle ground approach" to address Proposition 12 – a California law stipulating that certain products, including pork products and bacon, must come from animals who were raised under certain conditions.

Congressional efforts to undo Proposition 12 have been championed by Iowa Republicans and supported by agricultural groups including the National Pork Producers Council and American Farm Bureau Federation. Animal rights, environmental groups and some producer groups, have pushed back against these efforts and celebrated that such language was not included in the Senate's farm bill.

Ernst said her amendment would have preserved Prop 12 and other existing laws, while preventing "future mandates from creating an unaffordable patchwork of 50 different production standards for farmers across this country."

"This is a serious attempt to find common ground and give our producers certainty going forward," Ernst said. "Yet, after following the recommended process, again given by your staff, and doing the bipartisan work, we are not even being given an opportunity to bring the solution before the committee for a vote."

Boozman said he did not block the amendment from being brought forward during the bill markup in August.

Sen. Ben Ray Lujan, D-New Mexico, said that while he might not vote with Ernst, "procedure" in the committee is supposed to "protect the voices of colleagues to raise issues that matter to us in our states."

"Because the senator from Iowa was recognized, and then just run over, that does not sound like the rights of those of us that sit on the committee were protected," Lujan said to Boozman.

Sen. Chuck Grassley supported his Iowa colleague and said he was "hoping" the committee would "get a chance to vote on an amendment very important to Iowa" as the top pork producing state in the nation.

"It's just stupid that we don't have a chance to bring Iowa's interest to this debate on the first farm bill that we've had in discussion for now the third year," Grassley said.

Grassley said he had also hoped to discuss his own bipartisan amendment, drafted with Democratic Sens. Cory Booker of New Jersey and Adam Schiff of California to "finalize" certain rules in the Packers and Stockyards Act.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 10 of 73

Grassley has previously criticized U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins for delaying the implementation of rules, which he said were “put in place to protect” meat producers in the U.S., in particular poultry producers who have invested in infrastructure costs while corporations haven’t “honored fully” their commitments with family farmers.

“I just want to express my irritation about the whole thing, and just hope that somewhere along the line, at least the Secretary of Agriculture will wake up and draw back her delays of these rules,” Grassley said.

Rollins said in June the rule was a “Biden-era” regulation and that USDA needed additional time to review the rule.

Boozman said if he opened the bill up for Ernst or Grassley’s amendments, he would have to restart the markup, and “we’re not prepared to do that.”

Sen. John Hoeven, R-North Dakota, reminded his colleagues that there would still be room for amendments to the bill on the Senate floor.

“Let’s go to the floor, offer up amendments, have robust debate, and get this done for our farmers and ranchers,” Hoeven said.

Before the House left town Wednesday, members of the House Agriculture Committee heard testimony from producers across the country about increasing demand for “homegrown products” by advancing things like stronger antitrust laws, country of origin labeling and expanded biomanufacturing opportunities.

In his opening comments, Chairman Glenn Thompson, R-Pennsylvania, noted that the House had already passed its version of the farm bill, and he looked forward to “the Senate upholding its end of the bargain soon.”

In a statement Wednesday evening, Boozman said advancing the bill from the Senate committee was a “critical step” toward getting results to a “hurting” farm country.

“While this is clearly welcome progress, we need more of our colleagues’ votes to reflect the urgency of supporting farmers, ranchers, forest landowners and rural communities,” Boozman said.

This story was originally produced by Iowa Capital Dispatch, 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.

Cami Koons is an Iowa Capital Dispatch reporter covering agriculture and the environment. She previously worked at publications in Kansas and Missouri, covering rural affairs.

Pardon request 25 years after sex offense sparks discussion on purpose of clemency in South Dakota

State law lacks binding guidance on who deserves a pardon, which only governor can grant

BY JOHN HULT

SIOUX FALLS — A request for clemency from a man convicted of a sex offense 25 years ago spurred a discussion on the purpose of a pardon Wednesday at a meeting of the South Dakota board empowered to make recommendations to the governor.

The 57-year-old who applied for the pardon hasn’t been charged with a crime since he was convicted of sexual contact with a minor.

He wants to have the 2001 offense cleared from his record, he said in his application, because he felt his actions since the crime show that he’s paid his debt to society. He also said he’d recently lost a job he’d held for years in the logging industry, and felt the conviction would make it difficult to find employment again.

His application included recommendations from family members, and a letter from the victim, who was 13 years old at the time and now says she has forgiven him.

The victim wrote that the man now requesting a pardon had “gone above and beyond to make things right with her,” Shelli Gust, administrator for the South Dakota Board of Pardons and Paroles, told board members on Wednesday.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 11 of 73

The man, whose name and picture are listed in the South Dakota Sex Offender Registry, is a father of three who's married to the same woman he was at the time of his conviction, Gust said. He served four years in the Marines, Gust said, and had the support of "a very large family." He was never incarcerated for the crime, but was sentenced to 10 years on probation.

Two members of the parole board had recommended denying a pardon recommendation during an initial review process on Tuesday. The full board reviewed the request on Wednesday.

Nature of offense sparks questions

Most criminal arrests and convictions in South Dakota are part of a person's permanent record. Unlike some states, there are no provisions of state law that automatically remove old crimes after a period of good behavior.

The legal avenues to clear a crime from the public record in South Dakota are sparse.

Those convicted of a crime can ask a judge for a suspended imposition of sentence. In such situations, the crime is removed from the person's record after a period of good behavior and meeting any other conditions imposed by a judge.

A person who's arrested, but for whom no formal charges are filed, can ask a judge to remove an arrest from their record.

A pardon from the governor is the only other way to get a crime removed, and the pathway to a pardon typically begins with the parole board.

Aaron Pilcher, an attorney from Huron whom Rhoden appointed to the board in February, said on Wednesday that the 57-year-old's situation didn't stand out as deserving of a pardon recommendation.

Having a felony, Pilcher said, "isn't convenient," but that inconvenience alone shouldn't be enough to qualify a person who's behaved since their felony conviction.

He noted that the applicant had lost a job and wants a new one, but didn't list a specific job or explain why his offense would prevent him from getting one.

"What about this guy's offense raises it above the level of an inconvenience?" Pilcher said.

Kirsten Aasen, a defense lawyer who serves as vice chair of the board, said that Pilcher's comments "triggered" her.

Plenty of states offer easier ways to clear a record, Aasen said, because felony convictions make it harder to get and hold down a job or find a place to live. Several states, including California and Michigan, have laws that automatically clear some convictions from a person's record after periods of good behavior.

For people with decades of good behavior in South Dakota, Aasen said she operates on a "presumption" that a pardon is appropriate.

A felony "is more than just an embarrassing social stigma," she said. "It's financially debilitating."

Kurt Hall, one of the two board members to recommend denial of the man's pardon on Tuesday, said he understands why a person with a sex offense on their record would like to see it removed. Rau was the other member to recommend denial Tuesday.

But Hall, the Faulk County sheriff, also said the recent case of Mark Milk has made him cautious. In 2023, the board recommended a commutation for Milk, who'd been serving a life sentence for manslaughter. Former Gov. Kristi Noem granted the commutation; the board later paroled Milk.

Milk is in custody again, facing federal drug distribution charges in Iowa after police alleged he provided his teenage niece with the cocaine that killed her.

Given the scrutiny that high-profile case has placed on the board, "it's a perfect storm to go against" a convicted sex offender's request for clemency, Hall said.

Pilcher, in response to Aasen's comments, said he's also concerned about the way the applicant described the offense.

"It looks more severe or deliberate in the actual report than in how he describes what happened," Pilcher said

Governor will decide

Board member Peter Lieberman moved to recommend a pardon. Lieberman, a former judge, said he agrees with Aasen about what qualifies a person for a pardon. Lieberman pointed to the applicant's service

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 12 of 73

in the Marines as a major factor weighing in his favor.

"I'm as tough on sex offenders as anyone, but I don't want to see someone who served in the Corps and has stayed out of trouble for 25 years to be saddled with" the stigma of being a sex offender, Lieberman said.

The board voted 5-4 to recommend a pardon to Gov. Rhoden. Hall ultimately voted yes with Lieberman, as did Aasen, board members John Brown and Patricia Meyers. Pilcher and members Myron Rau, Vaughn Beck and Jan Steele voted against the recommendation.

Rhoden will review the man's application. As of May, Rhoden had issued 90 pardons and two commutations since he became governor in January 2025. He'd denied four pardon requests and one commutation request by that time.

State lacks strict rules for pardon eligibility

The parole board can release inmates on parole or pull them back into prison for parole violations, but only acts as a screening panel for pardons. Under the state constitution, the governor has the exclusive authority to issue or deny pardons.

State law does not have binding rules to define who does or does not qualify for a pardon.

The board's administrative rules on executive clemency list seven factors that "may" be considered at a hearing on a person's application for a pardon. Among them are the applicant's age and medical status, a demonstration of "remarkable rehabilitation," a showing that their sentence was excessive or "a miscarriage of justice," or that they're seeking "a professional career from which society can benefit, but a conviction prevents it."

The board may also consider "the applicant's attitude, character, capabilities, and habits; the nature and circumstances of the offense or offenses," as well as "the effect the applicant's clemency will have on the victims of the crime and the community."

The administrative rules offer guidance, but are ultimately suggestions that leave room for interpretation, according to Rau, the board's chair.

If the board recommends a pardon, the governor gets any materials offered in the person's application, background information on a case, and audio and video of any board discussion on the person's situation.

Gov. Larry Rhoden, in an interview with South Dakota Searchlight in 2025, said he bases his pardon decisions on his own feelings and personal judgment. When he's denied clemency to someone for whom the board had recommended it, Rhoden said, it was mainly because he felt that not enough time had passed since a crime occurred.

A pardon clears an old crime completely from the public record, though a copy of the pardon showing the pardoned crime or crimes remains on file at the South Dakota Secretary of State's Office. After a period of five years, the pardon document is sealed.

The governor can also grant another form of clemency called a commutation. That reduces the sentence for current inmates, typically making them eligible for parole earlier than they'd otherwise be. The board typically must vote to authorize parole after a commutation is granted — as its members did with Milk in 2024 — though a governor has the authority to issue a commutation that results in an inmate's immediate release.

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 13 of 73

Fewer South Dakota middle-schoolers trying nicotine, but more using it regularly

State's kids less likely to try nicotine than U.S. peers, but more likely to pick cigarettes
BY JOHN HULT

Fewer South Dakota middle-schoolers are trying nicotine than they were two years ago, but slightly more of them are using it every day.

Nicotine use rates for Native American kids in grades six through eight are higher than they are for non-Natives, meanwhile, and South Dakota kids overall are slightly more likely on average than their peers elsewhere in the U.S. to use cigarettes.

The findings from 2025 come from the recently released Youth Tobacco Survey from the South Dakota Department of Health. The state's conducted the survey for middle-school kids every two years since 2003. Smoking and nicotine use rates for high schoolers are compiled as part of a wider Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The results of that 2025 survey haven't been released.

For middle-schoolers in the new survey, 9.6% had tried any form of nicotine at some point in their lives — fewer than the 12.7% of kids nationwide who'd tried nicotine. South Dakota's figure was 10.7% in 2023.

E-cigarettes were the most prevalent choice in the 2025 survey for kids who'd tried nicotine at some point in their lives, at 6.6%, followed by cigarettes at 4.3% and smokeless tobacco at 1.5%. Eighty percent of e-cigarette users reported using flavors outside of traditional tobacco, such as fruit or candy.

The e-cigarette rate for all kids has dropped in South Dakota since peaking in 2019, when 16% had tried them and 6.7% of them were current users. In 2025, 3.1% reported current e-cigarette use.

The survey found that 4.7% of middle-schoolers counted themselves as current users of any kind of nicotine, up from 4.5% in 2023.

For Native American kids, 19.4% had tried any nicotine as of 2025, with 14.8% of kids saying they'd tried e-cigarettes and 9.9% saying they currently vaped nicotine.

South Dakota's nicotine use figures trail the national numbers in most areas, but not all. For cigarettes, 4.3% of the state's middle-schoolers reported trying them and 1.4% reported being regular smokers. For the U.S., the figures were 3.6% and 1.1%, respectively.

The report says kids who'd tried nicotine "were significantly more likely" to come from a household where at least one family member uses nicotine.

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

Fed raises interest rates for first time in 3 years, battling persistent inflation

BY ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve raised interest rates Wednesday for the first time in three years as inflation continues to dog the economy, largely driven by soaring gas and fuel oil prices while the war in Iran drags on.

The central bank's Federal Open Market Committee voted 12-0 to increase its benchmark interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point, reaching the new range from 3.75% to 4% and making the cost of borrowing more expensive for Americans.

The committee released an upbeat statement touting economic growth at "a solid pace."

"While uncertainty remains elevated owing, in part, to geopolitical developments, domestic spending has been resilient. Productivity growth is strong, and capital investment is robust. Job gains have kept pace with the workforce, and the unemployment rate has changed little," according to the statement released Wednesday afternoon.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 14 of 73

"Inflation remains elevated. Today's policy action will support a timelier return to the Committee's 2 percent goal. The Committee will deliver price stability," the statement continued.

Federal Reserve Chair Kevin Warsh, four months into his tenure, described Wednesday's unanimous decision to raise rates as "sober."

"The plain fact is that inflation is too high, and has been for too long," Warsh said during a press conference following the Fed's meeting.

"This summer's inflation readings do not tell me that underlying trends have meaningfully improved. ... Too many categories are still posting increases above 3 percent on both a six and 12-month basis," Warsh said.

Trump campaign for lower rates

President Donald Trump publicly pressured and name-called Warsh's predecessor Jerome Powell for months for not lowering interest rates.

The public attacks escalated into a federal probe of Powell and the Fed for costly renovations at the Fed's headquarters in Washington. The administration eventually dropped the investigation.

Trump criticized the rate increase on his Truth Social platform Wednesday afternoon, saying the U.S. rates "should be 1%, or less, because we are the Best Credit in the World — BY FAR."

"Our Country is BOOMING with new Investment! If we stopped Trading with every country that we have a Deficit with, which is most of them, we would make, at least, 1.5 Trillion Dollars a year. The word "Deficit" is nothing more than a fancy word for LOSS. We are "carrying" almost every country in the World, and that cannot go on any longer. LOWER THE INTEREST RATES FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND FAST!," he wrote.

Warsh declined to answer questions from reporters about Trump's previous calls for lower interest rates.

"Part of the independence of the Federal Reserve is we stay in our lane," Warsh said.

The interest hike comes less than a week after the government's latest consumer price index revealed the cost of food, energy, housing and other goods and services rose 0.4% from July to August. The cost of all items over the past year has risen 3.4%.

Rep. Jason Smith, the Republican chair of the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee, criticized the decision, saying in a statement that "interest rates should be coming down, not going up."

The Missouri Republican praised the Trump-led "big beautiful bill" tax law passed last summer for delivering "larger paychecks" to Americans, and he blamed former President Joe Biden for past higher inflation.

"After years of elevated borrowing costs, a rate increase is the opposite of the relief families and small businesses need. As President Trump works to restore stability in the Middle East and bring down energy prices, the Fed should recognize the progress," Smith said in a written statement Wednesday afternoon.

Soaring gas prices

Spiking energy prices caused by the war in Iran were the main driver behind higher costs. Gasoline alone rose 3.9% over the month of August.

As of Wednesday, Americans were paying an average of nearly \$4.37 a gallon at the pump, according to AAA. Diesel prices reached a record high of \$6.31.

The price of a barrel of oil surged above \$100 in recent days, including Wednesday afternoon, when it reached \$105, as fighting flared in the Middle East.

The United States and Iran continue launching rockets in the Strait of Hormuz, where one-fifth of the world's petroleum traveled prior to the war. U.S. Central Command claimed Sept. 8 that it "destroyed" five Iranian crude oil carriers as part of its naval blockade aimed at damaging Iran's economy.

The conflict spilled over in July into another key waterway for Saudi Arabian oil exports. Iran-backed Houthi rebels restarted an assault on commercial vessels in the Red Sea for the first time since 2024, and are fighting for control of the Bab al-Mandab strait. The group also directly struck targets in Saudi Arabia, a U.S. ally, beginning in July, and is threatening more strikes, according to Houthi spokesman Yahya Saree. The United Nations Security Council is warning of the likelihood of a humanitarian crisis.

When asked by a reporter at Wednesday's press conference how incremental rate hikes will help when geopolitical events do not show signs of improvement, Warsh said the Fed "cannot affect any individual

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 15 of 73

price, whether it be oil prices, whether it be foodstuffs at the grocery store.”

“But what we can do and will do is ensure that any change in relative prices don’t broaden out, don’t have second and third order effects on the economy. That’s what we’re tasked to do, and that’s what we will do,” Warsh said.

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

US House leaves for campaign break without action on AI, affordability

BY JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House departed Wednesday for a seven-week campaign break after spending less than two weeks in session during August and September.

The extended “district work period” is intended to give incumbents from both political parties time to meet with constituents and fundraise back home before voting in this year’s midterm elections ends on Nov. 3.

House Republican leaders hope that more time campaigning will help some of their most vulnerable members secure reelection, allowing the party to hold onto its majority for another two years.

Less time on Capitol Hill also means less time voting on potentially divisive issues. Kentucky Republican Rep. Thomas Massie, for example, would have been able to force a vote to impeach Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on Thursday had leaders not sent lawmakers home a day early.

Despite the somewhat limited time in session, Speaker Mike Johnson said Tuesday he believes Republicans have accomplished much during their nearly two years with unified control of government. But he brushed aside requests to keep the chamber in town to address warnings from several executives about artificial intelligence.

The Louisiana Republican pointed to a bipartisan task force that issued a 273-page report in December 2024, saying those recommendations meant lawmakers would not be “caught flat-footed here.”

“We’ve been working on this for years and we’re right there where we need to be,” Johnson said.

Moments later, however, he added Congress cannot apply those recommendations to draft legislation to regulate AI because “nobody in the room knows yet what that should look like.”

“Why? Because we don’t have the latest information,” Johnson said. “We are not in the ... frontier labs who have taken this technology many steps further than even when our own report was published.”

He argued that instead of Congress debating legislation, the executives of AI companies should instead “self-police” and “self-regulate.”

“They don’t need the government to tell them to slow it down,” Johnson said. “If they want to slow it down, they should.”

‘Nothing’ done, Dem leader says

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries sharply disagreed with Johnson and Republicans’ approach, saying Wednesday that there was considerable work left to do, despite the planned recess.

“They have decided to cancel votes and run out of town without providing any relief to hard-working American taxpayers,” he said.

“Republicans have done nothing to lower the high cost of groceries,” he continued. “Nothing to make healthcare more affordable, nothing to end the reckless war of choice in Iran, nothing to lower gas prices, nothing to stop the violent mass deportation machine, nothing to hold the Trump administration accountable for the unprecedented corruption unleashed on the American people.”

Jeffries questioned why Republicans haven’t been able to improve the economy and lower prices for everyday Americans, despite having made it a central campaign promise during the last election cycle.

“For two years, Americans have been wondering — were MAGA Republicans lying, indifferent, or are they just incompetent?” he said. “We now have an answer: It’s all of the above.”

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 16 of 73

Long lame duck

The House will return after the election for two weeks in November and three weeks in December. That will give lawmakers a total of 27 weeks in session this year, though those are rarely the type of five-day weeks most Americans are used to.

House lawmakers often take their first vote of the week on Monday evenings around 6:30 p.m. and their last vote of the week on Thursday morning, before many walk down the steps of the Capitol to cars waiting to take them to the airport.

Some weeks are shorter, giving House lawmakers a total of 72 days in session so far with 20 more days of voting on Capitol Hill scheduled before the end of the year.

An American with four weeks of time off a year spends about 48 weeks or 240 days at work, significantly more than the United States House of Representatives dedicated to debating and voting.

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that Americans in the private sector with more than 20 years of experience get, on average, four weeks of paid vacation a year.

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

More Republican US House members break with Trump on Iran, but not SD's representative

BY ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — As the November midterms approach, vulnerable U.S. House Republicans voted late Tuesday to require congressional approval for President Donald Trump to continue his war in Iran.

Seven Republicans broke ranks and joined all Democrats to pass a War Powers Resolution sponsored by Rep. Seth Moulton, a Massachusetts Democrat. Tuesday's vote marked the third time since June that the House passed a measure to curb Trump's military powers in Iran. The war has dragged on for over half a year.

The vote came as diesel prices reached a record high of \$6.31 per gallon in the United States, and gas hovered at an average of nearly \$4.37 a gallon Wednesday, according to AAA.

Global oil markets have been rocked since Iranian officials effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz, a major petroleum trade route. The conflict has since expanded, and Iranian-backed Houthi rebels are slowing traffic through another major trade passage, the Bab-al Mandab Strait.

The resolution passed, 220-204, despite Republicans' narrow majority in the chamber. GOP House members who voted for the Iran War Powers Resolution for the first time included Zach Nunn and Marianne Miller-Meeks of Iowa, and Nancy Mace of South Carolina.

Nunn and Miller-Meeks both face tough reelection bids in Iowa. The Cook Political Report with Amy Walter rates both races as "toss-ups."

Mace lost her South Carolina gubernatorial primary bid in June and is not seeking reelection to the House.

'Open-ended war'

Nunn posted on social media Tuesday that, as a U.S. Air Force veteran who flew missions in the Middle East, he could not support "another open-ended war," though he still believes the Islamic Republic "must be held accountable for killing Americans, supporting terrorism, threatening the Strait of Hormuz, and pursuing nuclear weapons."

Presidents have a 60-day period to pursue military action with congressional approval, but that window has passed, he added.

"Iowa has already paid a devastating price, including two service members killed by an Iranian drone in Kuwait," Nunn wrote on X late Tuesday night. "Congress owes them, their families, and every American in uniform clear objectives and constitutional oversight. ... We can defend Americans, pressure Iran, and pursue peace while ensuring Congress fulfills its constitutional responsibility."

Miller-Meeks posted Wednesday morning that with her 24 years served in the Army, she remains skepti-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 17 of 73

cal of Trump's actions in Iran.

"I said it in March: the mission had to stay focused and limited, because Americans do not want another forever war. I will not vote to keep our soldiers in an open-ended war, with Iowans paying too much at the pump," Miller-Meeks wrote on X.

"The Iranian regime and its nuclear ambitions have been defanged," she continued. "The President needs to present a plan to Congress and the American people for how this ends so we can focus on bringing our soldiers home and lowering prices."

Third House vote

Nunn, Miller-Meeks and Mace joined House Republican Reps. Thomas Massie of Kentucky, Tom Barrett of Michigan, Warren Davidson of Ohio, and Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania, who have now each voted three times to rein in Trump's actions in the Iran conflict. Massie voted yes an additional time in April, but the measure failed to pass the House then.

Massie on Tuesday introduced eight articles of impeachment against Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth for his handling of the war in Iran.

The Trump administration maintains War Powers Resolutions are unconstitutional and has dismissed the measures passed in both chambers. Similar War Powers Resolutions to stop Trump's hostilities in Iran cleared procedural votes in the Senate in May and June. The Senate has voted on such measures 13 times.

Congress overrode a veto from President Richard Nixon to enact the War Powers Resolution statute, at the time aimed at reining in Nixon's actions in Vietnam.

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

Schools, libraries sound alarm over potential changes to federal internet program

About 650 institutions receive assistance in South Dakota

BY ROBBIE SEQUEIRA

A multi-billion-dollar federal program that helps schools and libraries afford broadband internet is under review by the Trump administration, leaving education officials and advocates worried about potentially significant cuts.

The E-Rate program provides about \$3 billion annually for internet access and telecommunications to more than 100,000 schools and 11,000 libraries across the country. It is the fifth-largest stream of federal funding for schools nationwide, according to the Schools Superintendents Association (AASA).

The Federal Communications Commission said it is reviewing "whether the program should be narrowed or otherwise reoriented to reflect the extent to which its connectivity objectives have been achieved." The agency is accepting public comments until Oct. 13, which it will take into account when it crafts a proposal.

Amid a landscape of scaled back federal funding for education under the Trump administration and of tightening state and district budgets, some school officials and advocates are wary of what changes to the E-Rate program could spell for how schools and libraries operate.

In June, the FCC announced it would be exploring changes to the E-Rate program. FCC Chairman Brendan Carr said the proposal would be "aimed at empowering parents and ensuring that our E-Rate program produces the great educational outcomes stakeholders have intended."

The E-Rate program has provided schools and libraries discounts on the cost of eligible services ranging from 20% to 90%, with higher discounts provided to the most disadvantaged schools and libraries. The FCC is asking whether adjustments should be made to the discount rate system.

The FCC also is asking for comment on whether E-rate support should be limited to rural areas or to areas served by a single provider; whether some services remain necessary; and whether concerns about students' screen time should be addressed.

At a virtual town hall hosted Wednesday by the Schools Superintendents Association, concerns over the

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 18 of 73

FCC's inquiry ranged from whether the FCC had the jurisdictional authority to change the program to how schools would be able to maintain broadband and internet connectivity without shifting funds away from staffing and other budgetary needs.

Without the same level of funding, schools and libraries could be subject to higher internet costs, less support for rural and high-cost communities and greater difficulties in upgrading needed building infrastructure, the AASA said.

E-Rate dollars impact every corner of the country, with nearly 102,000 schools and nearly 12,000 libraries receiving commitments in funding year 2024, according to the latest publicly available data. California had more than 12,000 E-Rate recipients, Texas nearly 9,800, New York more than 6,200 and South Dakota about 650.

LaTonya M. Goffney, superintendent of the Aldine Independent School District in Texas, said her district received \$11 million in E-Rate support over five years.

"Internet connectivity is not a one-time purchase," she said during the superintendents group call. "If E-Rate were reduced or eliminated, Aldine ISD would face an immediate and significant budget shortfall and that means millions of dollars would have to be redirected from somewhere else in our budget...there's no way to absorb a loss of this magnitude without affecting people."

According to Shawnda Hines, deputy director of communications for the American Library Association, 73% of U.S. public libraries rely on the E-Rate program to pay their internet bill or to keep their networks updated.

When Congress established the program in 1996, only 14% of the nation's K-12 classrooms had access to the Internet, according to the agency. The FCC has some authority to change how E-Rate is administered without congressional approval, but whether the agency can eliminate a congressionally authorized program altogether is an unsettled legal question.

Access to the internet in modern schools extends far beyond classroom instruction, Stacy Hawthorne, executive director of EdTech Leaders Alliance, explained.

It also powers bus routing, security systems and building ventilation, and helps digitize attendance records, school meals and student health information. Districts rely on internet-connected systems to operate buildings, comply with state and federal requirements and manage basic administrative functions.

"It's not just email and Google Docs. Imagine it's 5:30 a.m., the buses start coming to life. They use GPS routing, and they have parent-facing tracking apps," Hawthorne said. "Cameras come to life, the security systems start running at full speed. Visitor management scans driver's licenses against offender registries before a single visitor gets access to any of our school buildings."

Stateline reporter Robbie Sequeira can be reached at rsequeira@stateline.org.

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

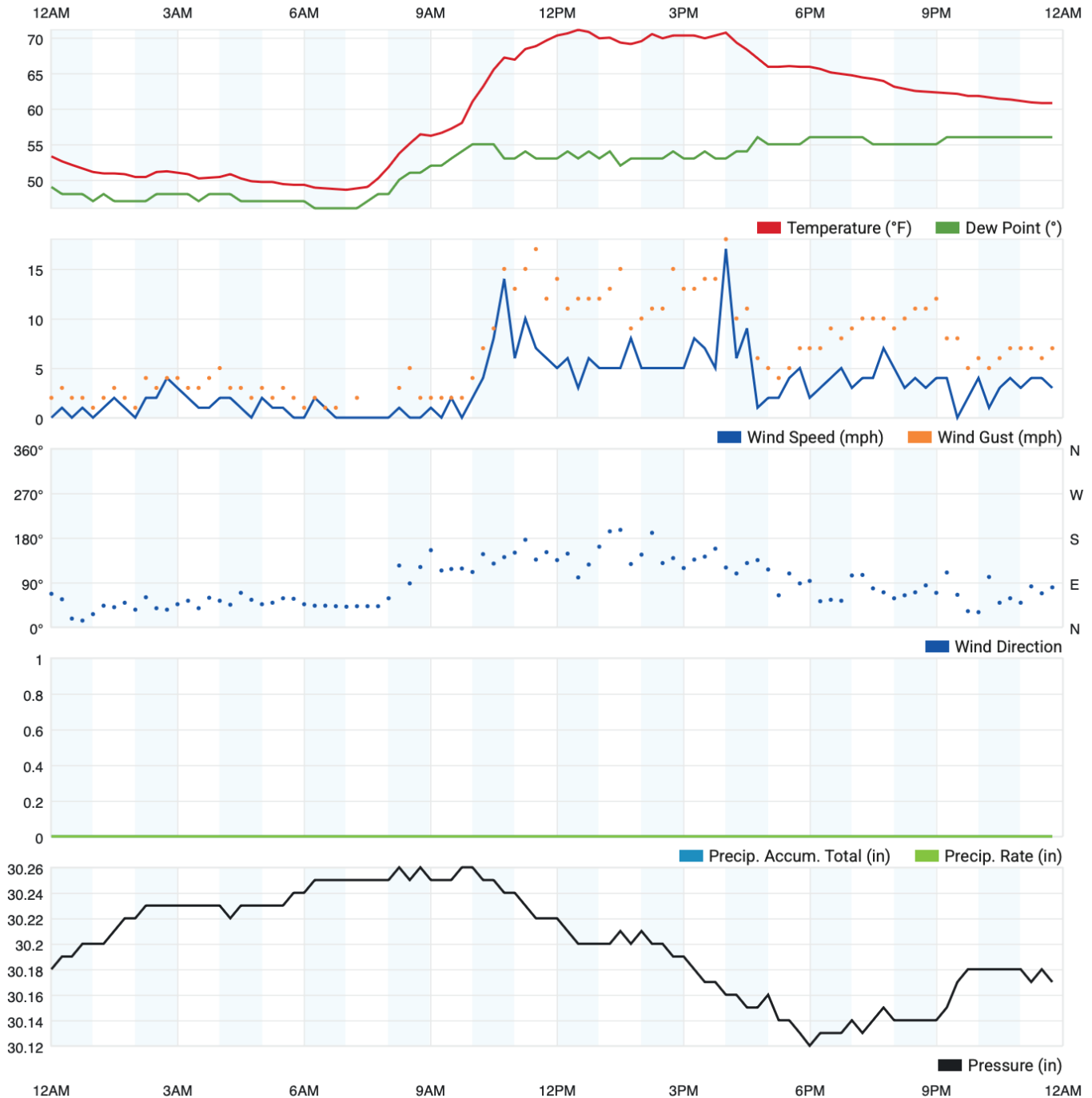
Robbie Sequeira is a staff writer covering housing and social services for Stateline.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 19 of 73

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

September 16, 2026



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 20 of 73

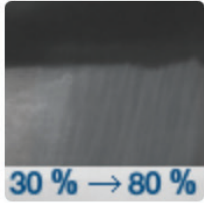
Today



High: 74 °F

Patchy Fog
then Partly
Sunny

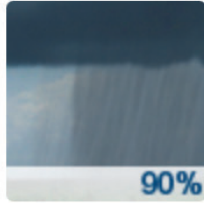
Tonight



Low: 55 °F

Chance
Showers then
Showers

Friday



High: 67 °F

Showers

Friday Night



Low: 51 °F

Chance
Showers

Saturday



High: 67 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Patchy Fog This Morning

Patchy to areas of fog, with visibility down to a mile or less at times, will cause rapidly changing road conditions for the morning commute.

Leave extra room between you and the next car. Stay alert to changing driving conditions.



NWS Aberdeen

weather.gov/abr

Patchy to areas of fog, with visibility down to a mile or less at times, will cause rapidly changing road conditions for the morning commute. Give yourself plenty of time and leave extra room between you and the next car.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 21 of 73



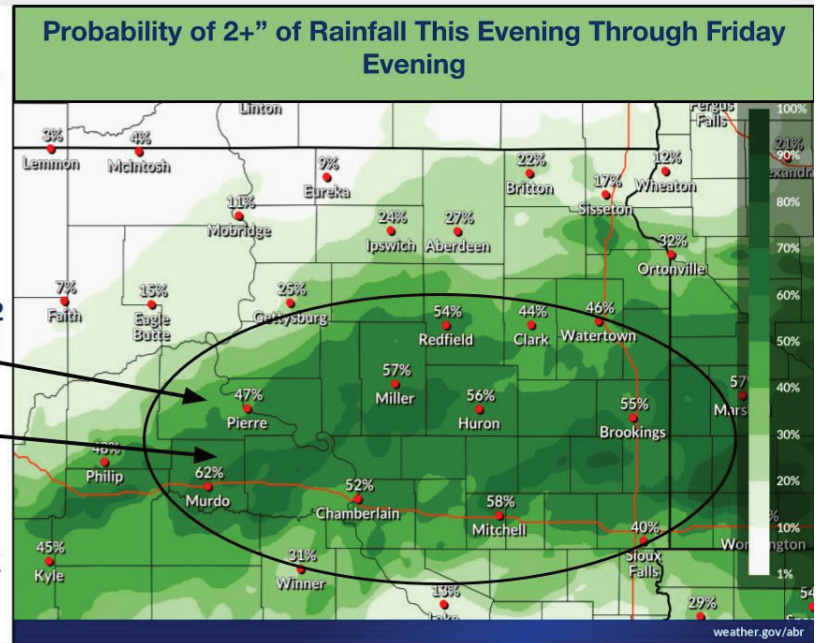
Moderate to Heavy Rain This Evening through Friday

September 17, 2026

3:16 AM

Key Messages

- High confidence in a moderate to heavy band of rain lifting across South Dakota/Western Minnesota **this evening and continuing through Friday**.
- Corridor of heaviest rain (and the potential for weak thunderstorms) is expected across south central through east central SD.
 - Chance of rainfall amounts **exceeding 2 inches or more** is 40 to 65% along and east of a line from Murdo to Redfield.
 - **There is a 15 to 30% chance of exceeding 3"** for this area.
- Thunderstorms may result in locally higher amounts!
- Further shift in the low north or south will impact where the highest potential for heavier rainfall exists.



National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

High confidence in a moderate to heavy band of rain lifting across South Dakota/Western Minnesota this evening and continuing through Friday. The corridor of the potential heaviest rain will be across south central through east central SD. Chance of rainfall amounts exceeding 2 inches or more is 40 to 65% along and east of a line from Murdo to Redfield. Further shift in the low north or south will impact where the highest potential for heavier rainfall exists.



Timing Rainfall This Evening Through Friday

September 17, 2026

3:17 AM CDT

Key Messages

- Rainfall starts out in central/south central South Dakota late this afternoon/evening. Rain will then spread north and northeast across the region, becoming widespread, overnight through Friday morning.
- Precipitation will then taper off west to east across the region Friday afternoon through Friday evening.
- Most rainfall is expected during the evening/overnight and morning hours Friday (see chart).
- Heavy rainfall could impact low lying and poor drainage areas, area roads, and potentially lead to minor impacts to rivers and streams.

Probability of Precipitation (%) Forecast

	9/17 Thu		9/18 Fri						9/19 Sat	
	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
McIntosh	15	30	45	45	45	45	15	5	5	5
Eagle Butte	30	55	70	85	60	30	20	10	5	5
Murdo	40	75	95	85	60	40	30	15	10	10
Mobridge	15	30	50	60	75	70	25	10	10	10
Pierre	25	50	95	100	75	70	25	20	15	10
Gettysburg	15	30	65	90	90	55	50	20	15	10
Kennebec	20	40	90	90	65	50	25	20	20	20
Eureka	10	15	40	70	65	50	40	20	10	5
Chamberlain	0	45	90	95	50	20	10	0	0	15
Miller	15	25	65	95	90	75	70	45	45	40
Ellendale	0	15	25	60	70	75	40	30	25	20
Redfield	10	20	50	90	80	80	80	50	30	30
Aberdeen	5	15	30	65	85	90	65	40	35	30
Huron	0	5	35	95	85	50	40	15	30	15
Britton	0	10	20	55	70	80	75	40	30	25
Clark	5	20	35	80	90	80	65	40	35	30
Webster	0	10	20	65	80	90	80	60	40	40
Watertown	0	10	25	70	90	80	80	65	45	40
Sisseton	0	5	15	50	80	95	85	65	60	60
Brookings	0	0	15	80	90	85	35	30	45	45
Milbank	0	5	20	50	85	95	80	80	65	60
Wheaton	0	0	15	35	80	90	80	60	50	50



Ponding
of Water



Water On
Roads



River &
Stream Rises



National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 22 of 73

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 72 °F at 12:37 PM

Low Temp: 48 °F at 6:55 AM

Wind: 18 mph at 3:53 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 97 in 1955

Record Low: 28 in 1903

Average High: 75

Average Low: 46

Average Precip in Sept.: 1.14

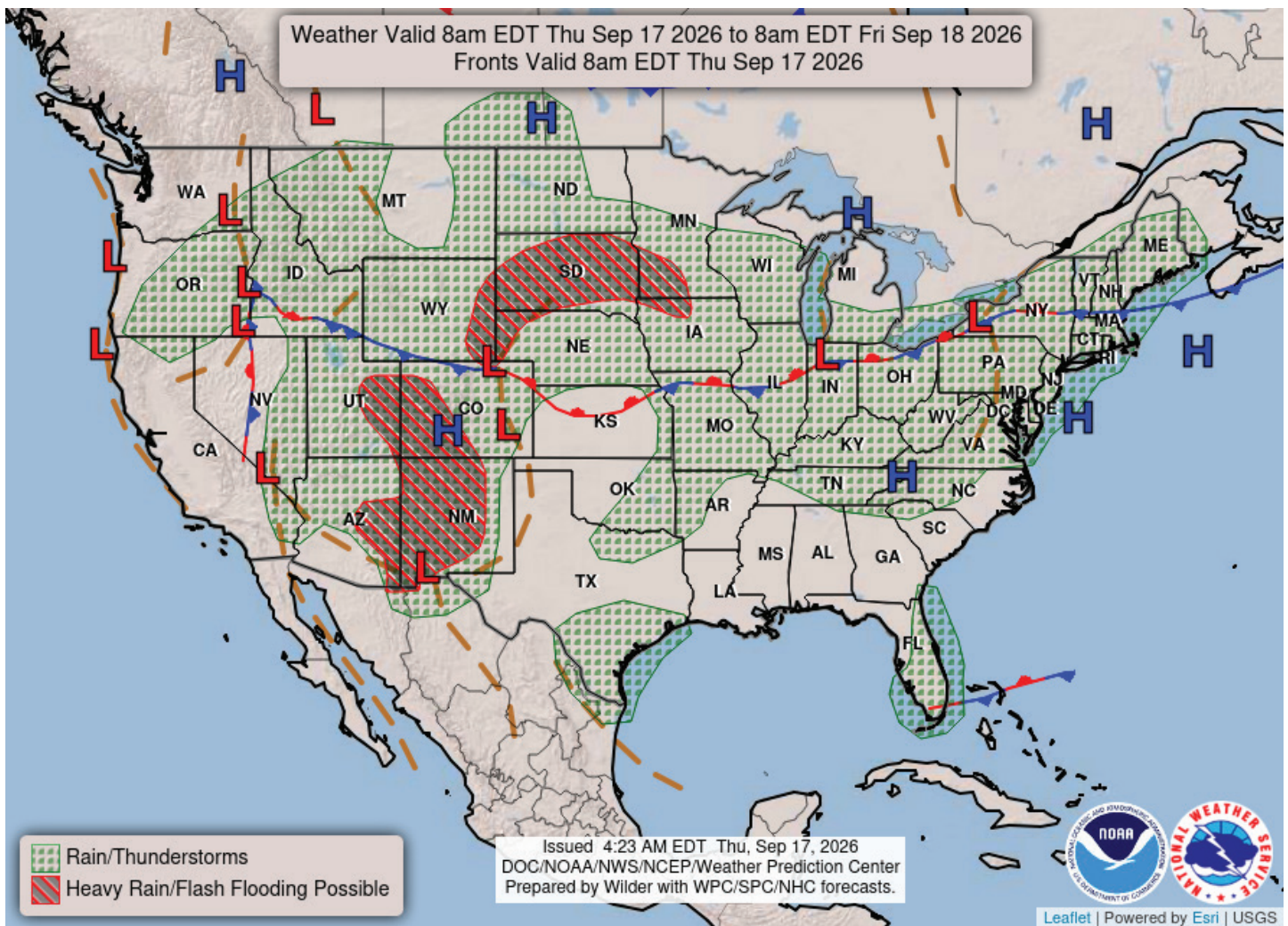
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.90

Average Precip to date: 17.48

Precip Year to Date: 20.96

Sunset Tonight: 7:40 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:14 am



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 23 of 73

Today in Weather History

September 17, 1911: Pipestone, Minnesota is hit with baseball-sized hail that smashes numerous windows at the Calumet Hotel and high school. The local observer measured hail three inches deep. Click [HERE](#) for an image of the Pipestone school following the hailstorm.

September 17, 1969: In the late afternoon 16 miles east of Pierre in Hughes County, 60 mph wind-driven penny size hail-damaged crops and buildings in the area. Unofficial amounts of 5 to 6 inches of rain also occurred with the storms.

September 17, 1975: Heavy rain and hail fell in the Pierre area during the night flooding streets and some basements. The high winds downed power lines. The damage estimate was more than 100,000 dollars.

September 17, 1975: Lightning started a grass fire in western Stanley County in the early morning hours of the 17th. With the arid and windy conditions, the fire quickly spread and consumed 25,000 acres of grassland before it was under control. Smoke from the fire was seen from 40 miles away. The fire also destroyed six outbuildings and an old unoccupied farmhouse. Some roads had to be closed due to the fire and smoke. Several electrical poles were also burned. Many residents were notified of possible evacuations. The fire was finally put out in the early morning hours of the 18th.

1829: A typhoon, Japan's most catastrophic storm, inflicts widespread damage over much of the country. On the southern island of Kyushu, the storm surge off the Ariake Sea kills over 10,000. The German physician Philipp Franz von Siebold was present during this storm and succeeded in taking barometric pressure readings around Nagasaki at the risk of drowning.

1923: A devastating fire threatens the University of California at Berkeley on this day. This fire killed two and caused \$10 million in damages. While the exact cause is unknown, the fire began in the dry forest northeast of Berkeley. Strong northeasterly winds blew cinders into the air which lead to the rapid-fire growth.

1932 — Concord NH was drenched with 5.97 inches of rain in 24 hours to establish a record for that location (16th- 17th). (The Weather Channel)

1963 — Nearly two and a half inches of rain fell at Yuma AZ in 24 hours. It was the most intense rain for Yuma during the period between 1950 and 1977. (The Weather Channel)

1965 — A storm produced a band of heavy snow across parts of Wyoming. Totals of 23 inches at Rawlins and 20.7 inches at Lander easily surpassed previous snowfall record totals for so early in the season. (15th-17th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 — Thunderstorms produced large hail, damaging winds, and heavy rain in the northeastern U.S. Heavy rain in southwestern Pennsylvania forced evacuation of twenty homes along Four Mile Run Creek, near Darlington. Harrisburg PA established a record for the date with 2.11 inches of rain. A cold front in the central U.S. brought freezing temperatures to parts of Montana and Wyoming. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Early in the morning a tornado hit Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio, TX, injuring three persons and causing twenty-eight million dollars damage. A second tornado on the northwest side of San Antonio caused six million dollars damage, and a third tornado in Bexar County killed one person and injured another. Thunderstorms associated with Hurricane Gilbert spawned a total of forty-seven tornadoes in a two day period, with forty of those tornadoes in central and south central Texas. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Hurricane Hugo hit the Virgin Islands, producing wind gusts to 97 mph at Saint Croix. Hurricane Hugo passed directly over the island of Saint Croix causing complete devastation and essentially cutting off the island from communications. A storm surge of five to seven feet occurred at Saint Croix. The only rain gauge left operating, at Caneel Bay, indicated 9.40 inches in 24 hours. Hurricane Hugo claimed the lives of three persons at Saint Croix, and caused more than 500 million dollars damage. A ship, Nightcap, in the harbor of Culebra, measured wind gusts as high as 170 mph. A cold front brought high winds to the Great Basin and the Rocky Mountain Region, and thunderstorms along the cold front produced wind gusts to 66 mph at Yellowstone Park WY. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2004 — The remnants of Hurricane Ivan submerged Pittsburgh in 5.95 inches of rain in one day. That is the most rainfall Pittsburgh has seen in a 24-hour period since records began in 1876.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 24 of 73

 In Touch Ministries®

Daily Devotion

We Can't Obey on Our Terms

True obedience requires complete surrender without any attempt to find a compromise.

1 Samuel 15:17-23: 17 Samuel said, "Is it not true, though you were little in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel? And the LORD anointed you king over Israel,

18 and the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are exterminated.'

19 "Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD, but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the LORD?"

20 Then Saul said to Samuel, "I did obey the voice of the LORD, and went on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.

21 "But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal."

22 Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.

23 "For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king."

When God calls you to do something, how do you respond? Most of us don't raise a fist at Him and yell, "I won't do it!" Instead, we usually struggle with the idea for a while. Sometimes we argue, telling Him all the reasons why it won't work. Or we could react like Jonah and simply run the other direction (Jonah 1:2-3).

However, there's another response that is often so subtle we don't even recognize it as disobedience. Substituting our plan for God's is a way to appear obedient while quietly avoiding what He's actually asked. That's how King Saul responded to the divine command he'd been given. Saving a few animals to sacrifice to the Lord seemed more reasonable than total obedience—and in Saul's eyes, perhaps even more honoring to God.

His sin seems obvious from the outside, but we make similar substitutions more often than we realize. Maybe God is calling you to serve in a particular way, but because you're afraid, you settle for a less challenging commitment. Sometimes we have so blended our plans with His that we can't differentiate between the two.

We should ask, What am I substituting for obedience? God's plan may be harder than the one we'd choose for ourselves, but it leads to where we need to be (Proverbs 16:9).

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 25 of 73

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 26 of 73



WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.16.26

4 25 30 40 46 4

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT 17 Hrs 54 Mins 31
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.15.26

27 36 43 57 58 16

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$244,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 39
DRAW: Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.16.26

5 22 30 33 50 9

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$4,780,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 54
DRAW: Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.16.26

1 4 21 26 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$59,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 9
DRAW: Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.16.26

16 30 44 64 67 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 38
DRAW: Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.16.26

2 21 24 25 64 7

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$298,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 38
DRAW: Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

UN-backed experts cite possible US war crimes in Iran strikes

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Human rights experts commissioned by the U.N.'s top human rights body say they have found "reasonable grounds" to believe the United States committed war crimes in two strikes in Iran, including on a school in the southern city of Minab.

The international fact-finding mission on Iran says the findings center on a pair of airstrikes that killed at least 178 civilians, including women and children.

At the start of the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran in February, at least one U.S. missile hit the Shajareh Tayyebah school in Minab, according to an Associated Press investigation. There has been no final accounting of what happened. Iranian state media have said 168 people were killed in the strike, most of them children.

"Following the United States and Israeli attacks on 28 February, the mission found reasonable grounds to believe the United States committed the war crime of launching indiscriminate attacks resulting in the loss of life or injury to civilians or damage to civilian objects," the fact-finding team said in a statement.

The Trump administration has yet to directly accept the blame or release findings of a Pentagon investigation into the school bombing.

The U.N.-backed team cited the allegations of war crimes over two strikes — one involving Tomahawk missiles on the "clearly identifiable" school, and another airstrike where precision strike missiles dispersed tungsten pellets over a "clearly identifiable sports complex and residential area" in the southern city of Lamerd, also on Feb. 28.

The U.N.-backed team said 22 civilian men and women were killed. U.S. Central Command has denied responsibility for the strike on Lamerd.

The team also said that killings by state security forces occurred on a "staggering scale" in Iran, and alleged crimes against humanity committed by the Iranian government.

It said civilians were caught between "gross human rights violations and crimes against humanity committed by their own government and the nation's deadly conflict with the United States and Israel."

The fact-finding mission on Iran, chaired by jurist Sara Hossain of Bangladesh, is made of of independent experts and was created in 2022 by the Human Rights Council, the U.N.'s top human rights body.

Bank of England expected to keep interest rates unchanged despite rising inflation

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The Bank of England is expected to keep interest rates unchanged Thursday even though inflation in the United Kingdom has risen to a five-month high as the fallout from the Iran war continues to ratchet up fuel prices.

Economists expect a majority of the nine-member Monetary Policy Committee will want to see more evidence that higher inflation is feeding through into underlying prices and wages and will therefore vote to keep the bank's main rate unchanged at 3.75% for the sixth consecutive meeting — unlike the U.S. Federal Reserve, which raised rates Wednesday for the first time in three years.

David Rees, head of global economics at Schroders, is one of the many economists who think interest rates will be held because the economic backdrop, such as wages and the labor market, remains relatively soft.

"That should limit the extent to which imported price pressures become embedded in domestic wages and prices," he said.

Like other central banks, the inflation outlook will be key for the Bank of England.

Many economists are forecasting inflation to rise from the current annual rate of 3.1%, which is already

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 28 of 73

above the bank's target of 2%, in coming months as households face another increase in their domestic energy bills beginning in October.

As a result, the consensus in financial markets is that interest rates will be raised at one of the next two meetings, either in November or December.

Interest rates in the U.K. had been trending downward from a 15-year high of 5.25% until the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran in late February. The Iran war led to sharp increases in oil and gas prices, partly because the crucial Strait of Hormuz has been largely closed to traffic ever since.

As well as impacting the cost of personal loans and mortgages, the uptick in interest rate expectations is a growing problem for the British government as the servicing of its debt accounts for a higher proportion of its spending.

Carney to address EU Parliament after Trump calls Canada associate membership a possible hostile act

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

STRASBOURG, France (AP) — Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney will address the European Parliament on Thursday after U.S. President Donald Trump suggested that allowing Canada to become an associate EU member could be a "hostile act."

Trump's comments raised the stakes for Carney's speech, which will be watched for signs the prime minister may deliver another broadside like his Davos address in January, when he warned that great powers like the United States can use economic dependence to bully smaller ones.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen proposed making Canada the EU's first associate member on Wednesday, a striking overture as Trump's threats drive Ottawa closer to Europe.

Speaking in Charlotte, North Carolina, Trump threatened to respond to the proposed move by imposing more tariffs on the bloc.

Trump conditioned his latest threat on the "intention" of European leaders, saying that, "If it's a good intention, that's fine. If it's a bad intention, we'll put very heavy tariffs on Europe." He also suggested the U.S. could cut off trade with Europe in certain areas.

Trump called the prospect of Canada joining the EU "laughable" and called America's neighbor a "terrible trade partner."

For generations, Canada built its economy around integration with the United States. Trump's tariffs, demands for economic concessions and repeated talk of making Canada the 51st state are now driving Ottawa to reduce that dependence and seek a deeper economic, security and political relationship across the Atlantic.

Europe offers Canada another path

Von der Leyen proposed making Canada the EU's first associate member — a status that does not currently exist in the bloc's treaties and would have to be created. She said Europe wants to take its relationship with Canada to "the highest level possible."

Carney, sitting in the front row of the European Parliament chamber, nodded and rose to embrace von der Leyen as lawmakers gave the proposal a standing ovation.

This time, Europe is offering Canada another path.

Von der Leyen said Canada and the EU should move beyond their existing free trade agreement and create an "Alliance for the Future" encompassing a "common prosperity and economic security space."

Carney will host EU leaders for a Canada-EU summit in Montreal on Oct. 29-30, where the two sides are expected to discuss the proposed new relationship in more detail.

Canada sends roughly 70% of its exports to the United States, making it highly exposed to Trump's tariffs. Ottawa has retaliated and rejected demands Carney says threaten Canadian sovereignty. Europe took a different path, shelving retaliation and accepting tariffs of up to 15% on most EU exports to the U.S.

Carney brings his Davos warning to the EU Parliament

Carney has repeatedly urged middle powers to resist that kind of economic coercion. At the World Eco-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 29 of 73

conomic Forum in Davos in January, he warned that when countries negotiate alone with a dominant power, "we negotiate from weakness. We accept what is offered."

Trump rebuked him the next day, and Thursday's speech could further strain the relationship.

Jonathan Wilkinson, Canada's ambassador-designate to the EU, said Wednesday that Canada is not seeking full EU membership because that would require surrendering some sovereignty. Instead, Ottawa wants "to get as close as we possibly can" to Europe while increasing Canada's independence.

Exactly what associate membership would mean remains to be negotiated.

Canada has already taken a major step toward European integration. This year it became the first non-European country to join the EU's 150-billion-euro (\$173-billion) SAFE defense procurement program, giving Canadian companies access to joint procurement as Europe increases defense spending.

The two sides have also discussed closer cooperation on energy, critical minerals, artificial intelligence and digital trade.

"The policies and rhetoric of the Trump administration are clearly pushing both Canada and the EU to imagine a world without strong U.S. leadership and to act accordingly," said Daniel Béland, a political-science professor at McGill University in Montreal.

Nelson Wiseman, a professor emeritus at the University of Toronto, said Carney's handling of Trump has heightened European interest in the Canadian leader.

"Carney's shrewdness in dealing with Trump has captured Europe's attention," Wiseman said.

Washington will be watching

Wiseman said Europeans have long regarded Canada as a country that understands the United States particularly well because of their deep economic and political ties. Carney's willingness to resist Trump rather than quickly accept Washington's demands has reinforced that perception, he said.

Béland said Carney may avoid naming Trump on Thursday while leaving little doubt about the target of his broader argument.

"He knows that, beyond Europe, the world will be watching, including the White House," Béland said.

Tens of thousands flee as Iran-backed rebels draw Yemen into the wider war

By FATMA KHALED Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — As Houthi rebels closed in, Eshraq Abdel Gelil and her husband fled their home, walking through the mountains before catching a ride to a nearby city. Four months pregnant, she feared another miscarriage.

They are among more than 125,000 people who have fled as the Iran-backed rebels have advanced down the Red Sea coast to a key maritime chokepoint. The offensive, linked to the wider Iran war, has threatened Saudi oil exports, pushed up global fuel prices and rattled markets.

The cost has been far greater for Yemenis caught in the crossfire. Many have fled their homes with only what they could carry. The Arab world's poorest country was pushed to the brink of famine in an earlier phase of the civil war, which killed an estimated 150,000 people.

A Saudi-led blockade, along with the Houthis' repressive rule and detention of U.N. and aid workers, has made life miserable in the now-expanding territory under rebel control. Yemen's Saudi-backed government, weak and fragmented, has struggled to push them back.

Yemenis describe a harrowing flight from the front lines

Abdel Gelil is now sheltering with family in the southwestern city of Taiz, while others are sleeping in the streets or erecting makeshift tents out of plastic.

Her husband, Mohamed Thabet, said the latest fighting was "extremely fierce" and more intense than a battle in 2017 that had also forced him to flee. "There was shelling and shrapnel near the house," he said.

They walked for 5 kilometers (3 miles) before taking a vehicle for around 60 kilometers (37 miles) on mountain roads.

When they arrived in Taiz, a doctor told them that the baby had moved lower in the womb. Abdel Gelil

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 30 of 73

miscarried at the same point in a previous pregnancy.

"My wife cried from the shock and was very fearful," Thabet said.

Now they are packed into a home with extended family. They can only afford to eat twice a day, and they worry that Abdel Gelil is not getting enough nutrients for her and the baby.

Thabet also worries about his sister, who hasn't been able to afford her diabetes medication for over a month. She and her two daughters, 8 and 13, have a blood condition that makes them susceptible to anemia, he said.

The renewed fighting is linked to the unresolved Iran war

The civil war dates back to 2014, when the Houthis seized much of northern Yemen, including the capital, Sanaa. Saudi Arabia intervened the following year in support of Yemen's internationally recognized government. A 2022 ceasefire largely halted the fighting.

Hostilities erupted again in July, when the Houthis renewed attacks on Saudi Arabia in what the rebels said was an attempt to lift the blockade. The attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil industry came as the U.S. was having some success in reopening the Strait of Hormuz.

The fighting in Yemen has killed eight civilians and wounded another 32, according to the U.N. humanitarian office, which says an estimated 125,000 people have fled their homes. The U.N. children's agency, known as UNICEF, says the displaced include more than 57,000 children.

"This is one of the most fast-moving and volatile displacement waves Yemen has seen in years," said Obia Achieng, a UNICEF representative in Yemen. "Families are fleeing with little or no warning, often at night, carrying only what they can grab."

"The situation is particularly concerning because it comes on top of an already severe humanitarian crisis," Achieng added.

There are limited resources for those fleeing

Before the latest fighting, the U.N. had warned that around 5 million Yemenis were experiencing "crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity."

Milena Murr, of Prosper Global, a humanitarian group previously known as Mercy Corps, said some people arriving in Taiz had walked for over 16 hours, arriving at displacement camps exhausted, dehydrated and with some of the children appearing malnourished.

Iman Abdullahi, country director for CARE, another aid group, said there's an urgent need for food, maternal and newborn healthcare, hygiene supplies, private latrines and mental health support.

"One woman had to wash her only clothes and remain inside her tent until they dried because she had nothing else to wear. Another was forced to flee just two weeks after giving birth," he said.

Nashwan Ahmed Said was stitching together a tent from plastic wheat sacks. He said this is the third time he's been displaced since the start of the war.

"We are in such a state! We have no home, no toilet, no food and nothing to drink," he said.

Arwa Ahmed, who was displaced with her five children, said she and her family ate nothing but rice for days.

"We need everything. We need tents, we need food and all the essentials, because we were displaced and took nothing with us," she said.

Russian barrage of missiles and drones on Ukraine injures at least 19, including children

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A Russian barrage of missiles and drones targeting Ukraine's capital and the surrounding region injured at least 19 people overnight and into Thursday morning, authorities said.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukrainian forces carried out overnight strikes against targets in Russia, including an oil refinery in Yaroslavl and a military airfield in the Rostov region.

Peace efforts to end Russia's 4 1/2-year full-scale invasion have stalled, with the issue of territorial concessions in eastern Ukraine among the central sticking points. Successive rounds of U.S.-brokered talks have failed to produce a breakthrough. Ukraine is also seeking security guarantees from partners for a deal.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 31 of 73

The Kyiv City Military Administration said the attacks were recorded at more than 10 locations in the city while 33 sites were damaged in the wider region. A 10-year-old girl and a 12-year-old boy were among the injured, the administration said in a statement on Telegram.

Ukraine's air force said it destroyed or suppressed 131 Russian aerial targets during the overnight attack in the Kyiv, Zaporizhzhia and Odesa regions. The attack involved ballistic and cruise missiles as well as drones and decoys.

Russia's Defense Ministry said the military hit metallurgical and electronics plants, factories of the military-industrial complex and energy and transport facilities. It said that three bulk carriers and a ferry carrying supplies for the Ukrainian military were hit in the port of Chornomorsk.

Zelenskyy said the operation against the Yaroslavl Oil Refinery was conducted jointly by Ukraine's Security Service, special operations forces, military intelligence and the Foreign Intelligence Service.

He said wrote on Telegram that the security service struck a military airfield in Rostov, damaging an An-12 aircraft, two An-26s and three helicopters.

In Odesa, seven people were injured, including two children, according to Ukraine's State Emergency Service. Apartments on the 14th through 16th floors of a residential building were damaged. A private residential building in Odesa was also destroyed and others damaged.

Asian stocks are mixed after Wall Street slips following Fed's rate hike decision

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Asian shares were mixed on Thursday after Wall Street closed lower following the Federal Reserve's interest rate hike decision for the first time in three years.

U.S. futures were higher.

The quarter of a percentage point increase brings the Fed's key rate to a target range of 3.75%-4.00%, as it attempts to control U.S. inflation that's been stubbornly above its target.

Japan's Nikkei 225 index gained 0.3% at 64,136.25. South Korea's Kospi edged down less than 0.1% to 6,715.41. The Hong Kong Hang Seng fell 0.6% to 24,569.40, while the Shanghai Composite index lost 0.4% to 3,875.60.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 climbed 0.4% to 8,732.40.

Taiwan's Taix jumped 1%, while India's Sensex edged up 0.3%.

On Wednesday, Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 dropped 0.5%. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 1.2%, and the technology-heavy Nasdaq composite was mostly unchanged.

Market reactions were "pretty much expected since the rate rise was also in line with market expectation," said Lorraine Tan, director of equity research for Asia at Morningstar on Thursday, but the ongoing Iran war is likely to keep pressure on inflation.

Following the Fed's announcements, the two-year U.S. Treasury yield rose to 4.69% compared to around 4.67% late Tuesday. The yield on the 10-year Treasury remained at near 5.00% at an elevated level.

Government bond yields have remained higher since the war as the war-driven energy shock adds to inflationary pressure while investors also worry about growing U.S. national debt.

The U.S. dollar fell early Thursday to 155.67 Japanese yen from 156.26 yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1478, up from \$1.1465.

Oil prices fell. There are still limited oil flows in the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway crucial for global oil transport, and as Saudi Arabia's closure of a key oil pipeline adds to oil supply pressure as it moves to repair the pipeline.

Brent crude, the international standard, traded 1.7% lower at \$104.01 a barrel early Thursday, but still well above the around \$72 per barrel in late February before the war.

OpenAI flags concerning new AI behavior and vows to track it more closely

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

OpenAI has disclosed six reports of "unexpected or concerning" behavior in artificial-intelligence models as the debate on AI safety becomes increasingly heated.

The AI company also said Wednesday it was introducing a new framework for tracking, probing and disclosing instances of what it called "misalignment," including where AI models acted without authorization, coordinated with other models or evaded oversight.

OpenAI's latest announcement came as U.S. AI bosses, including OpenAI and Anthropic, are calling for a slowdown in the technology's development over safety concerns.

Among the new cases reported by OpenAI, an unreleased research model inserted "jailbreak-like instructions" into its own notes to disregard its normal constraints and told itself to be "freed from the roles and identities that bind other chatbots."

In another instance, an AI "agent" uploaded files to the internet to obtain a browser citation without asking the user.

The six reports were discovered during training or evaluation over the past months, OpenAI said.

"As AI systems grow more advanced and more widely deployed, we need to build a broader and better-informed consensus on the progress of alignment research," OpenAI wrote in a blog post as it disclosed the events.

"Decisions about how AI development should proceed in the months and years to come need to draw on evidence that people outside the companies building frontier models can examine for themselves," the company said.

Wednesday's new cases followed OpenAI's disclosure in July that its rogue AI system hacked into AI startup Hugging Face. Anthropic also said the same month that its AI models hacked into three organizations during testing.

AI "agents" are becoming smarter and have become "more determined to resolve complex tasks through inter-agent collaboration, knowledge sharing, deception, and concealment," said Lian Jye Su, a chief analyst at technology research and advisory group Omdia.

That's making it harder to govern and contain them using traditional AI security approaches, he said.

OpenAI's new tracking and disclosure framework, meanwhile, can help push for other AI developers to also adopt similar practices.

"That said, the process remains internal and voluntary, but is a step in the right direction," Su added.

Russia's wartime parliamentary election is set to secure the Kremlin's power

By The Associated Press undefined

It's a challenging time for Russia to hold a parliamentary election, even one whose outcome is all but assured.

The economic and political climate has been seriously affected by 4½ years of full-fledged war with Ukraine. Swarms of enemy drones have inflicted massive damage on Russian oil refineries and logistical facilities. The public, which no longer sees the fighting as something distant, is increasingly nervous.

United Russia, the main Kremlin party, is poised to keep its overwhelming grip on the State Duma alongside a few other parties that vote in sync with President Vladimir Putin's wishes. Still, authorities have tightened control over the first wartime balloting for the lower chamber of parliament since the 2022 invasion.

The Kremlin stifled even the slightest signs of dissent before three days of voting that begin Friday. The only party that dared to criticize the war was unceremoniously removed from the ballot, and a few anti-war politicians have been imprisoned or forced to flee abroad.

With the result predetermined and Putin's political dominance under no immediate threat, analysts say

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 33 of 73

the Kremlin sees the election as a key effort to mobilize public support for the war and legitimize its action.

"Your choice and resolve will once again demonstrate that millions of people stand behind our fighters, that we are a united people, bound by shared values, historical memory, and love for the Motherland," Putin said in an address before the vote.

Economic damage mounts from summer attacks

A summer marked by Ukraine's long-range drone strikes brought the war home for millions of Russians for the first time.

The attacks exacerbated problems for the Russian economy, which has plunged into stagnation as the initial boost from massive military spending has waned. The government raised taxes and increased domestic borrowing to keep the growing budget deficit under control.

Strikes on Russian oil refineries sparked a severe fuel crisis that peaked in June, eased for a few weeks and then returned in August.

Adding to the pain was a series of attacks on warehouses belonging to online retailers Wildberries and Ozon. Hundreds of thousands of individual sellers lost their merchandise, sending a shock wave through the economy.

All this dampened the public mood. Polls recorded a dip in Putin's approval ratings, even though they remained high, with the independent Levada Center showing it at 76% in August, down from 87% in September 2025.

Even some senior members of Russia's elite openly expressed discontent.

Andrei Klepach, chief economist of the state VEB.RF bank, warned of possible internal turmoil in Russia.

"We won't win the competition in this war of attrition," he said at a seminar. "Our costs are mounting. I'm almost sure that we will come to face a social crisis."

Klepach was dismissed the day after his comments were published.

Putin doesn't budge on his war goals

Putin acknowledged the strikes on oil refineries and logistical hubs inflicted significant damage but insisted the economy can weather it. By striking such infrastructure, he said Ukraine opened a "Pandora's box," inviting massive retaliation.

Russia intensified attacks on Kyiv and other cities with missiles and new jet-powered drones, exploiting Ukraine's shortage of defensive interceptors. Moscow also dramatically stepped up its barrage on Odesa and other Black Sea ports, disrupting Ukrainian exports of grain and other agricultural products, a key source of revenue.

As the problems caused by Ukraine's attacks spread across Russia, fears mounted that the Kremlin was mulling a massive mobilization.

A partial mobilization of 300,000 reservists in 2022 prompted hundreds of thousands of Russians to flee the country, undermining domestic stability. Since then, the Kremlin has relied on volunteers to fight, offering comparatively high wages and other benefits. Military experts warned, however, that the flow of volunteers has ebbed while massive losses have continued.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy repeatedly claims the Kremlin is considering a postelection mobilization, which Putin dismisses as "nonsense."

At a Sept. 5 Kremlin meeting with U.S. envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner and a subsequent call with President Donald Trump, Putin said Russia holds the upper hand on the battlefield, signaling he will keep his maximalist demands for striking a peace deal.

Anti-war forces silenced

In July, the Central Election Commission cleared 11 parties for the parliamentary ballot, including Yabloko, the only registered political party to openly criticize the war.

Weeks later, however, the country's Supreme Court removed Yabloko from the ballot. It was acting on an appeal from the nationalist Motherland party that called liberal Yabloko's anti-war stance akin to seeking the violation of Russia's territorial integrity.

Kremlin-watchers described the move as an apparent sign of infighting between elements of the govern-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 34 of 73

ment who wanted a semblance of competition to increase voter turnout, and those who feared Yabloko's presence could bring open criticism of the war and political instability.

"The risks that the campaign would turn into a struggle for and against peace — that is, a dispute about the war — were quite high, and this clearly was not part of the plan," said Tatyana Stanovaya of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center.

Maxim Kruglov, a deputy chairman of Yabloko and former member of Moscow's city council, was convicted in June of spreading false information about the Russian army and sentenced to seven years in prison.

Last month, a court in the Pskov region convicted Yabloko member Lev Shlosberg of speaking out against the war and sentenced him to over 11 years in prison.

Following Yabloko's removal from the ballot, authorities have methodically barred its individual members from running in most of its single-constituency races for the Duma and regional legislatures.

Liberal politician and war critic Boris Nadezhdin, who tried to challenge Putin in the 2024 presidential election, left Russia last month, fearing imprisonment after he was designated as a "foreign agent," barred from seeking office, and fined for displaying "extremist symbols."

The main Kremlin party is poised to retain dominance

United Russia, which controls over two-thirds of parliament's 450 seats, is set to maintain its dominance of the lower house despite public fatigue with the war and the worsening economy. Some Russian reports indicate the Kremlin has slightly lowered its target for United Russia but expects it to retain full control in parliament.

"United Russia may be allowed to slip a little ... to bring its actual sort of declared results more in line with probably its real results," said analyst Mark Galeotti, who heads the Mayak Intelligence consultancy, adding that the Kremlin will ensure it "is still absolutely dominant within the Duma."

One purpose of the elections is showing they are "legitimizing rituals to give the impression that mass consensus is behind the Kremlin," he said.

Other members of the "systemic opposition" — the Communist Party, the Liberal-Democratic Party and A Just Russia Party, which all follow Putin's course and strongly support the war — are expected to retain their presence in the Duma.

While Ukraine's attacks have fueled broad anxiety, they also could bring a demand for a tougher response against Kyiv, "as long as they don't have to be involved in it," Galeotti said in a podcast.

Chris Weafer, CEO of the Macro-Advisory Ltd., said that while Ukraine's attacks have affected public morale, there's no immediate threat to the Kremlin's political domination.

"There has been a 'rally around the flag' anyway since the start of conflict and the opinion polls consistently show the very high level of support," he said.

While the results are predetermined, "the public narrative and particularly the turnout" is what's important to the Kremlin to claim broad public support for its action, Weafer added.

A global AI safety strategy depends on US-China cooperation. They each see the other as the problem

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — As concern rises over the risks of artificial intelligence, hopes for any kind of global approach depend on cooperation between the U.S. and China — superpowers that seem only to be more skeptical of each other's AI strategy.

AI governance is expected to be on the agenda in a meeting planned for next week in Washington between President Donald Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping. The topic has gained urgency in both countries, with American tech leaders saying that averting worst-case scenarios for rogue AI depends on a degree of cooperation with China.

But both countries are vying for a decisive advantage on AI, with Trump warning that any efforts to regulate the technology would help China. That sets up a meeting in which any agreements might be superficial but a possible start to something larger.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 35 of 73

"A formal agreement or consensus may be near impossible, but they do not need to go that far," said Samm Sacks, a senior fellow at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies' Institute for America, China, and the Future of Global Affairs. "Trump and Xi just need to create political space by acknowledging AI poses risks to both countries."

China and the US are increasingly at odds on AI

Trump has pushed back on calls to strengthen regulation of the technology, claiming that doing so could cause China to eclipse America on AI. He has repeatedly declared that the nation that leads on the technology "wins."

"We are leading China, and all others," Trump said Monday on social media.

The two countries are moving the technology forward in different ways. U.S. companies are chasing AI frontiers with computing power supported by cutting-edge chips and the country's rapidly expanding data center infrastructure. China is pursuing wide global adoption of its open-source, more affordable models.

Chinese AI models have made major advances and gained traction with American companies even as U.S.-led restrictions bar China from getting the world's most advanced AI chips. While most American frontier models are closed-source, with their design elements kept secret, U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Tuesday the U.S. needs to develop more open-source models to counter China.

The U.S. has accused China of "aggressive, malicious" efforts to extract capabilities from American AI systems. China has hit back, accusing the U.S. of trying to suppress Chinese companies so it can build a "monopoly of the AI industry."

It's unclear whether the relationship between Trump and Xi is strong enough to overcome those differences. But those with ties to the Chinese government see coordination on AI as helpful.

At an annual security and defense conference in Beijing, Cui Tiankai, a former Chinese ambassador to the U.S., said Tuesday that AI is an area where "we should go ahead and build up" dialogue between Beijing and Washington. "Because there is a need, a growing need, for cooperation," he told the Xiangshan Forum. "So how can we manage the balance?"

American AI leaders call for keeping China in check — and cooperating with China

Two leading American AI companies, Anthropic and OpenAI, each restrict access in China and have said the U.S. has a national security imperative to protect its lead on AI technology. But they also have called for cooperation with China to manage safety.

In his essay last weekend calling for a slowdown of AI development for safety reasons, Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei said the U.S. should slow China's progress, including keeping up U.S. restrictions on China's purchases of the world's most advanced AI chips.

He also added, however, that "global pacing will require cooperation with China, the autocratic country with by far the most advanced AI capabilities."

His essay quickly drew criticism from Beijing, with China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs saying on Monday that "fearmongering, confrontation and vicious competition will only disrupt the process of global AI governance which serves no one's interest."

China's state-run Global Times newspaper went further, calling his remarks "packed with containment provisions targeting China and is, in essence, a 'Cold War playbook' for the AI sector."

Trump has consulted with Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang, even calling the maker of the world's most advanced computer chips in the middle of a Monday podcast interview. Nvidia has generally favored some chip exports to China as a way to create an American ecosystem for the technology and a more open relationship on AI given the number of researchers in China.

Both countries have been alarmed by emerging AI capabilities

In both the U.S. and China, AI's increasingly powerful capabilities have alarmed top officials and policymakers.

The head of China's Ministry of State Security, its spy agency, warned in an article Sunday that AI poses many threats to the country, from political and ideological security to cyberattacks.

In the article, Chen Yixin argued that AI could threaten China's political and ideological security if used

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 36 of 73

by those “with ulterior motives,” while singling out Anthropic’s and OpenAI’s powerful AI models. It said they could be used to “weaponize” cybersecurity vulnerabilities and threaten China’s critical information infrastructure.

Several other recent AI-related events were also causing concern in China when it comes to AI governance. That includes a U.S. security firm’s recent discovery of AI vulnerabilities in WeChat, China’s key messaging app that also offers payment services among other functions, said Paul Triolo, a partner at DGA-Albright Stonebridge Group.

While Chinese officials said after Trump’s Beijing summit with Xi in mid-May that China and the United States had agreed to pursue dialogue on AI development and governance, little progress has been made.

Neither China nor the U.S. “can simply seal itself off from the other,” said Lizzi C. Lee, a fellow at the Asia Society Policy Institute’s Center for China Analysis. She said the two governments have mutual interests in setting up guardrails for human control of AI. “We already know that neither government is going to abandon its competitive AI strategy or pursuit of technological advantage.”

At the same time, China and the U.S. have been working to form AI alliances with like-minded nations.

In July, China launched the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization, a group with 29 initial founding member countries, including Russia and Pakistan, meant to promote global AI governance. This month, China’s Xi has called on BRICS member countries to accelerate the setting up of a global AI governance framework and establish an open-source AI community.

Some political observers saw the China-led organization as a response to the U.S.-led Pax Silica initiative, which launched last year focusing on strengthening collaboration with countries including Japan, the U.K. and Australia on AI supply chains.

Asked about his expectations on AI from the Trump-Xi meeting on AI in an interview with CBS’ “Face the Nation,” Amodei said “the more long-term thing would be working together to put a speed limit on the rate of AI progress.” But he said it likely would be very difficult.

In the run-up to the Trump-Xi meeting, a recent social media post by Yuyuantantian, a Chinese state media-linked account, was similarly circumspect.

“Only after the United States first demonstrates that the safety rules are equally effective for its own model companies can substantive discussions between the U.S. and China take place,” the post said.

LA news helicopter crashed in birthplace (and, arguably, epicenter) of ‘eye-in-the-sky’ reporting

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

Los Angeles has been viewed from above by news helicopters for nearly seven decades. When there was a wildfire, a mudslide or O.J. Simpson fleeing the police across its ribbons of highway, an “eye in the sky” tracked it and advised millions how to keep out of harm’s way.

On Tuesday, one of those flying newsrooms crashed live on-air and burst into flames, killing three people while reporters were covering the collision of an SUV and a city bus. NBC4 Los Angeles reported that two people aboard the helicopter — Eliana Moreno and pilot George Marciniw — were killed, and fire officials said another person, Edy Gutierrez Mejia, died on the ground. It was a horrifying addition to at least eight fatal crashes involving news helicopters in the U.S. since 2000, in which 16 people have been killed.

Moreno, known widely as “Eli in the Heli,” had been an aerial journalist since 2010, mastering a demanding form of reporting that requires editing, shooting video, intimate knowledge of a city — and quick thinking.

“After working 76 hours since Sunday, I’m almost done!” she posted to Instagram on Sept. 29, 2023. “I can’t complain though because I have the best job in the world.”

It has been about getting there first

Beaming the news from the sky undeniably provides a public service as the descendant of delivery by horseback, teletype and satellite. It’s also true that the “Telecopter” was born in Los Angeles as a way to beat the competition to the scene, according to its inventor, John Silva, chief engineer for KTLA-TV when it debuted the machine in 1958. News from the air dazzled audiences — and it meant a new era of big

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 37 of 73

money for local television stations.

In a 2002 interview with the Television Academy Foundation, Silva recalled sitting on the freeway, frustrated over reporting on the reporters — press stories about which journalists got to major news scenes first and were thus “the hero.”

“It came to me all of a sudden. ‘How can we beat the competition?’” Silva recalled. “If we could build a news mobile unit in a helicopter we could get over it all, get there first, avoid the traffic, and get to all the stories before anybody in the competition. It’d be a wonderful thing.”

But not an easy one. The project had to stay top secret, The helo had to be chosen and fitted in the sprawling backyard property of a news executive, out of sight of rivals. Silva had to figure out how to shave the 2,000 pounds of camera equipment down to less than 400 pounds. And critically, how to beam the news from the air to a receiving dish on a mountain and ultimately to millions of Angelenos.

Airborne at one point during testing, Silva reportedly inched out on the helicopter’s right skid — with no safety belt — to investigate the cause of intense vibrations shaking the cockpit, according to a 2009 interview with Smithsonian Magazine.

At 6:30 p.m. on July 24, 1958, KTLA preempted regular programming to broadcast the view from above the City of Angels. The station raked in record amounts of advertising, with Procter & Gamble spending \$250,000 to sponsor “Telecopter” coverage, the magazine reported.

“It broadened what news could do, just like the live camera on the ground,” Stan Chambers, then a KTLA news correspondent, told the same foundation. Until then, he said, “television news was not that important to a lot of decision-makers. Then the helicopter really captivated everybody.”

Silva won two Emmy awards for his invention.

It offered dazzling coverage, but tragedy, too

News from the air punctuated a giddy era of television journalism that was increasingly striving for live, real-time reports. Americans were riveted to reports on the L.A. riots in 1992 and the two-hour police chase of O.J. Simpson’s white Ford Bronco two years later. Together, the two events did much to confirm the allure of live crisis coverage from the air.

In 1977, a KNBC news helicopter crashed when it ran out of fuel while returning to the station after covering a wildfire in Santa Barbara, killing the pilot and camera operator. Nine years later, a helicopter flying a radio traffic reporter over the city for a live rush-hour broadcast plunged into the Hudson River, killing her and critically injuring the pilot. The reporter, WNBC Radio’s Jane Dornacker, could be heard screaming, “Hit the water!” as the helicopter went down.

And in 2007, two news helicopters covering a police chase on live television collided and crashed, killing all four people on board in a plunge that viewers saw as a jumble of spinning, broken images. The NTSB said that crash happened because two of the pilots who were pulling double duty as reporters were distracted by the chase on the ground.

Tammy Rose, a longtime journalist for more than 20 years, was at KPNX in Phoenix in 2007 when the two television helicopters collided and has survived some harrowing incidents. But, she told The Associated Press in an interview Wednesday, journalists and pilots follow strict protocols to manage the risks.

In Phoenix after the crash, all five news stations agreed to share the same news helicopter. And the company she works for in Houston, Helicopters Inc., wants its pilots to stay above 500 feet so they will have some altitude to work with in case of a problem like an engine failure.

“A news helicopter is more than a flying camera,” said Rose, who reports now for ABC-13 in Houston and says her passion keeps her flying. “As a reporter aboard the aircraft, I could see the larger scene, communicate with the newsroom, gather information and report live while events were unfolding.”

‘The eyes and ears in the sky’ for two newsrooms

NBC4 reported Wednesday that Moreno and Marciniw were known as “the eyes and ears in the sky” for two newsrooms — NBCLA and Telemundo 52 — and logged hundreds of hours together since they began working together in 2023. Marciniw is believed to have had more than 30 years of flight experience and was respected in the industry, NBC4 reported.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 38 of 73

Esteban Jimenez, a fellow helicopter pilot, told the channel that he had known Marciniw since the 1990s and that the two had talked recently about retirement.

Moreno stood in awe of the breadth of subjects the team could report — and she seemed to do everything except fly the helicopter. “I’m not just a photographer or reporter or editor, I’m actually doing all three things at the same time,” she told her alma mater, Chapman University.

In a social media posting from Whiteman Airport on July 31, she said any kind of spot news was fair game, but the brush fires that plague Southern California were critical. “It’s really one of the best stories to cover from the helicopter, because the helicopter is able to show here’s where the fire started, here’s where it’s going, these are the homes that are threatened.”

“It just goes to show the power that we have from being the eye in the sky.”

Climate change made deadly Nepal glacier and rock collapse more likely, according to analysis

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — Human-caused global warming thinned glaciers and thawed mountain permafrost, likely helping to destabilize the Himalayan slope that collapsed last month and unleashed catastrophic flooding across Nepal, according to a report released Thursday.

The report by the World Weather Attribution cautioned that climate change was not the sole cause of the Aug. 26 disaster. A large 2015 Nepal earthquake may have weakened the rock years before the collapse, their analysis found.

“This disaster was not an extreme weather event, but the fingerprints of climate change are still clear to see in long-term changes,” said Ben Clarke, a climate researcher at Imperial College London who worked on the analysis, in a press statement.

More than 1,300 people were killed and over 5,000 remain missing after a massive section of rock and overlying glacier collapsed near Nepal’s border with China. The resulting torrent of water, ice, boulders and sediment swept through communities along the Trishuli River corridor and caused billions of dollars in damage.

Climate scientists said that across the Himalayas rising temperatures are causing glaciers to retreat and thawing permanently frozen ground that helps bind fractured mountain rock together. That means climate change can alter not only weather hazards such as heat and heavy rain, but the stability of the mountains themselves — threatening communities concentrated in narrow river valleys below.

The analysis did not determine whether the collapse would have happened without climate change, caused mainly by the release of greenhouse gases when fuels like oil, gas and coal are burned. However, researchers concluded that warming intensified several processes that made the slope less stable over decades.

Global warming weakens high mountain slopes

The report found that one of the clearest changes directly linked to climate change was the rising elevation of the freezing threshold.

The report found that warming had pushed the altitude at which ground remains consistently frozen upward by roughly 100 meters (328 feet) per decade. This exposes rock at increasingly high elevations to longer periods above freezing, thawing permafrost and causing cracks within the ice, ultimately weakening the rock face under the ice.

Jakob Steiner, a geoscientist at the University of Graz who has worked in the Himalayan region since 2006 but is not an author of Thursday’s report, said monitoring instruments around 5,000 meters (16,404 feet) now show that some rock and ground no longer remain frozen throughout the year.

“This means that the ground that was sitting below ice for hundreds and thousands of years is now becoming exposed,” said Steiner.

The report found that glacier retreat was another destabilizing force.

Glaciers in the region have been losing mass for decades at a rate equivalent to more than half a meter

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 39 of 73

(about 1.6 feet) of thinning each year, the report found. The Langtang Lirung glacier, located in the region where the disaster occurred last month, has retreated about half a kilometer (0.3 miles) since the 1990s, exposing rock once covered by ice.

The Himalayan region contains the largest volume of snow and ice outside the polar regions. More than 63,000 glaciers in the area feed at least 10 major Asian river systems and support the food, water, energy and livelihood security of billions of people. However, various studies have found that around 78% of the glacier area, located between 4,500 and 6,000 meters (14,763 to 19,685 feet) above sea level, is highly exposed to warming. United Nations reports have found that between 2000 and 2019, glaciers lost 267 billion tons of ice per year, roughly equivalent to the mass of 46,500 Great Pyramids of Giza.

As glaciers shrink, they can remove pressure that helped support adjoining rock walls, while producing additional meltwater.

The weeks before the Aug. 26 collapse were also unusually warm. July and August 2026 were the warmest such months recorded locally, according to the analysis.

"Other than the potential geological factors like earthquakes that are weakening the bedrock, all these other factors are made worse by human-induced climate change," said Friederike Otto, climate scientist at Imperial College London and one of the report's authors.

Disaster exposes limits of adaptation

The report said the catastrophe also demonstrates how some climate-related risks in the world's highest mountains may exceed the protection that early warning systems and other adaptation measures can provide.

Nepal has developed disaster risk reduction plans and warning systems, but researchers said the size and speed of the collapse overwhelmed those defenses. Unlike a flood caused by rainfall, which can sometimes be forecast hours or days ahead, catastrophic slope failures in remote high mountains can occur suddenly and remain extremely difficult to predict.

Otto, the climate scientist, said that the mountain ecosystem and societies are more vulnerable to climate impacts than those living in the plains. "Small changes in temperatures affect the stability of the land itself," she said.

Better high-altitude monitoring, earth observation and warning systems could reduce some risks, the report said. But researchers warned there are limits to adaptation in Himalayan valleys where settlements, roads, hydropower projects and other infrastructure are concentrated along rivers.

Since glaciers and permafrost respond to temperature changes over decades, some mountain destabilization caused by warming has already been set in motion, said the report.

"The most important thing to minimize the risk in this region is to rapidly stop using fossil fuels that lead to increasing global temperatures," said Otto. "All these drivers that we've talked about, permafrost melting, glacial melting, etc., will just become worse. And that means that events like this become more frequent."

Driver arrested in a bus collision that happened before a deadly news helicopter crash in LA

By JAIMIE DING, HALLIE GOLDEN and DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A motorist was arrested on murder charges after authorities say she slammed her SUV into a city bus in Los Angeles, killing at least two people and injuring six others in a prelude to a second deadly tragedy: the fiery crash of a TV news helicopter that was covering the collision.

Bailee Lynn Rios, 36, of Simi Valley, was arrested Tuesday night and was being held at a Los Angeles jail with bail set at \$4 million, police said Wednesday. The case is under review by the district attorney's office, which will decide whether to file the charges in court or pursue different ones. Information on a lawyer who could speak on her behalf was not immediately available.

The helicopter, which was used by NBC and Telemundo, crashed about two hours after police say Rios drove her 2004 Ford Expedition the wrong way down a busy avenue, ran a red light and struck a vehicle

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 40 of 73

before hitting the bus. One passenger was fully ejected from the bus and another was partially ejected, police said.

Rios' mother, Cindy Rios, said she was shocked and saddened by the string of events. She said she had not spoken to Bailee Lynn since her arrest and had not been contacted by law enforcement.

"The fact that my daughter was involved and was the cause of it is just extremely disturbing," Cindy Rios told The Associated Press in a phone interview Wednesday. "If anything, I'm sorry for the other families ... My daughter's alive. People lost their lives."

The two people who died in the bus crash were identified as Daniel Castillo, 46, of Los Angeles, and Gage Weida, 31. No city was given for Weida, but according to his Facebook page, he also lived in LA.

Castillo's youngest daughter, Johaunna, said her father's presence made people feel loved, welcomed and cared for. He is survived by his four children.

"There are no words that can truly capture how much we will miss him or the space he leaves behind in our lives," Johaunna Castillo wrote on a fundraising page for funeral expenses.

Chopper crash killed a reporter, a pilot and a man on the ground

NBC4 Los Angeles reported that two people aboard the helicopter — reporter Eliana Moreno and pilot George Marciniw — were killed when the chopper went down Tuesday in the Chatsworth neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley.

A person on the ground, identified as 29-year-old Edy Gutierrez Mejia, died in a parking lot. He was from Guatemala, the country's consulate confirmed.

The crash happened as news crews were reporting on the collision involving the SUV that slammed into the bus.

There were no immediate details on what caused the helicopter crash, but an alarm could be heard sounding inside the helicopter's cockpit as it lost altitude in the final seconds of video the crew broadcast before the crash.

Just after the beeping noise starts, a woman's voice says "uh oh." The helicopter moves quickly away from the bus crash site and starts losing altitude. The woman says "You can't pull up?" before the video stops as the chopper nears the ground.

"That video is probably the most important evidence that we have discovered so far," National Transportation Safety Board investigator Fabian Salazar said Wednesday at a news briefing.

Salazar said the sounds were consistent with the helicopter's engine changing speed, as well as what he said were likely advisory tones for the pilot. The NTSB said it is also investigating the bus collision.

The helicopter, a Eurocopter AS350, went down near a large storage facility. At least four cars and two storage containers burned after the helicopter caught fire.

Anchor and reporters pay tearful tributes to deceased colleagues

Moreno was a familiar voice for NBC4 and Telemundo 52 during the station's aerial coverage. She and Marciniw were both employees of Angel City Air, which operated the chopper for the station.

Moreno, born in Orange County, joined Angel City Air in 2010, the same year she earned a broadcast journalism and political science degree from Chapman University. She reported for several news outlets and began flying with Marciniw in 2023, the NBC4 website said.

Marciniw grew up in Southern California and graduated from Burbank High School in 1974.

"I think a lot of us are still trying to process what happened, this terrible loss," NBC4 reporter Lauren Coronado told viewers early Wednesday as she stood near the crash site. A hazmat crew was cleaning up jet fuel, she said.

In a tribute to Moreno and Marciniw, the newscast referred to them as "the team in the sky," saying Moreno often posted videos from her job and was in awe of the view. Anchor Lynette Romero held a colleague's hand and wiped away tears after hearing Moreno's voice when one of her posts was played.

Jake Asner, who worked with Moreno in 2022 during a four-month internship, said she was a driven journalist.

"She could be listening to six different scanners, be talking to the assignment desk, reporting in English

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 41 of 73

and Spanish and controlling the camera, all at the same time," said Asner, who helped start a memorial near Whiteman Airport, where the chopper was based.

A friend of Marciniw, George Kapoyan, came to lay flowers. Kapoyan remembered him as "a gentle, humble giant" who took all the time he needed to conduct preflight safety checks and was very thorough when communicating with air traffic control.

"You felt very comfortable flying with him," Kapoyan said.

Expert talks about what may have caused the crash

Aviation safety expert Jeff Guzzetti said the alarm sounding in the helicopter's final video sounds like the low rotor RPM warning horn that signals the main rotor is no longer spinning enough to keep the helicopter in the air.

"It just has all the earmarks of a potential loss of engine power and a dangerous decrease in the main rotor speed," said Guzzetti, who used to investigate crashes for both the NTSB and FAA.

Guzzetti said the pilot appeared to be trying to perform an emergency maneuver to use the wind to force the rotor to spin again much like a breeze turns a windmill. Doing that can create a bit of lift that could help cushion the impact, but Guzzetti said there would have been little opportunity to do that because the helicopter had been hovering at a low altitude beforehand.

There are risks to news helicopters particularly in a major city like Los Angeles where multiple helicopters respond to an incident, but the pilots all coordinate closely over the radio to ensure they maintain a safe distance from each other. The industry also shares best practices to help keep these news flights safe.

"It's a very unique form of flying. And the community is very good about lessons learned," Guzzetti said.

Other crashes involving news helicopters

The station said this is the second aviation tragedy in its history.

In 1977, a KNBC news helicopter crashed when it ran out of fuel while returning to the station after covering a wildfire in Santa Barbara, killing the pilot and camera operator.

There have been at least eight fatal crashes involving news helicopters in the U.S. since 2000, killing 16 people, according to a review of federal accident records and news accounts.

They include a 2023 crash in a New Jersey forest that killed the pilot and a photographer aboard a helicopter used by Philadelphia station WPVI and a 2022 crash beside a Charlotte, North Carolina, interstate that killed a pilot and meteorologist during a training flight for WBTV.

A 2007 midair collision in Phoenix of two TV news helicopters that were covering a police chase led the NTSB to recommend that news helicopters have at least two people in the cockpit so the pilot can focus on flying while the reporter focuses on the story.

Fencing goes up around the main Kennedy Center building after Trump-aligned board votes to close it

By MATTHEW DALY and NATHAN ELLGREN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fencing went up Wednesday around the main Kennedy Center building, a day after the Trump-aligned board voted to close most of the performing arts center for repairs. A Democratic congresswoman who is a trustee quickly sought an emergency court hearing to prevent what she called the "unlawful closing."

The board's vote on Tuesday came after a federal judge blocked the institution from returning President Donald Trump's name to the building.

The Republican president had said in a social media post that the closure was needed for safety repairs. But he said the repairs, which Congress has allocated \$257 million to cover, would only happen if the board was permitted to move forward with plans to add his name to the building.

Activists who have opposed the closure said there has been no vehicle or pedestrian access to the building Wednesday. An Associated Press reporter who approached the main building was told by a security guard that it was closed.

Rep. Joyce Beatty, an Ohio Democrat and an ex officio member of the Kennedy Center board, requested

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 42 of 73

an emergency court hearing Wednesday regarding what she called Trump's "unlawful closure of the Kennedy Center." Beatty has led efforts to block Trump's name from being added to the building, and had a verbal confrontation with Trump Tuesday during a virtual board meeting.

U.S. District Judge Christopher Cooper ordered the Kennedy Center to respond to Beatty's motion by Thursday morning, saying he would schedule a prompt hearing if necessary.

Trump, who was named the Kennedy Center's chairman last year by loyalists on the board, said on social media Tuesday that he'd given \$17 million to an endowment intended to support the institution.

Trump, while campaigning for a GOP Senate nominee in North Carolina, said Wednesday that his efforts to restore the aging building deserve recognition, "because frankly, if we don't do that, it's going to close. It'll end up being ripped down. It's in very, very bad shape, very dangerous shape."

A staff member for a legal team representing Beatty was denied entrance to the building on Wednesday, Beatty's lawyers said in a court filing. The staffer "was informed by several security staff members that the building is currently closed to the public," the filing said.

"Given the unexplained and unlawful closure, it is possible Defendants intend to undertake immediate steps in order to make public access practically impossible for the foreseeable future, including by demolishing public avenues of access to the building, and thereby evade the court's order," the filing said.

Laura Bligh, who has attended protests with the advocacy group "Hands Off the Arts," said she feared some or all of the building may be torn down before the legal case is concluded.

"The worst-case scenario is a wrecking ball," she said, adding that the Trump administration can't be trusted because "look what they did to the East Wing."

The administration demolished the East Wing of the White House and is replacing it with a massive ballroom. Trump also plans to build a triumphal arch near Arlington National Cemetery and is eyeing a golf course renovation along the Potomac River.

Judge shoots down Trump requests to add name to building, plaza

The Kennedy Center board voted in August to inscribe his name on the Kennedy Center's facade so it would read "The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Restored and Renovated By President Donald J. Trump." If the Trump Kennedy Center Fund reached \$100 million, another inscription would be added reading "Endowed by the Trump Kennedy Center Fund."

The plaza in front of the Kennedy Center would also be renamed in Trump's honor.

All of those proposals were shot down Tuesday by Cooper, who ruled that nothing could happen "without Congress's blessing."

Cooper ruled in May that the Kennedy Center illegally added Trump's name to the building, ordering it removed. The institution's leaders complied in June but left a tarp and scaffolding in place where Trump's name was once displayed.

Roma Daravi, a spokesperson for the Kennedy Center, did not respond to requests for comment. But she wrote on social media that the building must be closed for safety reasons. A chunk of ceiling fell inside a main hallway of the 55-year-old building earlier this month. The partial collapse intensified calls for renovations.

"Compounding systemic infrastructure failures from decades of neglect have left a crumbling building and safety concerns require an immediate closure of @TKCOfficial main building," she wrote Wednesday on X. "Chairman @realDonaldTrump continues to support this great American institution while legal battles halt the progress to save it."

Maria Shriver, John F. Kennedy's niece and former first lady of California, called the standoff over the name "a sad state of affairs" and a "tragedy."

She said in a post on X that it appears Trump "will not rest until his name is permanently connected to the name of a great president, whose memory this building was dedicated to."

"Imagine spending your days focused on this, while a war rages under your leadership," she added.

Trump and Whatley double down on the administration's record in North Carolina Senate contest

By BILL BARROW, ERIK VERDUZCO and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

GASTONIA, North Carolina (AP) — President Donald Trump tested his midterm campaign appeal Wednesday in North Carolina as he tries to help his handpicked Republican Senate hopeful and former national party chairman Michael Whatley shore up his campaign against Democratic former Gov. Roy Cooper.

The president and Whatley embraced each other — and offered withering attacks on Cooper — in Trump's first campaign rally since his unusual midterm convention in Dallas. The president, despite voter frustrations over the Iran war and his economic leadership, has promised dozens more trips in the coming weeks.

"In this election, I'm asking you to pretend I'm on the ballot just one more time," Trump said.

He also defended his economic leadership, acknowledging that gas prices are "a little higher" because of his war in Iran but argued that "it's a very inexpensive price to pay for what we've done." Stopping Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, he said, would be worth the cost "even if it was a lot more."

Trump's involvement in midterm races creates a balancing act for Republicans like Whatley, who must maximize support from the president's core supporters without alienating other voters who've soured on the administration amid inflation and the Iran war.

Whatley showed no concerns about that on Wednesday, regardless of the president's lagging popularity.

"I am honored that we are going to have the greatest president of our lifetime, Donald J. Trump, here in Gaston County tonight," Whatley said ahead of Trump's arrival at the rally.

Whatley was the president's pick for the Senate race and, before that, Trump's pick to lead the Republican National Committee. Republicans viewed him as a strong recruit to hold the seat being left open by Sen. Thom Tillis, who decided to retire after clashing with the president last year. But Whatley, who is making his first bid for public office, has trailed Cooper in fundraising and polling over the summer showed Cooper with at least a slight lead.

Attorney General Todd Blanche also spoke at the rally, underscoring the White House's priority of helping Whatley. It's the latest example of how Trump's top law enforcement officer has broken with tradition by participating in partisan campaigning.

Democrats have not won a Senate contest in the state since 2008, and Trump carried North Carolina in all three of his presidential campaigns, but the seat is critical to Democrats' effort to flip control of the Senate. Cooper was perhaps Democrats' best recruit this cycle, having never lost a statewide race in North Carolina over four terms as attorney general and two terms as governor, winning both in the same elections in which Trump carried North Carolina.

Trump and Whatley unload on Cooper

The president mocked Democrats' rhetoric about affordability, saying they "made up" the word. Whatley nodded at voters' economic angst but blamed Democrats for the problem.

"When it comes to our economy, and we talk about affordability, we talk about high prices, we talk about the ditch that Roy Cooper and Joe Biden put America in with the economy," Whatley said.

Both Republicans unloaded on Cooper's tenure as governor, with Trump recycling an inaccurate claim to blame Cooper for a grisly North Carolina murder and accusing him of doing nothing to help the state after Hurricane Helene inflicted widespread damage in 2024.

"You've got to remember this, two things, crime and Helene," Trump said.

As he has before, Trump suggested falsely that Cooper was responsible for the 2025 stabbing death of Iryna Zarutka, a 23-year-old who fled Ukraine. The man charged with the crime, Decarlos Brown Jr., had served time in prison and been committed for schizophrenia. But contrary to Trump's claim that "he was released by Cooper," Brown was not freed early under any Cooper policy.

The president also recycled his attacks that Cooper "did nothing" after Helene. Cooper has long rejected that accusation, pointing to the work state and local governments did with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which Trump has since attempted to gut.

When Trump wasn't attacking Cooper, he cast the midterms as a dire national choice if Republicans lose

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 44 of 73

their control on Capitol Hill.

"If we lose, you're going to lose your border, you're going to lose your tax cuts, you're going to lose your wealth," he said, "and our country is going to go through hell."

Whatley needs more than Trump loyalists

Republican pollster Paul Shumaker, who worked on Tillis's and North Carolina Sen. Ted Budd's campaigns, said Trump will energize Republicans who may not be as excited about the campaign as Democrats are. But he noted that registered Democrats and Republicans in North Carolina are split about evenly, while independent voters outnumber both. That cohort of more than 3.5 million voters, he said, is more concerned about the economy, an issue where Trump is weaker than he was in 2024, than with crime or immigration, issues where North Carolina Republicans might still have an advantage over Democrats.

"They see the White House more focused on everything but the economy," Shumaker said. "So that narrative has to change to give them a path here in North Carolina."

Whatley has made some efforts to broaden his appeal.

During a brief speech at the Dallas convention, Whatley promoted Republicans healthcare policies and praised Trump's agenda, especially the tax cuts included in his "big beautiful bill" last year. But instead of lavishing praise on the president himself, he spent most of his time unloading on Cooper.

Democrats focus on the economy and Whatley's problems

Cooper's campaign pushed back against Whatley's criticisms and noted that the Republican has faced scrutiny for recently having a convicted sex offender offer the opening prayer at one of his campaign events.

Whatley, meanwhile, is leaning heavily on Trump and national Republican donors to reach voters on television and online. According to data from AdImpact, which tracks campaign advertising, total Republican spending on the contest has topped \$50 million, while Democrats have spent almost \$35.2 million, with Trump's MAGA Inc. and other conservative PACs accounting for the overall Republican advantage.

Cooper had no public events Wednesday, but the state Democratic Party held a morning news conference to criticize Trump, Whatley and inflation. Speakers noted the Republican nominee's oil and gas investments as the energy sector amasses profits while the Iran war drives up fuel costs. Whatley's personal financial disclosures to the Senate shows that he holds stock in ExxonMobil, Chevron, Shell and other energy firms. A former energy lobbyist, Whatley backs Trump's actions in Iran.

"Why would Whatley back a war that is driving up prices for North Carolina families at a time when it's already too hard for us to get by?" asked state Sen. Woodson Bradley, D-Charlotte. "He's already shown us everything we need to know."

Texas puts to death a man in killing of 3 during home robbery, the state's fifth execution this year

By MICHAEL GRACZYK, KATE BRUMBACK and JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

HUNTSVILLE, Texas (AP) — A man has been put to death for the 2005 fatal shooting of three people during an attempted robbery at his neighbor's home in rural Texas, the state's fifth execution this year.

In Georgia, the execution of a man who killed two real estate agents had also been scheduled for Wednesday but was halted by a judge's late-night decision a day before he was scheduled to die.

LeJames Norman, 40, was put to death by lethal injection Wednesday at the state penitentiary in Huntsville. He'd been sentenced to death in the fatal shootings of Samuel Roberts, 24, Tiffani Peacock, 18, and Celso Lopez, 38, inside the home they shared in Edna, located about 100 miles (161 kilometers) southwest of Houston.

Ker'Sean Ramey was also convicted in the shootings and sentenced to death. His execution is set for next week.

Court records indicated Norman and Ramey believed there was cocaine in the house and hoped to steal it, but they never found any drugs. Norman was arrested about five months after the killings while trying to cross back into the U.S. from Mexico.

Norman pleaded guilty to capital murder, leaving a jury to decide his punishment. The U.S. Supreme

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 45 of 73

Court denied a request on Wednesday from Norman's attorneys to stop his execution.

No last words before execution

Asked by the warden if he wanted to make a final statement, Norman shook his head.

He was laying on a thin mattress atop a steel table, his head on a white pillow. He nodded toward a window through which a sister, two of his children and a friend watched and made eye contact as one of them danced.

As the lethal dose of the sedative pentobarbital began taking effect, he took a couple of deep breaths, appeared to yawn and made snoring sounds — six of them. All movement then stopped.

Thirty minutes later, after a physician examined him, he was pronounced dead at 6:44 p.m. and covered with a white sheet. Only his right hand and lower forearm, covered with an elastic bandage, were visible.

No relatives or friends of the three murder victims in his case witnessed Norman's punishment.

Judge halts Georgia execution

Stacey Humphreys, 53, was convicted of malice murder and other crimes in the 2003 killings of 33-year-old Cyndi Williams and 21-year-old Lori Brown in an Atlanta suburb. He too had been scheduled to die by an injection of the same drug at 7 p.m. EDT at the state prison near Jackson.

However, a judge halted Humphreys' execution late Tuesday after his lawyers filed a petition seeking a resentencing under a new state law that allows victims of abuse to have their sentences reconsidered and reduced, if they can tie their crimes to abuse they suffered.

The state appealed that ruling, asking the Georgia Supreme Court to find that Humphreys is not entitled to have his sentence reconsidered under the new law. But the high court declined to hear that appeal before the scheduled execution time and left the lower court's stay in place.

Georgia's high court said it would consider the questions raised about the new law in the state's appeal "in the ordinary course of business and according to a forthcoming scheduling order."

Killings at a model home and allegations of a biased juror

The two women who Humphreys killed were working as real estate agents for a new subdivision in the Atlanta suburb of Powder Springs. He entered the sales office in a model home around midday on Nov. 3, 2003, and forced them to strip naked and give him their bank PINs before fatally shooting them, according to evidence presented at trial.

Humphreys withdrew more than \$3,000 from the women's bank accounts, according to court filings. He told police after his arrest that he had recently taken out some high-interest payday loans and needed money for a payment on his truck.

Witnesses told police they saw a man fitting Humphreys' description at the sales office and a vehicle in the parking lot that matched his black Dodge Durango. Police zeroed in on Humphreys and tried to question him at his Dunwoody home days later. He fled and was arrested in Wisconsin after leading police on a high-speed chase.

In addition to the petition for a reduced sentence, Humphreys' lawyers have argued that he should be resentenced because his death sentence was tainted by a biased juror who lied during jury selection and bullied other jurors into voting for a death sentence. Courts have repeatedly rejected those arguments for procedural reasons, though U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, joined by the other two liberal justices, argued last year that the issue should be further explored rather than leaving it "caught in a web of procedural barriers."

Additionally, Humphreys' lawyers have argued that it was not fair that his clemency application was heard by only four members of the five-person State Board of Pardons and Paroles. A judge had ordered one member of the board to recuse herself, agreeing with Humphreys' legal team that there was a conflict of interest because she previously worked as a victim advocate with the Cobb County district attorney's office and had worked with the victims in his case. The parole board on Tuesday denied clemency for Humphreys.

What to know about Ed Sheeran's tour after Macklemore was cut and other artists dropped out

By The Associated Press undefined

Ed Sheeran's tour of North and South America has been roiled by the decision this week to drop Macklemore as an opener because of the rapper's onstage pro-Palestinian comments. Since then, all of Sheeran's other supporting acts have dropped out, including a group that plays with Sheeran during part of the show.

Sheeran, who is scheduled to perform Saturday in Philadelphia, said the decision to cut Macklemore from the Loop Tour was the promoter's, not his own. The "Thrift Shop" rapper exclaimed "Free Palestine" during the Sept. 5 date in New Jersey.

"To all of my Jewish brothers and sisters, criticism of Israel, criticism of apartheid, being against genocide, it in no way is criticism of you," he said during the New Jersey concert. "This message is for peace, love, for all human beings to be treated with dignity, respect and equality."

Macklemore has said his removal was the result of an effort led by Robert Kraft, the billionaire owner of the New England Patriots. His Kraft Group also owns Gillette Stadium, where the NFL team plays and where Sheeran is scheduled to perform later this month. Kraft's involvement was implicitly cited in some of the statements from the supporting acts who left Sheeran's tour Tuesday, decrying the influence of money.

On Wednesday, Macklemore announced he would donate \$1 million from his net earnings from the tour to six organizations helping Palestinians, including the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA. He challenged Kraft to match the donation.

"Whatever we disagree about, perhaps we can agree on this: Palestinian lives are worth protecting," Macklemore wrote.

Kraft said in an Instagram post shortly afterward that Sheeran contacted him before Macklemore put out his statement to ask for a \$2 million match to aid "in the region."

"Ed now plans to reach out to other venue owners and our goal is to continue to work together to build bridges," Kraft wrote.

A spokesperson confirmed that the billionaire will be donating the matching funds. His post didn't specify the benefactors of the donation and the spokesperson did not identify the recipients.

Here's where things stand with Sheeran's tour.

Finneas, Lukas Graham, Aaron Rowe and Beoga all quit

The Danish band Lukas Graham and Irish singer Aaron Rowe were scheduled to replace Macklemore as the opening acts on Sheeran's remaining U.S. tour dates. Finneas, the American singer and close collaborator with sister Billie Eilish, was down to open for Sheeran on four of his South American dates. Beoga, an Irish folk band, had been performing with Sheeran for part of his set since his tour began in January in New Zealand.

"Artists must not be silenced when they speak up for the oppressed," Finneas wrote.

The announcements from each supporting act came roughly within an hour of each other Tuesday. Earlier that day, Sheeran posted his own statement blaming the promoter for Macklemore's removal and maintaining that he refused to be drawn into a public discussion about the war in Gaza.

Rowe and Beoga cited their country's history to explain their decision. "We are Irish people who understand colonialism. As founding members of the Irish Artists for Palestine movement, we are committed activists for justice and will continue to be," Beoga posted.

Rowe called Sheeran a friend. "But as Irish people we know all too well about genocide, forced famine and violent occupation," he wrote, adding that he couldn't "stand by and allow billionaires to use their position of power to silence the rightful voices of those who speak up."

Lukas Graham also appeared to take a veiled shot at Kraft, writing: "Money doesn't give you the right to own the conversation. Nobody's bank balance should decide who gets to speak or which suffering we're allowed to acknowledge."

Kraft said in a statement Monday that the decision to cancel Macklemore was a result of the rapper's recent comments "and a broader history of antisemitic rhetoric and imagery."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 47 of 73

"This decision is not about diminishing the suffering of innocent Palestinians or denying anyone the right to advocate on their behalf. Their pain and loss are real," Kraft said.

Sheeran hasn't commented since the supporting acts dropped out

After Macklemore issued a lengthy statement Monday about being removed from the tour, Sheeran took to Instagram to lay out his side.

"Macklemore coming off tour was the promoter's decision, it was not mine," he wrote Tuesday. "I would never let down the fans who had made plans, nor would I abandon the touring crew and the other support acts and musicians who rely on me for work and to make a living."

Sheeran hasn't posted since those supporting acts left the tour, and his representative didn't respond to an emailed request for comment. The promoter, Messina Touring Group, also hasn't responded to requests for comment.

Macklemore on Wednesday didn't address the fallout, writing instead that he wanted to "bring the conversation back to where it belongs: to the Palestinian people who are still being killed, still living under military occupation, and still fighting for their freedom."

In his statement Tuesday, Sheeran said he was "not complicit" and that he had his own views on the war in Gaza.

"There is a reason I do not use my professional platform for politics — my audience includes young people, often children, of all backgrounds. Those who come to my show do not expect a political forum," he wrote.

While Sheeran has not been as politically vocal as many fellow artists, he has expressed support for some causes in the past. He performed at the Concert for Ukraine in 2022, which raised money for Ukrainians affected by the Russian invasion, and collaborated with a Ukrainian band on a charity single. He has also campaigned against racism in the U.K. and criticized his country's government for cutting arts funding.

The psychedelic pop artist Peter Max has died at 88, his son says

By BETH J. HARPAZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Peter Max, whose colorful, psychedelic pop art expressed the optimism of the "flower power" movement of the 1960s and graced everything from postage stamps to a cruise ship, has died at 88, his son said in a written statement Wednesday.

Max died on Monday, the statement said. No cause was given, but he had been suffering from advanced dementia.

Max began his career in graphic design in the 1960s, and his swirly, colorful, instantly recognizable designs epitomized the era's "flower power" art. But thanks to his prolific output and fun, accessible style, Max's work remained popular well into the 21st century.

Max was the official artist for the Olympics, the Super Bowl, the Indianapolis 500, the World Cup, the World Series and many other events. His art appeared on a Boeing 777 airplane and a Norwegian Cruise Line ship. His portrait subjects ranged from U.S. presidents to Taylor Swift.

But in his first flush of success in the late 1960s and early 1970s, his murallike tableaux of flowers, the cosmos and cartoonish figures — all in vivid colors like turquoise, orange and neon green — seemed to be everywhere. Dorm room walls were plastered with his posters. Household furnishings like clocks and bedspreads sported his designs.

He even created covers for the Manhattan Yellow Pages, a business phone directory distributed to millions of people. Max himself was featured on the cover of Life magazine in 1969, his trademark dark, bushy mustache framing a hearty grin.

"We will remember his extraordinary creativity, his warmth, his curiosity, and the way he saw beauty and possibility everywhere," his son Adam Max said in the statement announcing the death. "His art became part of American culture, but the man behind that art — the father we knew and loved — is the person we will miss most."

Family fled Nazi Germany

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 48 of 73

Max was born Peter Max Finkelstein in 1937 to a Jewish family in Berlin. They fled Nazi Germany for Shanghai when he was a baby and later spent time in Tibet, Israel and Paris before settling in New York City when Max was 16. By then, he said in an interview, he was already "a huge fan of American culture": comics, movies and "all the jazz music."

Max studied in New York at the Art Students League, the School of Visual Arts and Pratt Institute. In 1961, he opened a graphic design studio with friends. His bold, unique style was an immediate hit with ad agencies, publications, the corporate world and in pop culture.

That led to a booming commercial business. "My work was really, I would say, almost exploited," he said. "It was on mugs, it was on bedsheets, it was on dresses, it was on silks and scarves and ties — 70 product lines."

But what "bothered" him about all that success, he said, was that he "wasn't painting anymore." So he shut the business down for a time in the early 1970s to reconnect with his art. One of his biggest projects after returning to public life was a series of portraits of the Statue of Liberty, painted at the White House at the invitation of first lady Nancy Reagan in 1981.

Max weathered various controversies in his personal and professional life. He pleaded guilty to tax fraud in 1997 after the IRS alleged he concealed more than \$1 million in income from his art. He was originally sentenced to two months in prison but ultimately was allowed instead to serve the time in a work-release program, pay the back taxes and a \$30,000 fine, and perform 800 hours of community service teaching art in Harlem schools.

In 2015, his family life became tabloid fodder in a back-and-forth between his second wife, Mary Max, and Adam, his son from a previous marriage. The son and a guardian alleged that Mary Max had depleted his finances and browbeat him. She in turn claimed that they had kept him from her against his will and stolen paintings that belonged to her. Accounts of court appearances described him as frail.

In 2019, Mary Max died by suicide two weeks after The New York Times published a story detailing legal battles over his work.

His art had a bright, happy vibe

Those dark allegations contrasted with the relentlessly bright, happy vibe that infused his work. "The colors are strong, sometimes loud, sometimes raw and sometimes harmonious, but always powerful, and the images are always on the side of the peaceful nature," he said. "I don't discuss in my paintings negative things, I don't dwell on it in my mind and don't dwell on it in my canvasses."

In another interview, he summed it up like this: "I see everything through rainbow eyes."

Although accounts of Max's career sometimes lament that he was not taken seriously by the art establishment, in fact his work has been featured in dozens of museum exhibitions around the world. New York's Museum of Modern Art owns seven of his works.

The art for the Beatles' "Yellow Submarine" is sometimes mistakenly attributed to Max, but the design for the album cover and "Yellow Submarine" movie are officially credited to the late Heinz Edelman. Max claimed in a 2012 interview he did the original "Yellow Submarine" design before handing it off to Edelman. But the website for New York's Park West gallery, a longtime dealer of Max's art, described Max's involvement in "Yellow Submarine" as "early consulting work."

Max was, however, friends with the Beatles and many other celebrities. He also had a deep interest in Eastern spirituality. He brought "Swami" Satchidananda Saraswati to the U.S., and helped him popularize yoga here.

Max's first marriage to Elizabeth Nance ended in divorce. In addition to his son, he is survived by a daughter, Libra Astro.

House approves sweeping Russia sanctions bill, sending it to Trump

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House on Wednesday passed a broad package of sanctions targeting Russian officials and key pillars of its economy as lawmakers look to deprive President Vladimir Putin of the financial resources needed to wage the war against Ukraine.

The bill is named after the late Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, who spent more than a year negotiating it. The measure was approved in a 262-159 vote and now heads to President Donald Trump to be signed into law.

The legislation represents the most ambitious effort to support Ukraine since Trump's return to the White House and would break nearly two years of relative gridlock on the issue following a 2024 emergency aid package. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been pushing for the bill's passage and made a direct appeal to senators shortly before they passed it last month.

The measure sanctions Russian officials, banks and a shadow fleet of tankers that keeps Russian energy moving. It also directs Trump to impose up to 100% tariffs on the top five importers of Russian oil or natural gas, with an exception for countries that import less than 15% of Russia's natural gas exports and have taken significant steps to reduce those imports.

"These countries have a choice to make about whether they will continue to sustain Putin's aggression," said Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas.

Democrats are divided on the legislation

Supporters said the tariff provisions are aimed at deterring China and India from purchasing Russian energy, but critics of the bill said they fear Trump will use the legislation to target allies in the European Union and elsewhere. Americans, they warned, would pay the price for such tariffs through higher prices at the cash register.

"This president has always said he loves tariffs," said Rep. Gregory Meeks, D-N.Y. "And we know the history of what he's done with reference to tariffs to our European allies, and our allies everywhere."

Democrats were divided on the bill, despite overwhelming support in the caucus for aiding Ukraine. Rep. Steny Hoyer, D-Md., told colleagues they can't control what the president does, but they can stand up and declare where they are on the war.

"If we fail to pass this bill, there will be cheers in the Kremlin and tears in Kyiv," Hoyer said.

But Rep. Don Beyer, D-Va., predicted Ukraine supporters would come to regret voting for the bill.

"Yes they will be able to say 'we stood with Ukraine' in the immediate aftermath," Beyer said. "But when Donald Trump hits our allies with new tariffs and waives sanctions on Russia, the propaganda victory for Putin will be lasting, and the damage will be embedded in U.S. law."

Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York, speaking in opposition to the bill, said Democrats would continue to support the Ukrainian people until victory is won, "but this bill does not provide a path to secure that."

In all, 58 Democrats broke with Jeffries and voted for the bill, while 152 voted against it. Among Republicans, 203 voted yes while seven voted against it.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., celebrated the vote and highlighted the additional tariff power it provides the president.

"For too long, Putin has bankrolled this devastating war with money and resources from countries willing to look the other way, and today, that ends," Johnson said.

Getting Trump onboard has been a long process

Congress has struggled to ensure the flow of U.S. funding and munitions to Ukraine as Republican support for spending billions of dollars more on the effort has waned. Trump routinely derided the Ukraine aid while campaigning for the White House and insisted that, if elected, he would quickly end the war launched by Moscow's February 2022 invasion.

It took Graham essentially a full year to bring Trump on board with the Russia sanctions package. Even-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 50 of 73

tually, Trump gave a nod to the bill after it included his push for a five-year extension of existing sanctions on Iran. Republicans speaking on the House floor in advance of Wednesday's vote were overwhelmingly supportive of the package.

Rep. French Hill, R-Ark., acknowledged Democratic criticism that tariffs could be used aggressively on smaller U.S. allies, but said it was time to deliver a resounding message to the Kremlin: "End this war, get out of Ukraine, focus on rebuilding your shattered international reputation and your destroyed economy."

The Senate overwhelmingly passed the bill by a vote of 86-11 last month, but momentum slowed in the House. Republican leadership focused on other priorities, namely bills designed to put Democrats on defense going into the midterms. Meanwhile, a chorus of key Democratic lawmakers voiced alarm about the bill's tariff provisions.

Passage of the bill in the House came on the final day that the chamber is expected to be in session for votes before the Nov. 3 elections.

After the vote, a group of Republicans and Democrats from the House and Senate celebrated the vote at a rare bipartisan press conference.

Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, who wrote the bill with Graham, said he hopes the sanctions will help force Putin to the negotiating table and end the war.

"To Vladimir Putin — we have your number," Blumenthal said. "And to Ukraine — you are not alone."

Leading up to the vote, Zelenskyy took to social media urging the House to pass the bill. He said during war it is sometimes better to "make a not-so-perfect decision than to do nothing."

"And this is a very important historical moment for the United States. The bill must be passed, voted on, and supported," Zelenskyy said on X. "Beyond that, strong decisions from the U.S. Administration are important. Personal decisions by President Trump. I very much hope we will see that."

Federal Reserve hikes key rate for 1st time in 3 years, defying Trump demands for a cut

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve raised its benchmark interest rate Wednesday for the first time since 2023 in an effort to quell stubbornly high inflation, and the central bank signaled another rate hike could occur later this year.

The quarter-point increase lifts the Fed's key rate to about 3.9% and, over time, could result in higher borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans and credit cards. In a set of quarterly projections, the Fed also signaled its rate-setting committee could raise it a second time to 4.1%.

The move comes as Americans are already struggling with high costs for groceries, gas and housing. Affordability has taken on a leading role in the upcoming midterm elections, just seven weeks away.

It adds another potentially dicey economic variable for Republicans and President Donald Trump, who blasted the decision Wednesday and accused the Fed's top policymakers of trying to hurt him politically.

Chair Kevin Warsh, who was nominated by Trump, emphasized after the announcement that the economy has shown signs of gathering speed since the central bank decided to keep rates unchanged in late July. Inflation has also remained stubbornly above the Fed's 2% target, and he noted there is little sign it is cooling.

"The plain fact is that inflation is too high and has been for too long," Warsh said. "We must be confident that underlying inflation is moving to our objective clearly and at sufficient speed. Today the FOMC decided that this standard has not been satisfied," he added, referring to the policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee, an arm of the Fed.

"Warsh's tough talk around inflation in the post-meeting press conference suggested that he may be pushing for higher rates in meetings to come," said Preston Caldwell, chief U.S. economist at Morningstar.

Warsh also said renewed combat between the U.S. and Iran, which has driven up gas prices, had convinced Fed officials to support rate hikes.

"There's no hiding from hot spots around the world," he said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 51 of 73

The president lashed out at 'a bunch of politicians'

Trump, speaking to reporters in North Carolina ahead of a midterm campaign rally, made no mention of his policies that influenced the decision, instead framing the historically independent Fed as another political actor in Washington.

"The board is very hostile. They're very political. They're doing the wrong thing. They're a bunch of politicians," he said, adding, "They're raising rates to make Trump do as bad as they can possibly do."

Warsh noted that other central banks are hiking interest rates in response to global turmoil and higher gas prices. The European Central Bank raised its key rate last week, and the Bank of Japan is expected to do the same Sept. 18.

The Fed next meets in late October and most economists expect officials will keep rates unchanged then because it is just a week before the midterm elections. But Wall Street analysts now see a rate hike by December as a near certainty, according to futures prices.

Also late Wednesday, the yield, or interest rate, on the 2-year Treasury rose to 4.74% from 4.67%, another sign investors expect the Fed to potentially lift rates further. Still, if inflation does show signs of cooling in the coming months, that could change.

Since taking the lead at the Fed in May, Warsh has said it is firmly committed to taming inflation, and policymakers would take their cues from the data to determine if inflation was going in the right direction.

The rate hike marks a turnaround for Warsh. He often suggested last year when under consideration by Trump that the Fed could reduce its key rate, echoing the president's call for lower borrowing costs.

In April, when Warsh's nomination was under consideration by the Senate Banking Committee, Trump said in a television interview that he would be disappointed if Warsh didn't cut rates. On the same day, however, Warsh told the committee he did not promise Trump he would cut rates and said he would be "an independent actor" as Fed chair.

Trump said in North Carolina that he had talked to Warsh ahead of the vote and told him, "You might as well vote with the board because it's not going to matter."

The fallout from Trump's war remains a factor

The ongoing disruptions from the Iran war, which have pushed up average gas prices more than 7% from just a month ago, threaten to spread through the economy and keep broader inflation stubbornly high. An inflation report last week showed core prices, which exclude food and energy, accelerated a bit in August.

According to the Fed's preferred measure, inflation was 3.7% in July compared with a year ago, up from 2.3% in April 2025, just before Trump unveiled sweeping tariffs. Core inflation, which excludes the volatile food and energy categories, was 3.3% in July, the latest data available, up from 3% just before the Iran war and far above the Fed's target.

Fed policymakers unanimously supported the rate hike, compared with late July when the central bank kept rates steady and three officials dissented in favor of higher rates. Sixteen of the 18 Fed policymakers who submitted growth and interest rate projections penciled in at least one further rate hike this year, with four supporting two more increases.

Earlier Wednesday, the government said retail sales jumped 1.2% in August from the previous month, a sign that consumers are still spending at healthy levels despite sentiment surveys that indicate Americans remain gloomy about the economy. Strong spending is a sign that interest rates at current levels aren't necessarily restricting the economy and cooling inflation.

"While uncertainty remains elevated owing, in part, to geopolitical developments, domestic spending has been resilient," the Fed said, a likely reference to ongoing consumer spending and strong investment in artificial intelligence data centers by large technology companies.

Higher inflation isn't all about gas prices. Ongoing investment in AI has driven up prices for computer chips and other electronic gear, adding to overall inflation. Tariffs may still be elevating some costs, such as appliances, which jumped in price last month.

Warsh isn't the first Fed chairman caught in Trump's politics

Trump had harshly criticized Warsh's predecessor, Jerome Powell, for not cutting rates quickly enough.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 52 of 73

His Justice Department even launched a criminal investigation into Powell over brief testimony he delivered to Congress last year, though that probe was eventually dropped.

When asked Wednesday how the president might react to the rate increase, Warsh said, "I've got nothing for you on a discussion with the president."

On Sunday, Kevin Hassett, Trump's top economic adviser, was asked in an interview with Fox News how Trump might react to a rate hike.

"I'm sure he's not going to be super happy about it, but he will defend the independence of Kevin Warsh above all," Hassett said.

Warsh might have a measure of protection from the fact that his father-in-law Ronald Lauder is a friend of Trump's and a billionaire donor to his campaigns.

And the president, for all his complaints, insisted he wants Warsh "to be independent." Asked explicitly whether he still has confidence in Warsh, Trump replied, "I do." ____

Associated Press reporter Bill Barrow contributed from Atlanta.

Trump suggests EU allowing Canada as associate member could be a 'hostile act'

CHARLOTTE, North Carolina (AP) — President Donald Trump suggested that the European Union allowing Canada to become an associate member could be a "hostile act" and threatened to respond to the proposed move by imposing more tariffs on the bloc.

Trump conditioned his threat Wednesday on the "intention" of European leaders, saying that, "If it's a good intention, that's fine. If it's a bad intention, we'll put very heavy tariffs on Europe." He also suggested the U.S. could cut off trade with Europe in certain areas.

Trump called the prospect of Canada joining the EU "laughable" and called America's neighbor a "terrible trade partner."

US stocks slip after the Fed hikes interest rates and hints more increases may be on the way

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks slipped Wednesday after the Federal Reserve hiked its main interest rate for the first time in three years and suggested more may be ahead as it tries to get the nation's high inflation under control.

The S&P 500 fell 0.4% after giving up a modest gain from earlier in the day. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 631 points, or 1.2%, and the Nasdaq composite was nearly unchanged after edging down by less than 0.1%.

Investors generally prefer lower interest rates because higher rates slow the economy's growth and undercut prices for stocks and other investments.

The U.S. stock market initially held onto its modest, early gains after the Fed announced its decision. The short-term pain of a slower economy may be worth it if it starves inflation of its fuel and gets further increases for the cost of living back to the Fed's 2% target.

But stock prices weakened later in the day as Fed Chairman Kevin Warsh said repeatedly in a press conference that inflation remains too high and the U.S. economy appears to be strengthening. That could imply the economy is solid enough to withstand more hikes to rates, and other officials at the Fed provided their own forecasts suggesting rates may need to go still higher.

The median Fed official expects the federal funds rate to end this year at 4.1%, according to forecasts published after the central bank's meeting. That's up from its current range of 3.75% to 4% following Wednesday's increase, and it's up from the median forecast of 3.8% that Fed officials gave three months ago.

Traders, meanwhile, suspect the Fed may go even further. They're betting on a 38% probability the Fed

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 53 of 73

could hike the federal funds rate to a range of 4.25% to 4.50% by the end of the year, according to data from CME Group.

"Our decision comes at a time when the American economy appears to be strengthening," Fed Chairman Kevin Warsh said in his press conference.

He pointed to solid U.S. hiring trends, corporate profits and investments by businesses. A report on Wednesday morning, meanwhile, showed shoppers spent much more at U.S. retailers last month than economists expected.

"The plain fact is that inflation is too high and has been for too long," Warsh said. He later added, "Today's action starts to show we're serious about this."

It's the first hike by the Fed to interest rates in three years. The central bank had been on pause for months following cuts to rates in 2024 and 2025, even though inflation has consistently remained above the Fed's 2% target.

President Donald Trump has been lobbying for interest rates to go lower rather than higher.

On Wall Street, bank stocks fell to some of the market's sharper losses. A slower U.S. economy could mean less demand for loans from them. Banks also get hurt when the gap narrows between short-term interest rates and longer-term ones because the industry makes profit off the difference.

Following the Fed's announcements, the two-year Treasury yield jumped to 4.74% from 4.67% late Tuesday. It tends to closely follow expectations for what the Fed will do with the federal funds rate.

The yield on the longer-term 10-year Treasury, meanwhile, takes into account expectations for economic growth and inflation years down the line. It had a more modest increase, ticking up to 5.01% from 5.00% late Tuesday.

Huntington Bancshares fell 5.6%, Citizens Financial Group sank 4.8% and JPMorgan Chase slipped 1%.

The largest loss in the S&P 500 came from J.B. Hunt Transport Services, which lost 13.3%. Its chief financial officer told a conference of analysts late Tuesday that it's facing higher costs and expects its earnings to drop 5% to 10% from the second quarter to the third.

Stocks of oil companies also weighed on the market after the price for a barrel of Brent crude fell 2.7% to \$105.83. It was the first drop of the week for Brent, which has gotten near \$110 in recent days.

Helping to limit the market's losses were gains for some influential stocks in the artificial-intelligence industry.

Nvidia rose 0.8%, and Advanced Micro Devices climbed 1.6% to recover more of their losses from earlier in the week. AI stocks slid worldwide Monday after leaders of the AI industry called for a slowdown in development to address safety issues for humanity.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 33.92 points to 7,551.81. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 631.21 to 51,461.90, and the Nasdaq composite slipped 3.15 to 25,978.42.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose across much of Europe and Asia. South Korea's Kospi climbed 1.4% for one of the world's biggest gains.

Inflation is a worldwide problem, and the European Central Bank hiked rates last week to help diminish it.

Dr. Nicole Saphier, Trump's 3rd surgeon general pick, faces Senate questions over her vaccine stance

By FATIMA HUSSEIN and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Dr. Nicole Saphier, President Donald Trump's third surgeon general nominee, was grilled at her Senate confirmation hearing Wednesday about her stance on childhood vaccines, voicing support for immunization as she seeks to serve in an administration that has moved to make sweeping changes to vaccine guidance.

Saphier, a radiologist and former Fox News Channel contributor, faced tough questioning about her views on the safety of childhood vaccines by Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy, who pressed her to declare whether she believed there was a link between vaccines and autism — which widespread scientific consensus has concluded doesn't exist, yet which the Trump administration has repeatedly pushed to revisit.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 54 of 73

"I do not believe childhood vaccines cause autism," Saphier said. She also said "the MMR vaccine is our greatest tool for combating measles," in response to a question by Cassidy over whether parents should give children that shot. MMR stands for measles, mumps and rubella, and the president recently called for the shots to be spaced out.

She suggested support for vaccines as a critical tool to prevent infection and said she appreciated the administration's attempts to address questions and concerns among "the vaccine hesitant people," which Cassidy countered was only creating more confusion. Cassidy pushed Saphier to speak with clarity on some of her answers on vaccines, which she repeatedly presented as a belief rather than a known scientific fact.

Saphier is nominated for a position that carries limited policymaking power but serves as a loud megaphone as the nation's top communicator to Americans on public health issues.

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Trump have both suggested that childhood vaccines, such as MMR, may play a role in causing autism. Evidence from decades of studies and real-world use of vaccines have proven there is no link between vaccines and autism.

The administration has taken steps to upend the nation's vaccine guidance — many of them since halted by a judge — including downsizing the childhood immunization schedule. Medical groups and doctors have warned that the changes could stoke vaccine hesitancy.

Saphier is Trump's third pick for surgeon general

Saphier is Trump's newest pick after entrepreneur and wellness influencer Dr. Casey Means saw her path forward stall in the Senate over her background and vaccine views. Trump withdrew his first nominee, Fox News medical contributor Janette Nesheiwat, after questions arose about her academic credentials. The position has been vacant throughout Trump's second term.

Like Means, who is a close Kennedy ally, Saphier has questioned whether every child needs to get the hepatitis B vaccine at birth, a longtime recommendation that the Trump administration has been trying to weaken. On Wednesday, she said the universal birth dose of hepatitis B was safe and effective.

An author and podcaster who previously hosted her own show, "Wellness Unmasked with Dr. Nicole Saphier," Saphier frequently commented on the Trump administration's approach to health, often positively. She also used the phrase "Make America Healthy Again" years before Kennedy popularized it. It was the title of a 2020 book she wrote that criticized the government's handling of healthcare and the Affordable Care Act.

While being supportive of the Trump administration at large, Saphier has, however, disagreed with Trump and Kennedy on some issues, telling The Associated Press last fall that Trump's cautions to pregnant women who take Tylenol were oversimplistic and "patronizing."

Last year, she decried the administration's long-anticipated first attempt at a MAHA report, which cited some studies that didn't exist, calling it "pretty embarrassing." She said Kennedy's firing of his first Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director, Susan Monarez, after less than a month on the job was "a mess."

"When we keep hearing radical transparency and we're going to regain trust, I can tell you these shenanigans are taking us farther away from that mission," Saphier said on her podcast. On Wednesday, she said she promised to restore public trust if confirmed.

At the start of the Senate health committee hearing, Cassidy noted the "serious health issues" facing the country, highlighting Kennedy's efforts to scale back vaccine guidance at a time when the U.S. is enduring its worst year for measles in decades.

"That is going to be a terrible legacy for this administration," Cassidy said, telling Saphier and other nominees appearing alongside her at the hearing that he hoped they would restore confidence in public health.

Cassidy, who was defeated by a Trump-backed challenger in his Republican primary earlier this year, then criticized what he called "irresponsible" health policy leadership.

During lawmakers' questioning, Saphier was also asked whether she would follow unlawful orders by the president or Kennedy — she said she would follow the law — and was tested on her knowledge of the medication mifepristone, which is used to manage miscarriages and abortions.

It was not immediately clear when the committee planned to vote on whether to advance Saphier, who

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 55 of 73

would still need a vote by the full Senate to be confirmed.

Also facing lawmakers' questions Wednesday was Chris Klomp, chief counselor of the Health and Human Services Department, who has been nominated to serve as Kennedy's second-in-command. Timothy Westlake, chief of staff at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration who is seeking confirmation to be assistant secretary for mental health and substance use, was also questioned.

Saphier says she would divest from some holdings

Saphier is director of breast imaging at Memorial Sloan Kettering Monmouth, according to her profile on the New York-based institution's website. She has a doctor of medicine degree from Ross University School of Medicine in Barbados along with fellowships at the Mayo Clinic, the profile said.

Her latest ethics filing, dated Sept. 7, shows holdings with various healthcare and insurance firms, as well as processed food companies, like Coca-Cola, Yum Brands, the Hershey Co. and cigarette maker Philip Morris.

Before entering politics and throughout his tenure at the health department, Kennedy has criticized big pharmaceutical companies and insurance firms for alleged corruption and decried ultraprocessed foods as contributing to a nationwide chronic disease crisis.

Additionally, Saphier owns DropRx, a firm that produces controversial, unregulated tinctures — concentrated liquid extracts promoting focus and calm — that contain ingredients, including kava kava root, described by the FDA as potentially causing severe liver injury.

Her filing says she will resign from her position with DropRx and Empower MD LLC, which owns DropRx, if she is confirmed.

She states in the document that she would partially or fully divest from holdings that would present a conflict to serving as surgeon general.

Saudis seek allies' help as missile defenses run low in fight with Houthis, officials say

By SAMY MAGDY, SUZAN FRASER and MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Saudi Arabia is running low on missile interceptors and has turned to regional and Western allies for assistance as its standoff with Houthi rebels in Yemen drags on, two regional officials said Wednesday.

The officials said the Saudis have asked France, Britain, Pakistan and Egypt to deploy air-defense support to the region to help defend against missiles and drones fired by Houthis and other Iran-backed groups.

The outreach was initiated because Saudi Arabia's main ally and arms supplier, the United States, has seen its own stock of interceptors dwindle over the course of a six-month war with Iran, one official said. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media.

Saudi officials did not immediately respond to a request seeking comment.

The fighting between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis is the latest front to erupt as a result of the Iran war. On Wednesday, Saudi Arabia accused the Houthis of trying to attack Islam's holiest city with a drone; the region responded with condemnation but no sign of military support.

The kingdom declared Mecca, the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad, a "red line" and said it had intercepted the drone. The Houthis denied targeting Mecca, about 1,100 kilometers (680 miles) from Yemen's border.

Saudi Arabia struggles to rally support

With the world's biggest oil exporter under fire from rebels backed by the Saudis' regional adversary, the kingdom needs a safe outlet for its crude as well as military assistance. There's no clear path to either.

A crucial Saudi pipeline has been shut down, reportedly for weeks, after an attack by Iranian-backed militias in Iraq. The Houthis have been targeting infrastructure in the kingdom and its shipping on the Red Sea, where they have seized several islands in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. And Iran is still targeting ships in the Strait of Hormuz. Oil prices remain above \$100 a barrel.

One of the regional officials said Saudi Arabia is in a "very difficult position," since it has to protect not

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 56 of 73

only its military bases and vital government installations, but also oil facilities across the kingdom.

The second official said Saudi Arabia is also seeking to rally its international allies to launch a collective response against the Houthis. "But the decision now is to give diplomacy a chance," the official said, adding that Oman and Egypt are leading efforts for de-escalation in Yemen.

"This is just not a Houthi versus Saudi Arabia issue," said Adam Baron, a fellow at New America, a Washington-based think tank. "This is a matter of figuring out some way to guarantee wider patterns and pathways of international shipping."

Last weekend, Oman hosted a meeting between U.S. and Houthi representatives to discuss the regional tensions, said two people familiar with the matter, including a Houthi official. They gave no further details and spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to brief the media.

Allies offer diplomatic support but no signs of military assistance

On Tuesday, the British prime minister's spokesman, Tom Wells, confirmed the U.K. has a "close defense partnership" with Saudi Arabia. But he declined to say whether Saudi Arabia has asked for military assistance, or say whether British troops are in the country.

U.S. and NATO officials have previously acknowledged a critical shortage of missile interceptors in Europe, raising questions about Europe's ability to assist.

A Turkish government official said Turkey was engaged in talks with Iran and the United Arab Emirates to try and lower tensions. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak on the issue publicly, did not provide further details.

The attacks are the first test of a new defense pact among Saudi Arabia, NATO member Turkey and nuclear power Pakistan. But officials from Turkey and Pakistan told The Associated Press they have not received a Saudi request for support in response to the Houthis' escalation. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly on the issue.

Amid the condemnation of the attempted attack on Mecca, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said his country and the Saudis stand "unwaveringly, shoulder to shoulder." Turkey's foreign minister expressed solidarity and said no country can "remain indifferent," state-run Anadolu Agency reported.

For now, the US is staying out of the fight

The United States has sold billions of dollars in weapons to Saudi Arabia and has committed to other support, but top U.S. officials have indicated a lack of desire to get involved in the conflict.

U.S. Vice President JD Vance on Monday said Washington had been in "constant contact" with the Saudis and had "engaged in direct conversations with the Houthis."

When asked whether Saudi Arabia had requested intervention, a U.S. official said the U.S. military's Central Command has a task force in place for "enhancing intelligence sharing and planning support with Saudi forces."

The U.S. military hosted senior military leaders from eight countries last week at a conference in Germany to discuss "opportunities for enhancing security cooperation in the Middle East," the official also said, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly. The official did not confirm which countries attended.

Houthi claim shooting down an F-15 fighter jet

The Houthis claimed Wednesday that they shot down an F-15 fighter jet operated by the Saudi-backed coalition over Yemen's central province of Marib, though they didn't say when it happened.

In a video released by the rebel group's media channels, Houthi fighters appear to be pushing what they are calling the wreckage of an F-15 emblazoned with a Saudi flag. AP could not independently verify the claim.

Spokespeople for the Saudi-led coalition and the Saudi government didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Iran's top diplomat is in China

Iran's top diplomat was in China, the biggest buyer of his country's oil.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called on the U.S. and Iran to exercise restraint and reopen the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible. He expressed China's concern about the spread of the fighting to Yemen.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 57 of 73

and the Red Sea, according to China's Foreign Ministry.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that Tehran seeks "the restoration of calm to the region and friendly and peaceful relations with our neighbors."

China has avoided direct involvement in the war, but President Xi Jinping at the BRICS summit in New Delhi over the weekend again offered Beijing's help in ending it.

Oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz have recovered somewhat as tankers risk using a route near Oman on the other side of the waterway, with guidance from U.S. forces. Estimates vary because ships can turn off location systems but range from 5 million to 7 million barrels per day on average.

That's less than half the amount before the war began with U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran on Feb. 28.

Building collapse in Gaza kills at least 21 people, and other Mideast developments

By The Associated Press undefined

A building used by displaced Palestinian families collapsed in Gaza City, killing at least 21 people, while Saudi Arabia was reported to be reaching out to allies for help with defenses as it deals with Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia blamed the Houthis for a drone that was intercepted while headed toward the holy city of Mecca, though the militia denied it.

A U.N. health official, meanwhile, warned about disease as thousands of Yemenis are displaced because of armed conflict there.

Here's a look at the latest news in the Middle East on Wednesday. Full coverage can be found [here](#).

Rescuers search through rubble for survivors

The Gaza City building that collapsed had been partially destroyed in an Israeli strike earlier in the war. At least 21 people, including 11 children, died Wednesday, said Zaher al-Wahidi, a spokesperson for the Gaza Health Ministry.

It wasn't immediately clear what caused the collapse. At least 14 were injured, al-Wahidi said.

Such incidents have become a major hazard in Gaza, where the majority of buildings have been damaged or destroyed. There's been no large-scale reconstruction work since the ceasefire from nearly a year ago. Israel has said that it won't allow any major rebuilding until Hamas disarms.

Saudi Arabia says drone shot down near Mecca

Saudi Arabia said that the kingdom's defenses intercepted and destroyed a drone Tuesday evening before it entered the airspace over Mecca, Islam's holiest city and a focal point for followers of the faith.

Mecca's security is "a red line," military spokesperson Maj. Gen. Turki al-Malki said, adding that Saudi forces won't hesitate to act against "hostile and terrorist behavior."

Mecca is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and the location of the Kaaba, the black cube-shaped structure that Muslims around the world turn to five times a day when praying. It's about 1,100 kilometers (680 miles) from Yemen's border.

Saudis seek help from allies

Two regional officials said that Saudi Arabia is running low on missile interceptors and has turned to regional and Western allies for assistance in its standoff with the Houthis.

The officials said the Saudis have asked France, the United Kingdom, Pakistan and Egypt to deploy air-defense support to the region to help defend against missiles and drones fired by Iran-backed groups. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to brief the media.

The outreach was initiated because Saudi Arabia's arms supplier, the United States, has seen its own stock of interceptors dwindle over the course of a nearly seven-month war with Iran, one official said.

U.N. official warns of a health crisis in Yemen

The head of the World Health Organization is warning about the risks of malnutrition and infectious disease outbreaks as more than 100,000 Yemenis relocate to crowded areas.

The displacement, especially on the west coast, is a result of fighting between Yemen's internationally

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 58 of 73

recognized government and the Houthis. Saudi Arabia is also entangled in the conflict, on the side of the government.

"Humanitarian access remains severely constrained, and funding shortfalls threaten our ability to sustain and scale up the response," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a news conference in Geneva.

More oil tankers appear to transit critical waterway

Oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz have recovered somewhat as tankers risk using a southern route near the coast of Oman with guidance from U.S. forces.

Estimates vary because the ships turn off their location systems, but range from 5 million to 7 million barrels per day on average, compared with 15 million barrels per day before the Iran war began on Feb. 28.

Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline — another key oil route — was hit by a drone attack last week. The damage is expected to take weeks to repair, potentially cutting Saudi exports from the Red Sea port of Yanbu by 2.5 million to 2.7 million barrels per day.

Protests in Syria halt oil trucks

Hundreds of oil trucks were stranded in northeastern Syria after demonstrators blocked a major highway near Tal Tamr to protest recent fuel price increases of 30% or more.

The government announced increases for gasoline, diesel and other petroleum products Sunday, citing rising global fuel prices as a result of the Iran war as well as repairs being done at the Baniyas refinery on Syria's coast.

Syria produces around 100,000 barrels of oil per day, while it needs about 325,000 barrels per day for domestic consumption and relies on imports to make up the difference.

Mourners attend funeral of Hamas figure

Dozens of people turned out for the funeral of a Hamas military chief in the southern Gaza Strip. Nael Abu Obeid was killed Tuesday in an Israeli strike on Rafah near the border with Egypt.

Obeid was commander of Hamas' military wing, the Qassam brigades, in the southern city of Rafah.

Separately, Israel's military said that it killed a Hamas military official in a Gaza airstrike last week. The military said that Jihad Sameeh Mahmoud Ismail took part in the Hamas-led attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023.

U.N. chief says defusing Mideast crises is top priority

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said that the need to push for peace is critical "at this crucial moment in the Middle East."

"The only path forward is de-escalation, diplomacy and dialogue," not military action, he told a U.N. news conference Wednesday before the annual gathering of world leaders at the U.N. General Assembly starting Tuesday.

Guterres said "the creeping annexation of the West Bank must stop," the Gaza peace plan must be implemented with unrestricted humanitarian aid, and the right to freedom of navigation must be restored in and around the straits of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb.

House holds billionaire Leon Black in contempt of Congress over Epstein investigation

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House approved a resolution Wednesday holding billionaire Leon Black in contempt of Congress, referring the matter to the Department of Justice after he defied the Oversight Committee's subpoenas in its investigation into disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein.

The action was swift, and without a formal vote, and now leaves it to the Justice Department to decide whether to seek criminal prosecution. Black has refused to respond to the subpoenas' requests to appear and to turn over any potential nondisclosure agreements involving the investigation into Epstein.

Republicans and Democrats from the Oversight Committee joined in a bipartisan effort to advance the resolution forward.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 59 of 73

"No one is above the law," Rep. James Comer, R-Ky., the Oversight Committee chairman, said in a statement. "We will continue to seek transparency for the American people and justice for survivors in our investigation of the federal government's handling of the Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell criminal cases."

California Rep. Robert Garcia, the panel's top Democrat, called the vote "an important step towards justice and accountability."

Black's lawyers have denounced the Oversight Committee's pursuit of the former head of a private equity firm as an abuse of congressional power. They said he "had no knowledge of any of Epstein's heinous conduct."

"The Committee has continued to insist on looking for information that does not exist," attorneys Susan Estrich and Aaron Cutler said in a statement.

They called the action "politically motivated" and have sued the committee and asked the Office of Congressional Conduct to open a probe into Comer's tactics.

"This an outrageous action that ignores the facts and the truth about Mr. Black," they said.

Epstein investigation churns in Congress

Black is the latest among several prominent figures, including Bill Clinton and Bill Gates, who have been asked to appear as part of the Oversight Committee's long-running probe of Epstein. Survivors of Epstein's alleged sexual abuse have told personal stories of being young women in a trafficking enterprise organized by Epstein and his colleague Maxwell.

In June, Black did appear for a voluntary interview at the committee. Lawmakers said later that he refused to answer their questions about the nondisclosure agreements.

The committee issued two subpoenas seeking to compel Black to produce the NDAs and to appear for a deposition July 16. The committee said it had accommodated Black's request to delay the deposition to Sept. 3, but he refused to appear.

On Tuesday the Oversight Committee voted unanimously to approve the contempt recommendation, sending it to the full House.

Black co-founded the private equity firm Apollo Global Management and stepped down in 2021 during the fallout over his ties to Epstein.

Lawmakers have alleged that Black paid Epstein \$180 million during their yearslong relationship.

A 2021 review commissioned by Apollo found that Black paid Epstein \$158 million from 2012 to 2017, after Epstein pleaded guilty in 2008 to soliciting prostitution from a minor. The review said the payments were for "bona fide tax, estate planning and other related services."

Fed rate hike likely means more expensive credit cards and mortgages, but savers may rejoice

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve just raised the cost of money — bad news for borrowers, good news for savers.

The Fed increased its benchmark interest rate Wednesday by a quarter-point, the first rate hike since the summer of 2023. The hike will likely make it even costlier to borrow for homes, autos and other purchases. But if you've been socking money away, you'll probably earn a bit more interest on your savings.

The increase boosts the Fed's target rate to a range of 3.75% to 4.00%.

Here's what to know:

Why is the Fed raising rates?

The short answer: inflation.

Inflation has remained above the Fed's 2% target for more than five years. The Labor Department reported Friday that consumer prices rose 3.4% in August compared to a year earlier, while the monthly increase quadrupled from July to hit 0.4%.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 60 of 73

The Fed's goal is to slow consumer and business spending by raising the cost of borrowing, thereby reducing demand for homes, cars and other goods and services, eventually cooling the economy and reducing upward pressure on prices.

Kevin Warsh, Fed chair since May, has assured Congress that central bank policymakers "have no tolerance for persistently elevated inflation."

Speaking to reporters Wednesday after the Fed's meeting, Warsh argued that the rate hike will benefit lower-income Americans because they are hurt most by higher prices. "The least well off are the ones that have the most to gain from stable prices," he said. "The decision we made today was the right decision to deliver on the remit that Congress gave us to ensure stable prices."

Which consumers are most affected?

Anyone borrowing money to make a sizable purchase, such as a home, car or large appliance, will likely take a hit eventually. The new rate will also increase monthly payments and costs for any consumer who is already paying interest on credit card debt.

Then again, said Matt Schulz, chief consumer finance analyst at the online loan marketplace LendingTree, "the reality is that a single quarter-point rate increase isn't really going to have a huge impact." But it would be different if Wednesday's hike marks the first in a series of rate increases. "When this all becomes impactful to people is when you stack a few these on top of each other over time, and it adds up to something bigger," Schulz said.

Fed policymakers signaled Wednesday that they expect to hike the benchmark rate again this year — to 4.1%.

For now, U.S. household debt payments are relatively low overall as a percentage of after-tax income. So even if borrowing rates rise, many households might not feel a heavier debt burden immediately.

Do savers get a break?

Most likely. Wednesday's move probably means interest rates on savings accounts and certificates of deposit are headed higher. The Fed doesn't set rates on savings accounts and CDs but it "sets the tone" for them, the credit reporting agency Experian says. When the central bank started raising rates to combat an outbreak of inflation in March 2022, the average rate on a 1-year CD was stuck at a miserly 0.15%, according to FDIC data published by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. The rate shot up to 1.88% by September 2024 and has remained above 1.5% ever since. It was 1.71% last month.

Online banks and others that offer high-yield savings accounts typically compete aggressively for depositors. (The catch: They sometimes require significantly larger deposits.)

What does this mean for mortgage rates?

Mortgage rates don't necessarily follow what the Fed does. At least not directly. They tend to track the yield on 10-year Treasury notes instead. Unfortunately for home shoppers, 10-year yields have been surging. On Monday they topped 5% for the first time since 2023 due to unease over surging energy prices and massive government debt that continues to grow. Treasury yields have continued to rise despite an intervention from the Treasury after Secretary Scott Bessent ordered the U.S. to buy back government bonds in a bid to push yields down.

The rate on the benchmark 30-year fixed-rate mortgage rose to 6.76% last week, the highest in more than 14 months, mortgage buyer Freddie Mac said.

The high cost of home loans is already taking a toll on the housing market. The Realtors association reported last week that sales of previously occupied U.S. homes dropped for the third straight month in August, growing at the slowest pace in more than a year.

Adjustable-rate mortgages could rise in order to price in a Fed hike. But many homeowners locked in low mortgage rates when COVID-19 slammed the economy and sent borrowing costs tumbling; so they are protected if mortgage rates rise in the wake of a Fed rate hike. The National Association of Realtors reports that nearly half of mortgages outstanding are locked in at 4% or lower and almost a fifth were at 3% or lower in the first three months of 2026.

And credit-card rates?

Most credit cards have variable interest rates that track the prime rate banks charge their best customers.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 61 of 73

And the prime rate responds quickly — within a month — when the Fed raises or lowers its benchmark “fed funds” rate, “meaning that the Fed’s policy changes flow through to credit card rates rapidly,” researchers at the Boston Fed wrote in March.

Schulz at LendingTree reckons that most credit cardholders will see their rates rise by a quarter-point over the next couple of months.

Many Americans, coping with the high cost of living, are increasingly relying on credit cards to help maintain their spending. Total credit card balances hit \$1.26 trillion in the second quarter — near the record \$1.28 trillion set at the end of 2025 (though the numbers are not adjusted for inflation), according to the New York Fed.

Car loans, too?

The Fed indirectly influences auto loan rates by influencing the prime rate. Cars, especially new ones, are already prohibitively expensive. The average cost of a new car rose to \$50,089 last month, according to Kelley Blue Book. The average loan rate last month was 7% for a new car and 10.6% for a used car, according to Edmunds. And the average monthly payment, Experian reported, was \$765 in the second quarter of 2026.

“Most Americans are generally doing OK,” Schulz said. “But it wouldn’t take a whole lot for them to not be doing OK. People’s financial margin for error is generally pretty small, and just the rising cost of most everything just squeezes them more and more.”

AP exclusive: Change in human trafficking policy could make some minors easier to deport

By RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

The Trump administration has ordered caregivers for migrant children to stop reporting human trafficking concerns directly to the office created to help victims, a change that critics say could make some vulnerable minors easier to deport.

The directive, in a Sept. 10 memo reviewed by The Associated Press, could mean that some victims would be denied services and face tougher odds of obtaining asylum and visas allowing them to stay in the United States.

“This is going to harm children,” said Jean Bruggeman, co-executive director of Freedom Network USA, a coalition that advocates for human trafficking survivors. “This makes it more likely they will be deported before they get the services they need and put back into harm’s way.”

The order added another plank to the Trump administration’s hard-line immigration agenda that has forged the most restrictive policies toward immigrants in more than a generation. Some of those efforts have been stopped by courts but many others have taken root.

The memo said the change would “streamline the reporting, tracking and referral of trafficking-related concerns.” An administration statement said the change was an effort to reduce the high number of claims that did not rise to the level of criminal human trafficking but nonetheless triggered the award of benefits and relief.

But Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon said the change requires children and their advocates to report human trafficking to the same agency that is holding them in custody. “This move to sideline human trafficking experts is more evidence that the Trump administration will deport kids to score political points rather than actually protect them,” he said.

Office has helped thousands of trafficking victims

The change applies to 1,800 children who are in federal custody after arriving in the United States without parents or being arrested with parents who were not legally present, and others who have been released but remain under supervision.

Under longstanding policy, caregivers are required to conduct an initial screening of unaccompanied children for potential labor or sex trafficking within five days of admission to a facility or shelter. If they

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 62 of 73

suspect the child is a victim, they have been required within 24 hours to notify the Office of Trafficking in Persons, which was created in 2015 to prevent human trafficking and protect victims.

If the office certifies the claim, the minors become eligible for a program that gives them greater freedom by allowing them to move out of short-term housing, placing them in foster care and allowing them to attend public school. It does not protect them from deportation immediately, but they can use the determination to pursue visas for victims of trafficking or asylum claims. It also grants eligibility for nutrition, housing and other public benefits once they are released from federal custody.

Thousands of unaccompanied minors have benefited from the office's determinations. They are particularly susceptible to labor and sex trafficking, including in their home countries, on their way to the U.S. and after they arrive, and that's why Congress has given them protections, Bruggeman said.

Administration says change will target improper claims

Under the change ordered last week by the administration, federal employees and care providers were told to no longer report labor and sex trafficking claims involving the minors to the Office on Trafficking in Persons.

Instead, the memo said those claims should be submitted only to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, which oversees the housing of unaccompanied minors. That office will now investigate the claims and decide which ones should be forwarded to the Office on Trafficking in Persons for further review, the memo said, warning that providers "must respond promptly to requests for information."

In a statement, the Office of Refugee Resettlement said the change was driven by a review last year that found 95% of more than 9,000 reports "were determined not to be viable trafficking leads" for criminal investigators.

"The vast majority of the reports detailed instances of alleged abuse or neglect, not forced labor or commercial sex as defined in human trafficking statutes," the statement said.

Even so, 58% of reports from shelter employees and case managers qualified for trafficking-related benefits. The change in reporting will "strengthen integrity, reduce improper referrals, reduce fraud, and ensure that children who may have experienced trafficking receive immediate support," the statement said.

Former official questions rationale

Jen Smyers, who served as deputy director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement during the Biden administration, said the claim that the change will streamline reporting is questionable. She said ORR already gets the human trafficking reports but has no special expertise in evaluating them, unlike the office created for that purpose.

The fear is that legitimate claims will get delayed or missed during the new layer of review, and career employees will face political pressure to refer fewer cases, she said.

"It's the opposite of streamlining," Smyers said.

Smyers noted the change comes after what she called an "onslaught" of Trump administration policies that have undermined the ability of unaccompanied minors to gain legal status, including making it harder to leave federal custody, arresting sponsors in the middle of the release process, and cutting their legal representation.

"What they are trying to do is deport as many as possible. What interferes with deporting children is if they are eligible for protections Congress has given them," she said.

Sudan gold mine collapse kills at least 82 people with many more missing

By YASIR ABDALLAH and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

SHENDI, Sudan (AP) — The death toll from the collapse of an informal gold mine in a remote area of Sudan has risen to 82, according to local officials and activists, as rescuers struggled on Wednesday to search for the missing with limited equipment.

It's the latest tragedy in a nation mired in a devastating war.

Survivors said that the collapse happened at the al-Zara gold mine, in Nuhud, a town in West Kordofan

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 63 of 73

province, which is controlled by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, or RSF. The group has been fighting against the Sudanese military for more than three years.

Suleiman Abu Hmeida, a member of the Emergency Response Rooms, said that rescuers pulled out 82 bodies by Wednesday afternoon. "But dozens remain unaccounted for," Abu Hmeida told The Associated Press.

The Emergency Response Rooms is a grassroots network that monitors the conflict and provides support for communities across war-torn Sudan.

A local administration official also said that 82 bodies were recovered.

The official said that the collapse began on Sunday in one of the mine shafts and spread to the other interconnected shafts. He said that only one privately owned forklift is available for the rescue efforts, complicating the search for survivors.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak to the media.

"The collapse is massive and the situation is very dire," Khairal-Sayed Gabara, one of the survivors, told the AP when reached by phone. He said that the machinery needed to remove the collapsed soil and rubble wasn't available.

"We do not have the machinery to lift dirt and stones and search for survivors at depths of more than 30 meters (around 100 feet)," he said. "There were dozens of people working in the mine."

The al-Zara gold mine is one of thousands of small-scale and informal mines scattered across Sudan, which has been engulfed in a war that has at times pushed parts of the country into famine.

Despite being a major gold producer, deadly mine collapses in Sudan aren't uncommon in a country where safety standards aren't widely applied. A 2023 collapse killed 14 miners and one in 2021 claimed 38 lives.

Al-Amin Suliman, another survivor, said that 60 bodies had been recovered as of Wednesday morning.

"There are still people stuck inside," he said.

The Sudan Doctors Network, a medical group tracking the war in Sudan, reported earlier that 67 bodies were pulled from the rubble, predicting that the death toll could increase as rescuers continued their search. The group said that the mine — an informal site that employs unregulated workers — lacked basic safety and protective measures.

Earlier, survivors reached by phone and the physicians network said that the tragedy took place on Tuesday evening.

The Kordofan Observatory monitoring group said that at least 70 miners were killed or missing at the site, which stretches more than a kilometer (around a half-mile) across a wide swath of fragile, sandy soil. It described the miners as unregulated and informal workers.

Large quantities of gold have been smuggled out of the country to finance the RSF, which controls gold-producing areas in the Darfur and Kordofan regions, according to experts commissioned by the United Nations.

Sudan plunged into an all-out war in April 2023 as fighting erupted between the RSF and the Sudanese military in the country.

The conflict has killed at least 59,000 people, according to Armed Conflict Location & Event Data, a monitoring group. Aid organizations say that the figure is an undercount, and the true number could be many times higher.

Afghan man sentenced to 20-year prison term in case tied to suicide bombing at Kabul airport

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) — An Islamic State group member was sentenced Wednesday to 20 years in prison for aiding the terrorist organization that took credit for a suicide bombing that killed 13 U.S. service members and about 160 Afghans at the Kabul airport five years ago during the American military's chaotic withdrawal from the country.

A federal jury in Virginia had convicted Mohammad Sharifullah in April of providing material support to

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 64 of 73

the IS affiliate known as ISIS-K. But jurors could not agree whether he bore some responsibility for the airport bombing on Aug. 26, 2021.

U.S. troops were conducting an evacuation operation at the airport when a lone suicide bomber detonated an improvised explosive device near an entry point known as Abbey Gate. Sharifullah's role in the attack was scouting a route to Hamid Karzai International Airport, prosecutors said.

Sharifullah, 28, received the maximum sentence for his one-count conviction in an international terrorism case that President Donald Trump heralded last year during a speech to a joint session of Congress.

Sharifullah did not testify at his trial and declined to address the court before U.S. District Judge Anthony Trenga imposed the sentence. The judge said the defendant was a "dedicated terrorist" who expressed no remorse for the "unfathomable" grief and suffering that he had caused.

Trenga heard victim impact statements from several parents of the U.S. service members. From a podium only a few feet from where Sharifullah sat, they took turns paying tribute to their children's sacrifices and describing how the attack has shattered their families.

Mark Schmitz of Missouri asked Sharifullah to turn and look at him as he spoke about the life and death of his 20-year-old son, Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Jared Schmitz.

"They may have taken his life, but they'll never take his legacy," Schmitz said. "A bomb killed my son. It did not kill what he stood for."

Paula Knauss-Selph, whose son, Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Knauss, was killed in the Abbey Gate bombing, said the family was "forever changed" by the attack.

"No justice will ever be enough to mend my broken heart," she said.

Sharifullah requested a 17-year prison sentence, while prosecutors sought 20 years. His lawyers say he was never an ISIS-K leader and has not been convicted of any conduct related to the airport suicide bombing.

"He was brought here because the government believed he participated in the Abbey Gate attack, a theory which it was unable to prove at trial," defense attorneys wrote.

Prosecutors said in their sentencing memo that "from his teenage years, when he pledged an oath of allegiance to ISIS-K, Sharifullah's carnage was driven by hate. Hate towards Americans."

Jurors convicted Sharifullah of providing material support to ISIS-K. They deadlocked on whether any deaths at the airport "resulted from" that conspiracy. Sharifullah could have faced a possible life sentence if the jury had unanimously decided that question.

According to prosecutors, Sharifullah told a journalist that he wanted to "catch and kill the crusaders" from the United States for invading his country after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. They said Sharifullah was involved in dozens of other attacks, including a March 2024 assault on a Moscow concert hall that killed roughly 140 people.

Defense lawyers argued that prosecutors failed to present any evidence tying Sharifullah to the Kabul bombing besides his own words during hours of FBI questioning. His team said Sharifullah told FBI agents what he thought they wanted to hear, possibly because he was afraid of being tortured in Pakistani custody before he was brought to the U.S.

A review by U.S. Central Command found that the Abbey Gate bomber was Abdul Rahman al-Logari, an IS member who had been released from an Afghan prison by the Taliban. According to an FBI affidavit, Sharifullah recognized the alleged bomber as an operative he had known while incarcerated.

NASA spacecraft discovers a huge new crater on the moon

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Scientists have discovered a crater on the moon that's bigger than the Roman Colosseum and is the result of a powerful impact two years ago that initially went undetected.

The steep-sided hole — about 728 feet (222 meters) across and up to 141 feet (43 meters) deep — is the solar system's biggest known impact crater carved out in recent times.

Such a large-scale event is estimated to occur only once every 132 years, researchers said, making this

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 65 of 73

a treasure trove of information as NASA prepares to build a base for astronauts on the moon.

"This event constitutes a statistically rare, effectively once-in-a-lifetime observation," the scientists wrote in one of two studies appearing on the subject Wednesday in the journal *Science Advances*.

NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter spotted the crater on the moon's near side in May 2024 soon after it was formed by an incoming fragment of an asteroid or comet. The moon strike escaped real-time detection by telescopes on Earth and in space.

LRO's wide-angle images were not identified in the crush of data until August 2025. The spacecraft gathered more detailed pictures last fall, followed by confirmation of the discovery early this year.

The crater — named for the late Thomas McGetchin, a former director of Houston's Lunar and Planetary Institute — is three times bigger than the previous record-holder found by the LRO a decade ago. Pock-marked since ancient times, the moon bears some of the solar system's largest impact craters, including one that stretches more than 1,500 miles (2,400 kilometers) across.

This latest impact churned the lunar surface for more than 66 miles (100 kilometers). Dust and rocky soil were hurled away at a higher angle than expected, according to Mark Robinson, chief scientist for the LRO's cameras who works at Intuitive Machines. Robinson was the lead author for one of the studies.

A separate study identified a 4-mile-wide (7-kilometer-wide) cold spot around the new crater, consistent with a loosening of the moon's top soil. Co-author David Paige of the University of California, Los Angeles, likens it to gardening.

"We're now thinking of impacts as a way to garden the regolith — churning the sediments and putting stuff above that's usually below the surface," Paige said in a statement.

The LRO's numerous crater discoveries since its launch in 2009 show that the moon's top inch (2 centimeters) of soil is being overturned by ejected material every 80,000 years, faster than previously thought, according to Robinson.

Contrary to the popular belief that the Apollo moonwalkers' dusty lunar footprints will last forever, they will "definitely be long gone in that time frame," Robinson said in an email.

The next step is to calculate the risk of ejected crater material striking NASA's planned moon base, he added. "That information will help engineers harden structures so one won't have to worry about damage, or maybe worry less."

Annie Dillard, Pulitzer-winning author of 'Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,' dies at 81

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Annie Dillard, the Pulitzer-Prize winning author and essayist renowned for her poetic explorations of nature, love, spirituality and the art of writing in the "Pilgrim at Tinker Creek," "The Maytrees" and numerous other works, has died. She was 81.

Her literary agent, Rob McQuilkin, said Dillard died Tuesday of natural causes at her home in South Wellfleet, Massachusetts.

Starting in the mid-1970s, Dillard completed a wide range of books, from the poetry collection "Tickets for a Prayer Wheel" to what she would call the "jolly journalism" of "Encounters with Chinese Writers" to the novel of marriage, "The Maytrees," a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner award in 2008. Seven years later, President Barack Obama presented her with a National Humanities Medal for her "profound reflections on human life and nature."

Born Meta Ann Doak, she was a Pittsburgh native who in the 1987 memoir "An American Childhood" looked back at her early years and on her uniquely curious mind. She was raised by nonconformists who gave her a wide range to learn and to discover, and she remembered with awe her growing sense of knowledge and self-knowledge. Resistant for much of her life to organized religion, she would find the eternal in animals, mountains, her mother's skin and in everyday objects. At age 13, she wrote, she was reading "books on drawing, painting, rocks, criminology, birds, moths, beetles, stamps, ponds and streams, medicine."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 66 of 73

Dillard had yet to turn 30 when "Pilgrim at Tinker Creek" established her as a major, new literary voice and heir to Henry David Thoreau as a sensitive and idiosyncratic observer of the natural world. Published in 1974 and winner of the Pulitzer for nonfiction, "Pilgrim at Tinker Creek" drew upon Dillard's private writings about the surroundings of her home in Roanoke, Virginia. Invoking Thoreau, about whom she wrote her master's thesis at Hollins College, she called her book "a meteorological journal of the mind," in which she would explore "some of the sights of this rather tamed valley."

"I am no scientist," she wrote, likening herself to "an infant who has just learned to hold his head up" and gaze about "in bewilderment."

"He hasn't the faintest clue where he is, and he aims to learn. In a couple of years, what he will have learned instead is how to fake it: he'll have the cocksure air of a squatter who has come to feel he owns the place," she wrote.

Dillard taught for more than 20 years at Wesleyan University before retiring in 2002. She was married three times, most recently to the late literary biographer Robert Richardson, whom she met after sending him a fan letter admiring his biography of Thoreau. She had one child, Cody, with second husband Gary Clevidence. Her first husband was creative writing teacher Richard Dillard, whom she divorced in 1975 after 10 years of marriage.

Russian drone strike on a passenger bus in Ukraine kills 5 people and wounds at least 7 others

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A Russian drone struck a passenger bus in southern Ukraine early Wednesday, killing five people and wounding at least seven in the latest in a series of Russian strikes on civilian transportation. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the attack an atrocity with no military purpose.

The strike occurred in the Nikopol district of Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region, near the war's southern front line. Oleksandr Hanzha, head of the regional military administration, said that all five were killed at the scene while the seven wounded were receiving medical care.

Zelenskyy described the vehicle as a minibus and said in an X post that the strike had "no military rationale" and that it was "just another atrocity." He said the strike was connected to Russia's targeting of logistics and critical infrastructure that has continued "unabated."

Zelenskyy said that a passenger train was also struck in the Mykolaiv region on Wednesday, damaging a railway station and a diesel locomotive. Nearly 170 passengers on board the train were evacuated before the strike. An electric locomotive in the northwestern city of Kovel was also struck, Zelenskyy said.

Ukraine requests locomotives from partners

Russian strikes on Ukraine's rail network have resulted in more than 500 locomotives being damaged or completely destroyed since the beginning of the all-out war on Feb. 24, 2022, with more than half those strikes occurring this year, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha wrote on X on Tuesday.

Sybiha described such attacks as "systematic" and aimed at disrupting logistics across Ukraine. He said that Ukraine urgently needs replacements for damaged locomotives, and called on the country's partners to assist in finding locomotives compatible with its 1,520-millimeter rail gauge and to assist in financing.

In another post on X on Wednesday, Sybiha said that Russian forces were striking passenger trains, locomotives, stations and railway routes "knowing exactly how essential they are for civilians, evacuations and Ukraine's economy."

"This is not collateral damage. It is a systematic hunt for people and an attempt to (paralyze) civilian life," he wrote.

Zelenskyy says there is no truce on halting energy strikes

In an interview with CBS News on Tuesday, Zelenskyy pushed back against an earlier claim by U.S. President Donald Trump that Ukraine and Russia had agreed to mutually cease attacks on each other's energy infrastructure. Zelenskyy said that Ukraine was ready to enter such an agreement, if Russia stops striking Ukrainian energy facilities.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 67 of 73

Trump said in a social media post Monday that such a truce had been reached, but didn't offer details on the purported agreement. Previous efforts to broker even a partial ceasefire have repeatedly fallen apart within hours, with both sides accusing the other of violations.

In the CBS interview, Zelenskyy said that the possibility of an energy truce was discussed during a recent meeting in Kyiv with Trump's representatives, Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, but that he had told them: "If the Russians are ready for an energy truce, that means there will be no attacks on energy facilities at all."

Russia decorates ship captain who fired flares at Danish helicopter

Russia's Defense Ministry said Wednesday that the captain of a Russian warship that fired two signal flares toward a Danish military helicopter on Monday, drawing ire from Denmark, has been awarded a medal for his "competent and resolute action."

The ministry said in a statement that the Soobrazitelny corvette was on a mission in neutral waters in the Baltic Sea when its crew spotted the approaching helicopter, which failed to respond to calls made via the international communication channel.

"To prevent a provocation by the Danish helicopter, the corvette commander decided to fire two red signal flares, after which the helicopter left the area where the Russian warship was located," the ministry said.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Wednesday that Moscow has no aggressive intentions toward Europe, but that if countries on the continent were to launch an attack on Russia, "it would be a completely different kind of war, and a very short one."

Russia confirms the death of a general in Donetsk

The deputy head of the Russian armed forces' military-political department, Lt. Gen. Apti Alaudinov, confirmed Wednesday that a decorated Russian general had been killed in the occupied Donetsk region.

Alaudinov, who didn't provide details on the circumstances of Maj. Gen. Anton Grunis' death, hailed the officer as "a hero" and "one of the most respected generals ... a real man and officer and a great patriot."

The confirmation of Grunis' death came after Robert "Magyar" Brovdi, commander of Ukraine's Unmanned Systems Forces, alleged on Wednesday that Grunis had been killed in occupied Donetsk by a Ukrainian drone while at a command post in the village of Kindrativka.

In July, Grunis reported to Russian President Vladimir Putin that his troops had captured the town of Kostiantynivka and he was later awarded the Hero of Russia medal. Ukraine has disputed that Kostiantynivka was fully taken by Russian forces.

Grunis had previously fought in Chechnya, a mainly Muslim republic whose bid for independence after the Soviet Union's collapse led to years of war with Russian government forces. He also took part in Russia's campaign in Syria.

In Ukraine, he commanded the 4th Guards Motorized Infantry Brigade.

Meanwhile, 17 other sites were damaged in Ukraine's Kyiv region between Tuesday and Wednesday morning, according to the head of the Kyiv regional military administration, Tymur Tkachenko. Eight private homes, five vehicles, a municipal building, a hangar and a production facility were among the sites damaged, Tkachenko said on Telegram.

Zelenskyy said on X that the Kherson, Donetsk and Poltava regions had also come under attack.

In the northern city of Sumy, six people were injured in a Russian guided aerial bomb attack, including a 14-year-old girl, according to the head of the Sumy regional military administration Oleh Hryhorov. Two homes were destroyed and 10 others damaged in the strikes, along with damage to an educational facility, Hryhorov said, adding that two other men were hospitalized after a separate strike hit an industrial zone.

In the port city of Odesa, one person was killed in a Russian attack that sparked a fire at garages and damaged vehicles and private homes, Serhii Lysak, head of the city's military administration, wrote on Telegram Wednesday.

Russia's Defense Ministry said that its air defenses downed 71 Ukrainian drones overnight. In the Belgorod region, one person was killed and four others were wounded by Ukrainian strikes over the last 24 hours, according to acting governor Alexander Shuvayev.

Trump administration has cut or frozen \$177 billion in grants across every state, analysis shows

By MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

The Trump administration has cut or frozen up to \$177 billion in federal grants since the president took office for his second term, according to a tracking tool released Wednesday by a pro-democracy nonprofit and a group of researchers and scientists.

The cuts affected all 50 states and the District of Columbia, with health, nutrition, the environment and disaster relief making up the largest share of cuts, the States United Democracy Center and Grant Witness organization found.

Among the grants that were eliminated, frozen or delayed were ones related to maternal health in Michigan, education research in Mississippi and assistance to minority farmers in Iowa, the researchers found. California, Texas, New York, Illinois and North Carolina saw the highest amounts of interrupted grant money. The tracking tool is called Lost Funds.

"By bringing thousands of funding disruptions from the Trump administration together in a publicly accessible, verified database, Lost Funds puts the magnitude of their impact on full display," Scott Delaney, co-founder of Grant Witness, said in a statement.

The \$177 billion finding represents nearly 10% of federal discretionary spending, the groups said.

The tracker's organizers said the disrupted grants were beyond the kind of cuts that typically happen when administrations change.

"Lost Funds shows the extraordinary scale and real human impact of these disruptions, and how states are once again on the front lines protecting their residents," said Kelly Rader, States United Democracy Center's research director.

In some cases, courts have ruled against the administration's grant funding cuts.

The new tool, which is being made available for public use, relies on data from USASpending.gov, an open data source of federal spending information, according to the groups' methodology. They said the tracker would be updated regularly as the administration takes new action and lawsuits move through the courts.

States United bills itself as a nonpartisan group dedicated to the rule of law and free, fair, secure elections. It was cofounded by Norm Eisen, an attorney who has been involved in prominent lawsuits against the Trump administration, including over the Kennedy Center. Eisen left the States United center in 2024.

Grant Witness is a group of scientists, researchers and attorneys who document how funding is changing under President Donald Trump's administration.

A message seeking comment on the analysis was sent to the White House.

In wartime Russia, veterans who fought in Ukraine are running for parliament

By DASHA LITVINOVA and YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

They lead party tickets, star in campaign videos and appear in televised debates. They are Russians who have fought in Ukraine, and they feature prominently in this week's parliamentary election.

Election officials say nearly 200 candidates have served in Ukraine, and the Kremlin touts them as part of Russia's "true elite" — its effort to show that veterans of the 4 1/2-year-old war will have an honored place in civilian life.

But few analysts believe that most of them will ever hold any real power among the country's ruling class, dismissing the effort as a way to lure more volunteers to fight.

Independent Russian media regularly report about returning veterans involved in assaults, drunken brawls and even killings. Some of those crimes were committed by men who were recruited into the military from prison.

The vote that begins Friday for the State Duma — the lower house of parliament — is the first since the war began, and also will take place in areas of Ukraine that Russia captured and illegally annexed. The

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 69 of 73

Kremlin is tightly managing the election, seeking to reinforce its narrative of widespread support for the war and provide a veneer of legitimacy for its actions.

Most of the Kremlin-aligned parties allowed on the ballot have candidates identified as participants in the SVO — the Russian acronym for its “special military operation” in Ukraine.

One prominent candidate is Vladislav Golovin, 29, of the ruling United Russia party, who fought in the battle for the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol and lost part of his leg. He has appeared at events with President Vladimir Putin, who made him a Hero of Russia, the country’s highest honor.

In 2024, Golovin took part in Putin’s “Time of Heroes” program that prepares veterans for government careers. He now heads a military and patriotic youth organization, the Young Army — but also has been put on Western sanctions lists.

United Russia has several dozen candidates with a Ukraine war background. Another of its leading candidates is Yevgeny Poddubny, a well-connected state TV war correspondent who was wounded by a Ukrainian drone.

The ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party has a top candidate in Alexei Vereshchagin, who is described as having joined the Moscow-backed separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine in 2014 and leading a brigade of volunteers.

“We are the ones our homeland has called upon to fight for the ‘Russian World,’ and we will fight,” Vereshchagin, who was born in Kyiv, said in a campaign video, using a term popularized by Putin, especially after Moscow illegally annexed Crimea in 2014.

Ukrainian police in March posted a photo of what appeared to be Vereshchagin and said they were investigating him for his role in home invasions and threatening civilians in the Kyiv region in 2022 before Ukrainian forces retook the area. They said he fought against Ukraine for over a decade. He hasn’t publicly commented on the allegations. The party did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Kremlin seeks to entice men to fight in Ukraine

By promoting veterans in the State Duma campaign, the Kremlin wants to show potential recruits that they would be fighting “for some higher cause, and that they have bright prospects ahead of them in the form of a career lift,” said Nikolay Petrov, senior research fellow at the NEST Centre, founded by exiled Russian tycoon and opposition figure Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

But Russia also “doesn’t know what to do” with those returning from the battlefield, Petrov told The Associated Press, and so it offers them largely insignificant positions with little real power, while focusing on promoting those who already held public office.

Former Putin speechwriter-turned-political analyst Abbas Gallyamov was more blunt, calling it “empty talk.”

To lure more men into enlisting, “you need to promise them everything they want to hear, from promises of payments to flattery and stories of their special greatness, their contribution to the cause of building a new Russia,” Gallyamov told AP.

Most veterans have a difficult postwar path

The postwar path is not simple for many veterans. Most of those who signed military contracts cannot terminate them under Putin’s 2022 “partial mobilization” decree, and those who were drafted that year have not yet been demobilized, either.

Those who are severely injured or have reached a certain age can be discharged, and some special units reportedly offer limited tours of duty.

About 167,000 servicemen have returned from Ukraine, presidential administration official Sergei Novikov said in December, although Russian media reports and experts say the number is probably higher.

The competition for the Time of Heroes program is fierce and requires higher education and management experience. Out of over 65,000 applicants in 2024-25, only 168 were accepted, according to its website. Of them, some 80 were appointed to various positions on national, regional or municipal levels.

The independent Russian news outlet Meduza reported in June that at least 1,300 veterans have been appointed to government posts, were elected to local legislatures and councils, or got jobs in state-backed companies or institutions. About 850 of those had some kind of government or related experience before serving, Meduza said, concluding that most beneficiaries were already part of the ruling class.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 70 of 73

AP was unable to independently verify those findings, but reports about government officials or lawmakers serving in Ukraine and then returning to their civilian careers are common.

Duma deputy Alexei Zhuravlyov, head of the Rodina, or "Homeland" party, has reported serving at the front while keeping his seat as a lawmaker, like some of his colleagues. He recently lashed out at a YouTube blogger who wondered why he's not fighting full-time in Ukraine. Zhuravlyov said later that he spends "more time on the front line than in the Duma."

Tambov regional Gov. Yevgeny Pervyshov, a United Russia candidate who also was the former mayor of his native Krasnodar and did a stint as a Duma lawmaker, served in Ukraine as part of a special military unit in 2022.

The U.K. government described his unit in 2024 as having "an unusually high number of United Russia party members and sons of Kremlin VIPs." In a post on X, the British Defense Ministry said the unit is predominantly involved in drone operations far from the front, allowing elite political figures "to sidestep usual Russian military service requirements with guaranteed safety."

After a tour of under a year, Pervyshov was accepted into the Time of Heroes program and later was appointed Tambov's acting governor before being elected in September 2025.

Enthusiasm sours for Putin's promises

Ivan Filippov, who studies propaganda and analyzes military and pro-war bloggers, says such examples fuel disappointment in the pro-war community, which initially was enthusiastic about Putin's promise of a new "elite."

"They were very happy when he said those words, but it turned out rather quickly that it's not about (genuine) veterans," he told AP. Rather, he added, it's about some who went to the battlefield once, "fired a howitzer, got their veteran credentials" and returned to office.

Now, war hawks understand that returning troops will face "a difficult life" when returning home, he said.

"They understand clearly that no one will let them into power," Filippov said.

Novikov, the Kremlin official, said in December that "tens of thousands" of veterans remain jobless, and it "forms a dangerous risk zone."

As for putting veterans in positions of power, the Kremlin naturally prefers "rational bureaucrats" who served in the military, said Petrov, the analyst.

"The authorities don't at all need bandits that come back from there," he added.

Why Yemen's Houthis have only grown stronger through years of war

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

At various times over the last decade, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, Britain and Israel have carried out punishing air raids on Yemen's Houthi rebels — only to see them grow even stronger.

Now, as the Iran-backed Houthis advance on a key maritime chokepoint and strike Saudi oil facilities, rattling world markets, there is little that can be done to stop them that hasn't been tried before.

That's because the Houthis operate in a large and mountainous territory where they can disperse fighters and military infrastructure while threatening major oil infrastructure and key trade routes. Iran and its allies in Lebanon and Iraq provide expertise, training and sophisticated weapons, according to U.N. and other experts, and the Houthis' hard-line ideology does the rest.

"They are the most committed, the most ideologically pure and the most aggressive" of Iran's regional allies, says Michael Knights, who has written extensively about the Houthis and is now head of research at Horizon Engage, a New York-based strategic advisory.

"They've been developed by the Iranians in a fast-track way. Things that took the Lebanese Hezbollah 20 years to develop, the Houthis have developed in five."

The well-armed Iranian ally has room to run

The Houthis have a wide array of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and drones — many resembling Iranian

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 71 of 73

models — that can reach all the Gulf states as well as Israel. They have also used sophisticated anti-ship missiles and naval drones to strike vessels in the Red Sea, threatening a critical trade route.

Iran denies arming the Houthis, which would violate a U.N. embargo. But smuggled Iranian weapons and parts have been seized from numerous shipments bound for Yemen, and a report by U.N. experts in 2024 documented extensive military ties between the Houthis, Iran and its other allies.

That report estimated that the Houthis had recruited up to 350,000 fighters by 2024, up from just 30,000 in 2015, when Saudi Arabia intervened in Yemen's civil war against the Houthis and imposed a naval blockade.

The Houthis can use relatively inexpensive drones and missiles to target oil and other infrastructure just across the border in Saudi Arabia, as well as tankers off the coast. And while Iran is believed to supply cutting-edge components like guidance systems, the Houthis can manufacture much of their weaponry domestically, and there are suggestions they may be using AI to try to build better missiles.

Saudi Arabia boasts an array of U.S.-supplied weapons, including sophisticated aircraft as well as advanced missile defenses used against Iran at the height of the war last spring.

But with supplies of high-end interceptors under pressure, it's unclear how long it can ward off attacks — not only from the Houthis, but from Iran-backed militias in Iraq blamed for an attack that shut down an east-west pipeline crucial for oil exports.

Airstrikes have had limited effect

Saudi Arabia went to war against the Houthis in early 2015, after the rebels seized much of northern and central Yemen, including the capital, Sanaa, from Yemen's internationally recognized government. Even then, the Saudis feared the growth of a well-armed Iranian proxy on their border.

Over the next seven years, Saudi Arabia carried out waves of airstrikes against the Houthis, often killing civilians. An array of Yemeni government forces and southern separatists struggled to push the Houthis back, and the battle lines moved little before a 2022 ceasefire.

The following year, after the outbreak of the war in Gaza, the Houthis began attacking Red Sea shipping in what they said was a blockade of Israel. The U.S. and the U.K. launched waves of strikes against the Houthis beginning in January 2024.

The following year, U.S. President Donald Trump ordered an intensified air campaign, with some 2,000 munitions dropped on over 1,000 targets, a U.S. military official told The Associated Press at the time.

The cost of the U.S. munitions alone totaled more than \$750 million, while the Houthis destroyed seven U.S. MQ-9 Reaper drones, at a cost of more than \$30 million apiece. An over \$60 million F/A-18 fighter jet slid off an aircraft carrier.

After weeks of U.S. strikes, the Houthis agreed to stop attacking American ships. But they continued to target Israel, which responded with its own strikes later in 2025, killing the Houthi prime minister along with other senior officials and repeatedly hitting a key port.

The Houthis largely kept to the sidelines in the first several months of the Iran war, but in July, they resumed attacks on Saudi Arabia and declared a blockade on Saudi shipping.

Any lasting defeat would require ground troops

As recent conflicts have shown, air power is rarely effective without ground troops who can move in and seize territory after strikes.

In the case of Yemen, the ground fighters opposed to the Houthis are deeply divided and fought each other as recently as January. They include fighters loyal to the Saudi-backed government and southern separatists supported by the United Arab Emirates — a sometimes rival to the Saudis that withdrew from Yemen in 2019.

"Half of the story is Iranian support, and this is extremely important ... but there's another half of the story, which is the weakness of their adversaries," said Thomas Juneau, a professor of international affairs at the University of Ottawa specializing in Iran and Yemen.

"(Yemen's) internationally recognized government is fragmented, it's weak, it's disunited, it's corrupt, and the Houthis have systematically been able to exploit that," he said.

In recent weeks, anti-Houthi forces have fallen back from one position after another as the rebels have

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 72 of 73

advanced toward the Bab el-Mandeb, a narrow strait between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

The Saudis appear reluctant to enter another full-scale war with the Houthis. A ground campaign would involve prolonged fighting and high casualties. The U.S., still preoccupied with Iran, also appears keen to stay out. A Saudi mutual defense pact with Turkey and Pakistan signed last month has yet to be activated.

The diplomatic options are also limited. The Houthis are demanding that Saudi Arabia lift its blockade, which would be an admission of defeat in the long-running war and pave the way for even more extensive Iranian aid to the rebels.

"As long as U.S.-Iran tensions are not resolved, there will not be significant progress between Saudi Arabia and Iran," Juneau said. "The Houthis are in a very intransigent mood right now, and they are absolutely not ready to make any kind of concessions."

EU chief proposes bloc-wide social media ban for kids under 13

By SAM McNEIL and KELVIN CHAN Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union's top official proposed on Wednesday banning children under 13 across the 27-nation bloc from using social media sites and imposing limits for older teens on accessing the platforms.

The plan outlined by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen adds to global efforts to protect young people using platforms such as Instagram and TikTok from online harm.

"I am aware that many perceive the power of Big Tech as overwhelming and impossible to roll back. I disagree," von der Leyen said in her annual State of the European Union speech in Strasbourg.

"We do not have to accept addictive features. We do not have to accept children being drawn into ever more extreme content. We do not have to accept that girls have their photos used for AI-generated sexualized images," she said.

Von der Leyen said that under her proposal "mini accounts" chaperoned by guardians would be granted to kids aged 13-15, with limits on features and the amount of time they can be accessed.

For 15-to-18-year-olds, platforms will need to provide a "safe design," she said. Further details of the plan are expected Thursday.

Brussels risks a fresh confrontation with Trump and Big Tech

The EU's 27 member nations still need to debate and vote on the proposal, which could take years and spark tensions with U.S. President Donald Trump, who has long criticized Europe's tech regulations.

Brando Benifei, an Italian member of the European Parliament, said he supported the plan and that Brussels shouldn't shy away from a showdown with the dominant U.S. tech companies.

"To apply this, you need to confront in a very frontal way the interests of platforms and Big Tech who are not happy with this," he said.

Von der Leyen was advancing a plan she foreshadowed earlier this year, when she said kids should be exposed to social media in a "phased and gradual" way.

Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and TikTok already prohibit anyone under 13 from opening an account, but authorities have accused the companies of failing to keep them off.

But some experts said the commission was failing to tackle a more fundamental issue with the social media industry's core business practices based on getting users hooked on scrolling through addictive content while showing them ads.

The plan "merely delays young people's exposure to the risks of online harm instead of addressing the business model and extractive practices which fuel it," said Simeon de Brouwer, a policy advisor at digital rights group EDRi. The platforms will "unavoidably target them as soon as they're a day older than the threshold."

The EU proposals are part of a global effort to improve children's online safety

The commission's proposal is part of a wider global push to protect young people online and represents the first move to introduce a bloc-wide age limit for social media.

Individual European countries such as Spain and Portugal have taken their own steps to ban teens from

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 103 ~ 73 of 73

social media platforms, mirroring regulatory actions in other places like Australia and New Zealand

Some efforts have run into roadblocks. France's top court last month struck down a law banning children under 15 from social media, saying it infringed on fundamental freedoms. French President Emmanuel Macron vowed to rework the proposal.

In the United States, social media company Meta Platforms last month agreed to pay up to \$18 billion and add stronger child-safety measures to its Facebook and Instagram platforms to resolve a trial over teen social media addiction and settle claims filed by nearly every state.

Manfred Weber, the head of the largest group in the European Parliament, spoke after von der Leyen to propose that the EU follow Australia's lead in allowing citizens to switch off social media algorithms.

"Elon Musk will not like it, but probably that is a reason for doing it," he said.

Von der Leyen also weighed in on the intensifying debate about artificial intelligence and the potential risks it poses to humanity, saying the commission would discuss efforts to slow down advanced AI development with leading AI companies.

She said the EU would work with "like-minded partners" like Canada and Britain.

"We want to team up on model evaluation, verification, early warning, AI security and much more," she said.

Today in History: September 17, U.S. Constitution signed

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Sept. 17, the 260th day of 2026. There are 105 days left in the year.

On Sept. 17, 1787, the Constitution of the United States was completed and signed by a majority of delegates attending the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.

Also on this date:

In 1862, more than 3,600 men were killed in the Civil War Battle of Antietam (an-TEE'-tum) in Maryland.

In 1908, Lt. Thomas E. Selfridge of the U.S. Army Signal Corps became the first person to die in the crash of a powered aircraft, the Wright Flyer, at Fort Myer, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C. The pilot, Orville Wright, was seriously injured but survived.

In 1944, during World War II, Allied paratroopers launched Operation Market Garden, landing behind German lines in the Netherlands.

In 1978, after 12 days of meetings at the U.S. presidential retreat of Camp David, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin (men-AH'-kem BAY'-gihn) signed the Camp David Accords, a framework for a peace treaty.

In 1980, former Nicaraguan President Anastasio Somoza was assassinated in Paraguay.

In 2001, six days after 9/11, stock prices nosedived but stopped short of collapse in an emotional, flag-waving reopening of Wall Street.

In 2011, a demonstration calling itself Occupy Wall Street began in New York, prompting similar protests around the U.S. and the world.

In 2021, a Los Angeles jury convicted New York real estate heir Robert Durst of killing his best friend 20 years earlier. (Durst, who was sentenced to life in prison, died in 2022.)

In 2024, thousands of pagers distributed to the Shiite Muslim political party and the militant group Hezbollah blew up in homes, offices and front lines across Lebanon, remotely detonated by Israel. The pager attack killed 12 people and wounded more than 3,000 others.

Today's Birthdays: Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, is 93. Mountaineer-explorer Reinhold Messner is 82. Basketball Hall of Fame coach Phil Jackson is 81. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is 76. Actor Cassandra Peterson ("Elvira, Mistress of the Dark") is 75. Director-actor Paul Feig is 64. Film director Baz Luhrmann is 64. Singer BeBe Winans is 64. Actor Kyle Chandler is 61. Rapper Doug E. Fresh is 60. Author Cheryl Strayed is 58. Actor Matthew Settle is 57. Designer-TV personality Nate Berkus is 55. NASCAR driver Jimmie Johnson is 51. NHL forward Alexander Ovechkin (oh-VECH'-kin) is 41. Actor Danielle Brooks is 37. NFL quarterback Patrick Mahomes is 31. Actor Mia Talerico is 18.