

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 1 of 73

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Hein Birthday Ad](#)
- [4- Today on GDILIVE.COM](#)
- [5- Groton Area sweeps Deuel in all seven volleyball sets](#)
- [7- Table Talks started in 2014](#)
- [8- Brown County Planning and Zoning Agenda](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: Ex-Biden appointee faces attorney general in US House race with differences on tariffs, immigration](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: South Dakota keeps teaching scholarship open to all, but special education gets priority](#)
- [14- SD SearchLight: Amendment K: Lawmakers ask voters to approve investing unclaimed property proceeds in a trust fund](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: California sued by Trump administration over demand to purge 20,000 voters from rolls](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: Bipartisan permitting bill in Congress could speed energy projects, but draws green critics](#)
- [20- SD SearchLight: Trump: Execution of Fort Hood shooter will not be livestreamed](#)
- [20- SD SearchLight: Federal judge blocks Trump administration from moving Forest Service headquarters to Utah](#)
- [22- Weather Pages](#)
- [26- Daily Devotional](#)
- [27- Subscription Form](#)
- [28- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [29- News from the Associated Press](#)

Community Calendar

Friday, Oct. 16

Senior Menu: Roast pork, baked potato, green beans, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Fruit buckle.

School Lunch: Meatballs, green beans.

Football at Aberdeen Roncalli, 7 p.m., Dacotah Bank Stadium

Saturday, Oct. 17

SDHSAA State Soccer

C Team Volleyball at Northwestern JV/C Tournament, 9 a.m.

Varsity Volleyball at Miller Tournament, 10 a.m.



Sunday, Oct. 18

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.

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

Third Grade Basketball practice in the GHS Gym, 4 p.m.

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.

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

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

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

Sixth Grade Girls Basketball Practice, 4 p.m., Arena
Third Grade Girls Basketball, 4 p.m., GHS Old Gym
Dance Team Practice, 5:30 p.m., Arena

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 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.

Energy Ceasefire Ends

Ukraine struck an oil refinery southeast of Moscow yesterday in retaliation for Russia damaging energy facilities in and around Kyiv. The strikes defied President Donald Trump's declaration of a ceasefire Sunday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy maintains he was not involved in any ceasefire negotiations before Trump's announcement. He nonetheless paused strikes for several days after, alleging yesterday that US officials had threatened to withhold intelligence if he continued attacks. Russia did not publicly acknowledge a ceasefire, and an attack Wednesday left over 600,000 Ukrainians without power. Ukraine says it did not receive advance warning of that attack and accused Elon Musk's SpaceX of cutting access to internet service Starshield.

Brent crude oil futures fell 0.1% yesterday while West Texas Intermediate climbed 2.8%.

Execution Livestream Canceled

President Donald Trump yesterday called off the Pentagon's plans to livestream the firing-squad execution of Fort Hood shooter Nidal Hasan after bipartisan backlash.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced last week that the Dec. 3 execution would be broadcast to deter terrorism. Hasan, a former Army psychiatrist, killed 13 people and wounded 32 others on a Texas military base in 2009, citing opposition to what he called a "war on Islam" as his motive. He would have been the first person publicly executed in the US since 1936, when roughly 20,000 people gathered in Kentucky to watch the hanging of a Black man convicted of raping a white woman. About 8 in 10 Americans oppose public executions, according to recent polling. Iran, Yemen, and Afghanistan are the only known countries to have carried out public executions since 2021.

Hasan's execution will still be the first by a US military firing squad since 1945, as the US also reintroduces electric chair and gas chamber executions.

'You Can See Everything'

A documentary about disgraced Theranos founder Elizabeth Holmes opens in select theaters today after setting advance ticket sales records for documentaries and A24 films at Alamo Drafthouse.

The 174-minute film begins 34 days before Holmes entered prison in 2023 to serve an 11-year sentence for defrauding investors in her failed blood-testing company. Holmes approached A24 about documenting her final weeks of freedom, and the studio tapped comedian Nathan Fielder, known for "Nathan for You," and filmmaker Lance Oppenheim. The pair eventually moved into the guesthouse at the San Diego rental Holmes shared with partner Billy Evans and their two children. The filmmakers challenge Holmes' account of the Theranos scandal, while Holmes maintains her innocence.

The documentary has earned a 100% critics' score on Rotten Tomatoes so far and is projected to earn at least \$7M during its opening weekend. Holmes and Evans reportedly have not yet watched the finished film.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 3 of 73

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

BBC's legal team accuses President Donald Trump of delaying testimony in his \$10B defamation case against the British broadcaster.

Arizona State men's hockey coach Greg Powers exits program after August outdoor workout left player on life support.

College Football Playoff reportedly nears deal to expand to 24 teams, beginning with 2027 season; move would double the number of teams in the postseason bracket, which debuted with a four-team format at the end of 2014 season.

Science & Technology

Researchers develop machine-learning model that doubles weather forecasting accuracy two to six weeks out, a critical window for emergency planning.

Coral can fully recover from bleaching after brief contact with healthy coral clones, according to lab-controlled study.

Archaeologists unearth remains of Neanderthal likely killed with a wooden spear roughly 75,000 years ago—the oldest known evidence of such lethal violence among human ancestors (More, w/images)

Business & Markets

US stock markets rally (S&P 500 +0.3%, Dow +1.1%, Nasdaq +0.1%) as the 10-year Treasury yield falls to 5.1%, the largest single-day decline in over a year.

Wholesale inflation rises 6.3% over the last 12 months through September, the biggest increase since December 2022, producer price index report finds.

SpaceX and Tesla shares fall 2.3% and 1.3%, respectively, amid reports Elon Musk's companies could merge in the coming weeks.

Politics & World Affairs

Gunman kills at least three children and a teacher, wounds two others at elementary school in Bend, Oregon; 16-year-old male suspect is killed by a bystander.

Texas Senate candidate James Talarico (D) raises \$64M in third quarter, his campaign says—the largest haul for a US Senate candidate in history in a single quarter.

Iranian-backed Houthi rebels strike Saudi-backed government's presidential palace in Aden, killing at least five people and wounding more than a dozen others.

Celebrating 85 years

Nancy will celebrate her 85th birthday on Oct 16th.
Family and friends are invited to help her mark
this special occasion by sending birthday wishes to

Nancy Hein,
918 Arbor Lane #46, Aberdeen, SD 57401.
With love and appreciation her family wishes her
a very happy birthday.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 4 of 73



Groton
Area
Tigers
Groton, SD

GDILIVE



YouTube

A production of the

Groton Daily Independent

For more info: GDILIVE.COM

Football

Groton Area
at Roncalli

(Dacotah Stadium)

Fri., Oct. 16, 2026, 7 p.m.



**Join the voice of the Tigers, Justin Olson
along with Savannah Bible and Paul Kosel**

Sponsors on GDILIVE.COM are: Agtegra, Avantara-Groton,
Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom Ts, Blocker Construction,
Dacotah Bank, Dan Richardt from Groton Ford, Farmers Union Insurance,
Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, Heartland Energy,
Jacobson Electric, John Sieh Agency,
Jungle Lanes & Cafe, Rix Farms / R&M Farms, S & S Lumber,
and The Meat House of Andover.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 5 of 73

Groton Area sweeps Deuel in all seven volleyball sets

CLEAR LAKE – It was a clean sweep for the Groton Area volleyball teams Thursday night as the Tigers defeated the Deuel Cardinals in all seven sets played, from the C match through the varsity contest.

The varsity Tigers posted a 3-0 victory, winning 25-20, 25-21 and 25-11 to improve their season record to 13-10. Deuel dropped to 8-11.

Groton Area used several scoring runs throughout the opening set to secure the 25-20 victory. The second set proved more competitive, featuring eight ties and eight lead changes. After falling behind 11-10, the Tigers put together a four-point run to grab a 14-11 advantage and maintained the lead to claim the 25-21 win.

The third set was tied three times early, with the only lead change coming when Groton Area moved ahead 2-1. From there, the Tigers dominated the action, collecting 16 kills in the set on their way to the 25-11 victory.

Groton Area finished the match with 40 kills, six ace serves, eight assisted blocks and one solo block. Deuel recorded 20 kills, four ace serves and three solo blocks. The Tigers committed six serving errors compared to just two for the Cardinals.

Tevan Hanson led the Tigers with 10 kills, one solo block, one assist and 15 digs. Taryn Traphagen added eight kills, one solo block and one assisted block, while Elizabeth Cole contributed seven kills and two assisted blocks.

Abby Fjeldheim finished with six kills, Kella Tracy had five kills and one assisted block, and Makenna Krause recorded two kills and two assisted blocks. Sydney Locke added one kill, two ace serves and 13 digs, while McKenna Tietz contributed an ace serve.

Libby Althoff directed the offense with 18 assists while adding two solo blocks and two assisted blocks. Tori Schuster finished with 13 assists, 10 digs and one ace serve.

Deuel was led offensively by Lauryn Peterreins and Camdyn Peterreins, who each finished with six kills. Lauryn also recorded one ace serve and 10 digs, while Camdyn added three solo blocks and eight digs.

Alayna Carlson contributed four kills and one ace serve, while Aubrey Lanners had three kills, one assist and 13 assists. Sophie Trupe recorded one kill and 14 digs. Kamryl Kreger had one solo block, and Mataylah Pope added an ace serve.

Groton Area coach Chelsea Hanson was pleased with the sweep, particularly as the Tigers prepare for another tournament Saturday.

"A win's a win always," Hanson said following the match. "For us, just being able to come out and get wins and try to do it somewhat efficiently so that way we can go into our weekend tournament this weekend and not waste a bunch of reps on Thursday."

Hanson was particularly pleased with the balanced offensive production, especially with some changes to the lineup.

"I thought everyone did a really nice job," Hanson said. "Obviously, we ran a 6-2, had new setters on the floor trying to figure that kind of stuff out."

The Tigers played without Chesney Weber, who had been feeling ill during the week. Hanson said the team had been dealing with the situation since its earlier match against Britton-Hecla and decided to use Thursday's contest as an opportunity to give other players experience.

"She's doing good. She wasn't feeling good today," Hanson said. "Hopefully she'll be back for the tournament this weekend. And if she's not, we'll run with this lineup and we'll just do what we do."

The coach said the biggest adjustment involved developing timing between the setters and hitters, particularly in the middle of the court.

"People don't realize how hard it is to build a connection," Hanson said. "It's not as hard with the outsides and the right sides, this connection with the setter, but trying to get Taryn and Libby going in the middle, it's a little more difficult. It's just timing."

Hanson explained that middle hitters have less time to adjust to a set because of the shorter distance between the setter and the hitter.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 6 of 73

She also emphasized the importance of having several players capable of carrying the offensive load rather than depending on one individual.

"Usually we're used to Taryn kind of taking over and leading us offensively," Hanson said, noting that other players stepped up when the Tigers needed additional scoring.

The Tigers recorded 10 kills and four ace serves in the opening set, followed by 14 kills and two ace serves in the second. Their offense was at its strongest in the third set, when Groton Area connected for 16 kills while holding Deuel to just three.

"If we can average more than 10 kills a set, we're going to win games," Hanson said. "Overall, any game that we can walk out with a win is good for us."

The junior varsity Tigers also earned a straight-set victory, defeating Deuel 25-22 and 25-19.

Kinley Sandness led Groton Area with six kills and two ace serves, while Abby Fjeldheim also recorded six kills and one ace serve. Brooklyn Spanier and Elizabeth Cole each had four kills, with Spanier adding a block.

Neely Althoff contributed three kills and two ace serves. Tori Schuster recorded four ace serves, and Rylene Gilbert added one.

For Deuel, Aubrey Lanners and Brylee Redlin each finished with three kills. Mataylah Pope had two kills, one block and one ace serve.

The C team completed the evening sweep with a 25-12, 26-24 victory.

After cruising through the opening set, Groton Area found itself facing a three-point deficit late in the second set. Deuel held a 24-21 advantage and was just one point away from forcing a deciding third set.

However, the Tigers rallied to score the final five points, turning the deficit into a dramatic 26-24 victory.

Maycee Moody led Groton Area with eight kills and two ace serves, while Charli Jacobsen contributed five kills. Brylee Redlin led Deuel with six kills.

The successful evening capped a strong showing throughout the Groton Area volleyball program, with the Tigers winning every set in the three matches.

Hanson also praised the competition earlier in the evening, noting that Deuel's eighth-grade team was among the strongest opponents the Groton Area junior high program had faced this season.

Groton Area now turns its attention to Saturday's tournament, where the Tigers are scheduled to open pool play against Philip at 10 a.m. They will also face Miller and Hitchcock-Tulare before advancing to placement matches based on pool results.

Potential opponents later in the tournament include Warner and Castlewood.

"Should be a good day, fun tournament," Hanson said. "We're excited to go."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 7 of 73



Pictured left to right are Becky Hunter, Bridgett Fliehs, Laurie LaMee, Judy Thompson, Eunice McColister and Laurie Mitchell; not pictured are team members Renee Swisher, Lori Westby, and Becky Knecht. (Photo by Dorene Nelson)

Table Talks started in 2014

by Dorene Nelson

In 2014 a group of ladies joined together to provide a new option for lunch for Groton High School students. For the first year, meals were set up in the high school gym. The next year the meals, now called Table Talks, moved across the street from the school to the parish hall at St. John's Lutheran Church. Utilizing the church facility was good for the workers and for the students who can get a breath of fresh air as they walk across the street every Wednesday for noon lunch.

"The goal is to nourish the student's body and soul," Laurie LaMee stated, "since the faith-based topics at the luncheon are provided along with excellent home cooked meals."

"The food is donated by the workers and many others interested in supporting this worthy cause," Becky Hunter said. "There is no charge for the delicious food. We average about 65 students a week."

"Usually there are about ten ladies who fix the food and help set it up on tables along the south wall of the parish hall," she explained. "The students come in, set their cell phones on various tables to save their place, and proceed to the food choices set out and ready for them!"

"There is no charge since the food is donated and cooked by the volunteers at Table Talks," Laurie LaMee explained. "Our menu today is hot beef sandwiches, green string beans, roasted potato chunks, dessert, and juice."

"Table Talks is available only for high school students," Becky said. "Near the end of the meal, we have a speaker. We were very grateful to have Laurie LaMee's daughter, Katie Francis, as our speaker today."

Katie told the group about her baby daughter having been born with Down's Syndrome. "I know there will be challenges but also rewards in raising a special child," she explained. As Katie talked, this group of high school students listened respectfully and enjoyed her little girl.

"We work as a group, cook the food, and have lunch after the students go back to their classes," Becky said. "It's a group effort and very rewarding as well as being a lot of fun!"

"The juniors were absent today since they were in Aberdeen for a college and career fair," she said. "The adults enjoy eating after the kids have gone through the line. The kids are allowed to have second helpings if they want."

"We often get comments from the students," Becky said, "such as you can make that chicken cracker hotdish again. I am usually in charge of finding speakers every week. I receive ideas and suggestions from others."

"We start working about 10 a.m. every Wednesday," she explained. "The food is prepared from donations, either food or money, from the community."

AGENDA

BROWN COUNTY PLANNING/ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETINGS

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2026 – 7:00 PM

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

- I. **Call to Order:** for Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission
- II. **Roll Call:** Stan Beckler, David North, James Meyers, Carrie Weisenburger, Paul Johnson, Joel Wiedebush and County Commissioner Mike Gage (who serves on this Board per SDCL 11-2-2).
- III. **Opportunity for Public Comment if any.** Anyone may speak for up to three (3) minutes on any item that is not on this Agenda. A total of ten (10) minutes is set aside for this item if needed.
- IV. **Approval of October 20, 2026, Agenda:** Motion: 1st _____ 2nd _____
- V. **Approval of September 15, 2026, Minutes:** Motion: 1st _____ 2nd _____

ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT (BOA)

- VI. **Old Business:**
 - 1) **Sign-up sheet:** On the table by the door entrance, there is a Sign-up Sheet. Please legibly sign in and mark YES or NO if you want to speak to the Board on any Agenda Item.
 - 2) **Permits:** Anyone that has submitted a Variance Petition (VP) or a Conditional Use Petition (CUP) to the Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA) is still required to get their required PERMITS from the Zoning Office before starting their project if their Petition gets approved. Penalties may be assessed by Ordinance when starting projects without proper permits in place.
- VII. **New Business:** Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission as Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA).
 - 1) **Variance to Setbacks** in a Lake Front Residential District (R-3) described as Lot 11, "Lutgen's West Addition" in the NE1/4 of Section 23-T124N-R65W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (127370 W Shore Drive; Ravinia Twp.) to Have a 7'-0" west rear yard setback rather than the 30'-0" required & a 4'-0" north side yard setback rather than the 7'-0" required by Brown County Ordinance.
 - 2) **Conditional Use Petition (CUP)** in a Heavy Industrial District (H-I) described as "Lien Outlot A" in the SW1/4 of the SW1/4 of Section 14 & the SE1/4 of the SE1/4 of Section 15-T123N-R64W, except H-1,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 9 of 73

of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (2204 W Hwy 12; Aberdeen Twp.) to replace existing metal roof.

- 3) **Variance to Setbacks** in an Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) described as Lot 5, "Replat of Borden's Subdivision" in the S1/2 of the SE1/4 of the SE1/4 of Section 3-T127N-R64W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (38590 107th Street; Frederick Twp.) to allow a 60'-0" south front Yard setback rather than the 100'-0" required by Brown County Ordinance.
- 4) **Variance to Setbacks** in an Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) described as Lot 1, "Hanson Addition" in the SW1/4 of Section 9-T121N-R62W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (14354 396th Avenue; East Rondell Twp.) to have a 15'-0" west front yard setback rather than the 100'-0" required by Brown County Ordinance.
- 5) **Variance to Setbacks** in a Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG) described as Lot 3, "Jody and Stacy Linsey Subdivision" in the NE1/4 of Section 35-T123-R64W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (807 135th Street SW; Aberdeen Twp) to have a north shelterbelt setback of 75'-0" rather than the 150'-0" required from the section line for 5 new rows of trees.
- 6) **Conditional Use Petition** (CUP) in a proposed Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG) described as Lots 1-7, "Replat of Borden's Subdivision" in the S1/2 of the SE1/4 of the SE1/4 of Section 3-T127N-R64W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (10695 386th Avenue; Frederick Twp.) to continue selling fireworks in a proposed Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG).

VIII. **Other Business:**

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

AGENDA

BROWN COUNTY PLANNING/ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETINGS

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2026 – 7:00 PM

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

PLANNING COMMISSION

I. **Old Business:**

II. **New Business:** Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission as **Planning Commission.**

- 10) **Rezone Petition** for (Lot 1 = 31.51 acre & Lot 2 = 8.73 acre; Lot 1, Pence First = 5.45 acre) properties described as proposed Lots 1 & 2, "Pence Second Subdivision" in the S1/2 of the S1/2 of Section 9 & Lot 1, "Pence First Subdivision" in the SE1/4 of Section 9, all in T125N-R64W of the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 10 of 73

5th P.M, Brown County, South Dakota (38444 & 38474 120th Street & 11995 385th Avenue; Westport Twp.) to be rezoned from Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) to Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG).

- 11) **Rezone Petition** for a (9.75 acre) property described as the 330' next South of the North 766' of the West 1320' & the S1/2 of vacated Derian Drive of the NW1/4 of Section 27-T123N-R64W of the 5th P.M, Brown County, South Dakota (1913 S 385th Avenue; Aberdeen Twp.) to be rezoned from Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) to Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG).
- 12) **Rezone Petition** for a (4.55 total acre) properties described as Lots 1-7, "Replat of Borden's Subdivision" in the S1/2 of the SE1/4 of the SE1/4 of Section 3-T127N-R64W of the 5th P.M, Brown County, South Dakota (10695 386th Avenue; Frederick Twp.) to be rezoned from Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) to Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG).
- 13) **Preliminary & Final Plat** for financial purposes on a property described as "Waage First Addition" in NW1/4 of the SW1/4 of Section 23-T124N-R64W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (12760 386th Avenue; Lincoln Twp.).
- 14) **Preliminary & Final Plat** for financial purposes on a property described as "Pond View First Addition" in NW1/4 of Section 9-T123N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (4270 & 4390 Paper Lane; Aberdeen Twp.).
- 15) **Preliminary & Final Plat** for conveyance purposes on a property described as "Pence Second Subdivision" in the S1/2 of the S1/2 of Section 9-T125N-R64W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (38444 120th Street; Westport Twp.).
- 16) **Preliminary & Final Plat** for conveyance purposes on a property described as "A Plat of a Replat of Outlot A" in the SW1/4 of Section 15-T123N-R63W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (approx. 477 S 391st Avenue; Bath Twp.).
- 17) **Discussion on Ordinance Chapter 4.38-Data Centers**
- 18) **Discussion on Fliehs Property**

III. **Other Business:**

IV. **Executive Session:** (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2).

V. **Motion to Adjourn:** 1st _____ 2nd _____



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Ex-Biden appointee faces attorney general in US House race with differences on tariffs, immigration

Gronli and Jackley running for South Dakota seat that will be vacated by Rep. Dusty Johnson

BY JOHN HULT

Nikki Gronli would love to have her old job back.

During a debate earlier this month with Attorney General Marty Jackley, her Republican opponent in the race for the state's lone seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, the Democratic former South Dakota director of rural development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture said she'd have "happily" continued doing that job under Republican President Donald Trump.

"It was the best job I ever had," Gronli told South Dakota Searchlight the following week.

She was appointed by Democratic President Joe Biden, and lost her job early on in Trump's second term, as did some of her staff amid Trump's widespread reduction of the federal workforce.

"In South Dakota, a quarter of my staff lost their jobs," said Gronli, who'd supervised 38 staff members at USDA after spending most of her career in marketing.

It wasn't long before Gronli was traveling the state, talking to people at town halls about the impact those federal job cuts were having and could have in the future for South Dakota. By the end of 2025, the Aurora native and Dell Rapids resident — who'd been vice-chairwoman of the South Dakota Democratic Party prior to her Biden administration appointment — was a candidate for the seat Republican U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson was vacating for what would ultimately be a failed attempt to secure his party's nomination for governor.

The election for the open U.S. House seat is Nov. 3, advance voting is underway, and the voter registration deadline is Monday.

As with her past roles as a hockey parent-advocate for the construction of the Scheels IcePlex in Sioux Falls, a member of the Siouxland Historical Society Board and member of the Minnehaha County Housing and Redevelopment Commission, Gronli said running for office is about "stepping up where I was needed."

Jackley: From private sector to public service and back again

Jackley's path to a congressional run was also paved in part by a political appointment.

The Sturgis-born lawyer, who also has a degree in electrical engineering and has a farm in Butte County and a ranch near Pierre, served as South Dakota's U.S. attorney under Republican President George W. Bush. It was his first full-time public service job, taken after working part-time prosecuting drug cases for former South Dakota Attorney General Larry Long.

"That appointment was a career shift for me," Jackley told South Dakota Searchlight.

When President Barack Obama took office, Jackley was replaced as U.S. attorney. A year later, Long became a circuit judge in Minnehaha County. Jackley was appointed to replace him as South Dakota attorney general. Jackley's father, Mike, the longtime Meade County state's attorney and unsuccessful 1986 candidate for attorney general, swore him in.

His dad never ran again for statewide office, but was elected multiple times to the county post. There's more money for lawyers in the private sector, but "our family's always believed in public service," Jackley said.

He was elected as attorney general in 2010 and reelected in 2014.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 12 of 73

He stepped away from public life in 2019 after losing the Republican primary race for governor to Kristi Noem, and went to work at the same Rapid City law firm he'd started at in the late 1990s.

He returned to the attorney general job in 2022 after running unopposed.

Jackley was elected president of the National Association of Attorneys General from 2015 to 2016, and was chosen as president-elect in December of 2025. As a part of that group, he worked with his Democratic and Republican counterparts on multi-state law enforcement initiatives, including as one of the lead plaintiffs in a recent multi-state lawsuit in California that led to a settlement with Meta, the parent company of Facebook, over its products' alleged damage to children's mental health.

"I look at this as that opportunity to use what I've learned as attorney general, the relationships I've developed with Republicans and Democrats, to go to Washington and address the important issues for South Dakota," Jackley said.

Challenges for both candidates

Mike Card, a retired political science professor for the University of South Dakota, said Gronli's party is her biggest challenge in the race. Registered Republicans outnumber registered Democrats in South Dakota, but Democrat registrations also run behind the combined number of people registered as independent or with no party affiliation.

To become the first Democrat elected to the U.S. House from South Dakota since 2008, Card said, Gronli "has to find a way to take positions that stand out from her opponent and resonate with voters."

"It does seem that she's got to find a way to give voice to her perspective, being different and better than what Marty Jackley has for issue positions," Card said.

Jackley has name recognition and the advantage of being the Republican in the race, Card said, but the professor also sees the attorney general as a lackluster political communicator, perhaps a reflection of Jackley's engineering background and years spent in the weeds of lawyerly rhetoric.

"He's certainly got the credentials. He's got lots of evidence he could be using. He just doesn't seem to be using it to his advantage," Card said.

Tariff issue divides, but both candidates say Congress should be involved

Gronli said during an Oct. 1 debate that Trump's "blanket tariffs" and tariff threats have hit South Dakotans in the pocketbook, contributing to high prices for goods and services. Tariffs are taxes paid by those who import goods from other countries.

Outside the debate, Gronli has said the tariffs cost South Dakotans \$1,300 a year, citing a figure from the nonprofit Tax Foundation used in a February Newsweek article.

Gronli didn't use the \$1,300 figure in the debate, but Jackley brought it up.

After the U.S. Supreme Court struck down some of Trump's tariffs, the foundation's current figure for how much more the average household will pay because of tariffs is \$820. Jackley said that \$820 was "still too high" a burden on South Dakota families, but said the number is coming down. He later told South Dakota Searchlight that his opponent was either using the larger, earlier estimate for political effect or that "she doesn't understand the issue."

He also criticized Gronli's use of the term "blanket tariffs"

"We don't have blanket tariffs," that cover all goods from all countries, Jackley said in a follow-up interview with Searchlight, "so she's wrong on that."

"We have had an impact in South Dakota, but she inflated it," Jackley said, referencing the \$1,300 figure from February, "which is wrong."

Free trade deals with targeted tariffs, ideally built with input from Congress, could ultimately benefit the U.S. economy, Jackley told Searchlight.

"My position has always been that it has to be targeted," said Jackley.

Gronli said Jackley used the \$820 figure as a "gotcha," but "\$820 is too much for families to take on when grocery prices are high, gas is high, and everybody's concerned."

Gronli said Congress needs to be a check on the president on trade.

"We should have trade experts that are negotiating in good faith, getting us good deals, but also con-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 13 of 73

sidering our American economy has a lot of reliance on those neighbors," she said.

Immigration differences

During the debate and in a later interview with Searchlight, Jackley said Gronli "wants to get rid of" U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

"I'm a former U.S. attorney and an attorney general, and the relationship we have with ICE is essential," said Jackley, citing the immigration agency's contributions to the state's Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force.

Jackley pointed to the state Division of Criminal Investigation's enforcement agreement with ICE, which allows agents to question people about their immigration status and detain them for the federal agency. Jackley said he's limited that authority to cases involving violent crime, and said the Trump administration's immigration enforcement actions and moves to secure the border between the U.S. and Mexico have improved public safety.

Border security is important, Gronli said, but she sees the administration's deportation efforts as counterproductive to discussions on comprehensive immigration reform.

"I want Congress to take up looking at the visa programs that we have for workers, because going out and talking to those in poultry and egg-laying operations and dairies, those visas are not working for them," Gronli said. "They can't fill roles without having immigrant labor."

Gronli said she doesn't support ICE's immigration enforcement efforts in South Dakota, but she's not interested in dismantling the agency or ending its partnerships on crimes against children.

She wants "new leadership" and "a well-run department," as well as a shift in priorities for federal spending away from deportations. ICE is targeting too many immigrants who don't have a violent criminal record, she said, and its tactics have been too aggressive.

"We've spent just an exorbitant amount of money on that department, and it has shifted away from the American people," Gronli said. "I feel like we have a misalignment with the way we're using our dollars, and it's been shifted towards an organization that's brutalizing and has even killed American citizens."

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.

South Dakota keeps teaching scholarship open to all, but special education gets priority

BY MAKENZIE HUBER

A South Dakota board voted Thursday to keep a critical needs scholarship open to all prospective K-12 teachers while prioritizing special education and language arts.

Demand for special education teachers is expected to grow over the next decade, creating a need that outpaces other teaching positions in the state, according to data presented Thursday by state Education Secretary Joseph Graves during a teleconference meeting of the Critical Teaching Needs Scholarship Board.

Graves pointed out that special education has been consistently near the top of the list in turnover and need. Turnover is likely attributable to burnout, Graves said, due to the profession's more demanding nature.

"If these numbers are correct — and they are projections, you never know — in special education, we're seeing a lot of openings in those areas compared to the number of positions there are. That's going to remain a hot field," Graves said.

Graves said programs including the state's Teaching Apprenticeship Program — which allows full-time teacher's aides to earn their teaching degree while continuing to work — and the critical needs scholarship are designed to address the shortage.

Language arts was the second priority, the board deemed. The profession had lower turnover and vacancy numbers than special education, though still higher than other specialized teaching positions.

State lawmakers created the scholarship program in 2013 to encourage South Dakota high school gradu-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 14 of 73

ates to earn their teaching degrees in South Dakota and remain in the state after graduation. The board expanded the scholarship from targeted subjects to all teaching positions last year in response to teacher shortages.

Awardees sign an agreement to stay and work in a high-need teaching position in South Dakota for five years after graduation. If they do not complete the requirement, the scholarship is converted into a low-interest loan, with repayments going back into the scholarship fund.

Anna Schwan, vice president for academic affairs at Northern State University in Aberdeen, told board members the scholarship motivates college students "to keep going."

"It's the tie at the end that really helps push them, especially during their student teaching semester where they virtually have no income to pay for tuition," Schwan said.

State officials presented data showing persistent turnover and vacancies across nearly all teaching disciplines. At the end of the 2024-25 school year, public school districts reported 1,178 full-time teachers no longer employed, and at the start of the current school year, 137 full-time teaching positions were unfilled statewide.

Teaching vacancy rates have fallen in the years since South Dakota's peak teacher shortage after the COVID-19 pandemic, Graves said.

"The crisis is not over. We still have a problem, but it is not the severity we saw three years ago," Graves said.

After the board opened the scholarship to all teaching positions in the state, there were 86 applications, South Dakota Board of Regents System Academic Program Manager Molly Weisgram said. It was a "significant increase" in applications over previous years, but board members said they wish there were more. Schwan told board members some students might be afraid of committing to working in the state for five years.

"That's something we're struggling with," Schwan said. "They stay — traditionally speaking, they don't leave South Dakota — but it's a shame. There are a lot of supports available, but they're very intimidated by that expectation."

Nineteen students were awarded and accepted a combined total of \$101,946 in scholarships for the 2023-24 school year, averaging about \$5,300 per student. The program has awarded 148 scholarships worth about \$1.4 million since 2014, funded by interest earned on the state's Education Enhancement Trust Fund — a dedicated state account for education spending.

Thirty-one awardees so far did not complete the program requirements, resulting in \$291,663 converted to loans repaid into the fund.

The Critical Teaching Needs Scholarship application window opens Nov. 1 and closes Dec. 15.

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

Amendment K: Lawmakers ask voters to approve investing unclaimed property proceeds in a trust fund

BY MEGHAN O'BRIEN

South Dakota has received more than \$1 billion worth of unclaimed property over the years from an array of sources, including cash, insurance policy proceeds and even gold teeth. Amendment K, a question on the Nov. 3 ballot, asks voters to allow the state Investment Council to manage a trust fund consisting of unclaimed property proceeds.

Annual unclaimed property receipts have risen in recent years and hit a record \$308 million recently, the result of factors including people leaving assets behind during pandemic-motivated relocations and

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 15 of 73

Bancorp's relocation of its national headquarters to Sioux Falls. The holders of unclaimed property, such as abandoned bank accounts, spend three years looking for the rightful owners before the property reverts to the state.

The state also tries to find the rightful owners, but many of them never claim their property, and the state has typically spent much of the unclaimed money while setting aside only a portion of it in case people come forward. Rightful owners can claim their assets from the state at any time.

The ballot question is part of a package passed during the last legislative session to bring more predictability to the volatile revenue source, and to protect the state if claims increase. A law passed last year limits the amount of unclaimed property funds that can be used in the state's budget, and transitions all unclaimed property money into a cash flow fund. Only the interest from the fund is treated as revenue for the state's annual budget.

"We had just been spending the money as it came in, even though we are perpetually liable to pay out those funds if an heir were to ever come forward," said state Sen. Taffy Howard, R-Rapid City. "So, it is technically an unfunded liability on our books."

To put the money in a trust fund managed by the state Investment Council earning higher returns, lawmakers need South Dakota voters to amend the state constitution. The Investment Council manages other state trust funds and the state's retirement fund for public employees.

Howard sponsored a bill last year that state lawmakers unanimously approved to send the question to voters, with the support of the state's Bureau of Finance and Management and the State Treasurer's Office.

Now, "we need your approval," said State Treasurer Josh Haeder.

"So we can protect those dollars forever until the rightful owner comes forward," Haeder said. "And we can earn a maximum amount of interest that can be used for the betterment of the state of South Dakota."

A "yes" vote on Amendment K will create a trust fund for unclaimed property managed by the Investment Council. A "no" vote will leave unclaimed property as it is.

No organized opposition to the amendment has surfaced. The general election is Nov. 3 and early voting is underway. The voter registration deadline is Monday.

Meghan O'Brien is the audio reporter for South Dakota Searchlight where she covers the state government and its impact on South Dakotans. She's previously reported in Nebraska with a focus on health care and rural communities across the state.

California sued by Trump administration over demand to purge 20,000 voters from rolls

BY JACOB FISCHLER

The Trump administration sought a federal court order Thursday to force California to purge 20,000 people from its voter rolls over claims they are not U.S. citizens, a major development less than three weeks before the midterm elections.

The U.S. Department of Justice sued the state, asking a judge to validate its claims that the state is willfully allowing noncitizens to vote in the Nov. 3 elections. California law requires that ballots have already been sent to registered voters.

California Secretary of State Shirley Weber and Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk Dean C. Logan on Wednesday declined to open a thumb drive the federal government sent them containing a list of suspected noncitizens registered to vote in California.

Logan said the drive was unvetted and opening it would violate the office's security protocols.

The Justice Department's complaint said the refusal to open the drive was a major obstacle to enforcing federal voting laws.

"By sending ballots to likely noncitizens despite the Federal Government notifying California of serious concerns, Defendants (collectively, California) have made it nearly impossible for the United States to inves-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 16 of 73

tigate and enforce federal law," the suit said. "This is a substantial drain on federal resources. In addition, when aliens illegally vote in elections, they dilute the votes of citizens and unduly influence who runs the Federal Government. That also undermines public faith in federal elections."

The suit seeks a judicial order blocking the state from counting mail ballots sent to registered voters that the administration says are noncitizens.

California sends ballots to every registered voter in every election without distinguishing among state, local or federal elections, the suit says. Ballots for this year's general election went out Oct. 1.

Only citizens can vote in state and federal elections. San Francisco allows noncitizens to vote in some local elections.

In Thursday's complaint, the administration said the Department of Homeland Security had identified 20,000 noncitizens who were registered to vote in California. The department warned California "months ago" that noncitizens may be registered to vote in the state, which "made no serious attempt to" determine if that was true, according to the suit.

Many of the people the administration says are noncitizens and registered to vote live in Los Angeles County, the suit says.

Representatives for Logan and Weber did not immediately return messages seeking comment Thursday.

Motivation questioned

The suit omits efforts by the state over the past few months to work with the federal government to identify noncitizens on its voter rolls, David Becker, the executive director of the nonpartisan Center for Election Innovation & Research, said on a press call Thursday afternoon.

The administration estimated several months ago that 190,000 noncitizens were registered to vote in the state. State officials asked for the federal government's methodology and for the names of the individuals. They did not receive a response, Becker said.

Instead, the DOJ blindsided California and Los Angeles County with a letter demanding voter files be removed just weeks from Election Day, Becker said.

Becker suggested that the administration's objective was not to deny noncitizens from voting, but to sow doubt about the election results. If the DOJ had a "legitimate concern" and was operating in good faith, it would have worked diligently starting at the beginning of last year, he said.

"I don't know what their motivation is, but I can tell you what their motivation isn't, because if they were seeking to work in good faith to clean up the voter list that they believed had issues, they would have done this months ago in a much different fashion," he said.

"It does raise questions as to whether or not the sole purpose of this is to set the stage for false claims about election theft after an election that the president might be worried his party was going to do poorly in."

He added that the thumb drive was sent in an envelope that included a handwritten note with a password written on it, which is a serious red flag for cybersecurity experts.

"I don't know how much you're aware of the cybersecurity protocols in election offices," he said. "Election offices do not just stick thumb drives into their technology — for very good reason."

Jacob covers federal policy and helps direct national coverage as deputy Washington bureau chief for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 17 of 73

Bipartisan permitting bill in Congress could speed energy projects, but draws green critics

BY DAVID LIGHTMAN

WASHINGTON —Suddenly there's hope for cutting the reams of red tape that can make getting new energy projects a seemingly endless slog.

Top Republican and Democratic senators have unveiled a 417-page bill to overhaul the approval process, a pathway for what's known as "permitting reform." A debate is likely when lawmakers return for their lame-duck session in November, though getting to a finish line anytime soon won't be easy.

Reformers will have to fight environmental groups, who tend to appreciate today's detailed, often lengthy process for reviewing energy projects. They worry that streamlining reviews will make it easier for energy-gulping and air-and-water-polluting projects to proceed.

It's a battle that is likely to continue for months and perhaps even years. But at least now there's a real starting point, a bipartisan group of powerful senators eager to find common ground and a widespread congressional — and national — consensus that the process is broken.

"Long awaited is not an exaggeration," said an analysis from the Bipartisan Policy Center of the effort to spur changes.

"There is widespread recognition that a permitting system created to protect the environment against industrial pollution more than 50 years ago has morphed into a system that is bad for both the economy and the environment," it said.

An uncertain future

The bill faces a bumpy, unpredictable path. Lots of amendments are likely. The White House's reluctance to embrace renewable energy is a potential roadblock.

Getting through the House, where Democrats who might be in the majority next year are signaling broad skepticism, could be tough.

"No issue was an easy issue," said Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., top Democrat on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, describing for reporters the challenges he and his colleagues faced in writing the bill and continue to tackle.

The strongest opposition is coming from environmental groups.

"The entire gist and purpose of this bill is to get to yes as fast as possible for every project under the sun. It doesn't matter if it's a good project or a bad project," Brett Hartl, government affairs director at the Tucson, Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity, told States Newsroom.

These groups see the bill as a massive concession to those who have thwarted efforts to promote renewable energy.

"Making a deal with the devil fails the American people," said Eric Schlenker-Goodrich, executive director of the New Mexico-based Western Environmental Law Center.

Whitehouse saw the bill very differently..

"The wins from this could be very very big ones. This should lower electricity costs measurably for Americans. This should increase clean power significantly for Americans. This should significantly add construction and jobs across the country," he said.

What the bill would do

The Senate bill is co-sponsored by four of the most powerful energy and environmental voices in the chamber: Energy and Natural Resources Chairman Mike Lee, R-Utah; top committee Democrat Martin Heinrich, D-N.M.; Environment and Public Works Chair Shelley Moore Capito, a West Virginia Republican; and Whitehouse.

The bill offers new laws governing the issuance of permits and approvals to energy and infrastructure projects.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 18 of 73

It would put new restrictions on the process federal regulators use to take a serious look at environmental impact before approving a project. Critics have complained that the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act's provisions have meant unnecessary delays.

Here's what the reforms could mean for:

Data centers. Companies would have to pay for the electricity infrastructure they use to operate the centers. While they've pledged to protect consumers from paying additional costs, signing an agreement with the White House, nothing in that deal is mandatory. Traditionally, those who use the electricity share the costs, since they too benefit from the new or expanded power plant and/or transmission lines. This bill says data centers will pay all those additional center-related costs.

Power plants and transmission lines. The bill would cut down the amount of time allowed for government review and approval of such facilities. It would be easier for federal and state reviews to proceed simultaneously, shortening the review period.

Wind and other renewable energy. President Donald Trump has been opposed to such projects. The bill would apparently bar the executive branch from denying permits for political reasons, though lawmakers are still in discussions with administration officials on how to proceed.

Historic preservation. Reviewing a project's impact on a historic property can take years — there's no deadline for review. The bill would streamline the process in a number of ways.

Legal challenges. Opponents would have 150 days to file legal challenges to most of the act's provisions. Currently lawsuits can be filed within six years.

Environmental protection. The bill attempts to speed the process for environmental review without changing the standards for review.

Pipelines. The bill makes it harder for a single state to block an interstate gas pipeline or electric transmission line that the administration views as essential to national security or significant economic reasons.

One reason permitting itself can take a long time, said the Bipartisan Policy Center, is that "agency staff try to write environmental review documents that will survive legal challenges, which is quite different from doing a more careful review of potential harms."

Roadblocks

The promising news for the effort is being led in the Senate by the four top committee members.

"We once built projects like the Hoover Dam, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the Empire State Building in years, not decades," said Lee in a statement. "America still has the resources and the talent, but what too often stands in the way is a permitting system that takes too long and costs too much."

Whitehouse had a somewhat different emphasis. "If we can pass this bill, we will flood the grid with clean, affordable energy and make data centers start paying their fair share," he said.

But in the House, Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., said that while the senators have "done some good work," their bill "raises significant questions and concerns that would have to be resolved before most Democrats could support it."

While he supports smoothing the process for transmission and clean energy projects, he had environmental concerns.

"We can't throw states, tribes, impacted communities, and threatened and endangered wildlife under the bus," said Huffman, top Democrat on the House Natural Resources Committee.

Environmental groups agreed.

Holly Bender, chief program officer at the Sierra Club, worried that the bill would benefit oil and gas companies "while communities stand to lose critical protections for clean air, water, and wildlife."

Her views were shared in a letter to top Senate Democrats from representatives of 122 clean air and water advocacy organizations. They stretched from coast to coast, including the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Detroit Riverkeeper, Los Angeles Waterkeeper, Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Oregon Wild, Orleans Audubon Society, Ohio River Foundation and more.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 19 of 73

Alaska pipeline project

Hartl cited a proposed pipeline project in Alaska as an example of how the bill could have a profound impact.

The LNG project, championed by the Trump administration, would send natural gas from Alaska's North Slope to a terminal in the southern part of the state.

"That pipeline will cross lands, streams, rivers, down to Anchorage. A project like that in a normal world would have a pretty serious environmental review. If this (bill) were to pass I think they could approve it with almost no review," Hartl said. "That project will be rubber stamped."

Ariana Kretz, policy analyst at the Climate Justice Alliance, which promotes efforts to reduce the impact of climate change, cited as an example of the bill's danger how the administration has dealt with the Santa Ynez Unit, an offshore oil production operation off the Southern California coast. It was shut down 11 years ago after an oil spill.

In March, Energy Secretary Chris Wright directed it to reopen after a presidential executive order aimed at producing more domestic oil.

"Today's order will strengthen America's oil supply and restore a pipeline system vital to our national security and defense, ensuring that West Coast military installations have the reliable energy critical to military readiness," he said at the time.

If the new legislation became law, Kretz told States Newsroom, "a future administration would have a very difficult time reversing Secretary Wright's decision."

More opinions

Energy interests have offered strong praise for the bill. It's a "generational opportunity" to streamline a balky process, said Mike Sommers, American Petroleum Institute president and CEO.

Others are being somewhat more circumspect.

The National Governors Association is "encouraged" by the bill's introduction. CEO Brandon Tatum said he looks forward to "working with Congress to further develop this legislation."

Whitehouse said issues such as wind projects — which the Trump administration tried to halt but was thwarted by a federal judge — remain under discussion.

"We need more clarity on that and when we have more clarity there will be back and forth," he said. So far, he found White House staff's proposals and discussion "not outside the bounds of ordinary legislative disagreement."

The bill is a starting point, he and others said, and there are many amendments and negotiations still to come. But at least there is a starting point, Whitehouse suggested, and so "today begins a process."

David Lightman has been a reporter or editor for more than 50 years. He's worked for the Hagerstown (Md.) Morning Herald, Riverside (Calif.) Press Enterprise, and then 10 years at the Baltimore Evening Sun, covering local news and, for six years, state government and the legislature. He spent 23 years as the Hartford Courant's Washington Bureau Chief, and 18 years at McClatchy's Washington bureau, where he covered the White House and Congress. He also served as regional editor, supervising the bureau's seven regional reporters. He was president of Washington's Gridiron Club in 2018 and won the David Lynch award for regional reporting in 2007.

Trump: Execution of Fort Hood shooter will not be livestreamed

BY ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump Thursday announced that the execution of a man convicted of the Fort Hood shooting will not be livestreamed, a reversal after Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said last week that Nidal Hasan's death by firing squad would be public.

"I think streaming the execution for all to see might have been a strong deterrent for the World to witness how America deals with Terrorists and SCUM like Hasan but, many very good and well meaning people would rather not watch him die, through streaming, or through any other visual device," Trump wrote on his social media site, Truth Social. "He will die, as scheduled, by firing squad, but this event will not be streamed."

Last week, Hegseth's decision to make Hasan's execution public garnered bipartisan backlash, and members of Congress urged the Trump administration to reconsider.

On Friday, Trump "absolutely" said he had approved the livestreaming but also said he would make a determination about whether it should occur.

Vice President JD Vance appeared skeptical that a public execution would be approved, and already stated he would not watch it.

Earlier this month, Trump approved of Hasan's execution by firing squad on Dec. 3 at Fort Hood, Texas, the military installation where Hasan carried out a mass shooting on Nov. 5, 2009.

He was an Army Medical Corps psychiatrist from Virginia who was convicted and admitted to killing 13 people and injuring 32 others at Fort Hood, making it the deadliest non-combative attack on a U.S. military base.

Hasan was also shot during the mass shooting and is paralyzed from the waist down.

Trump added in his announcement that the only people who will be viewing the execution in person are "the immediate families of the victims, if they so choose."

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include immigration, congressional policy and legal challenges with a focus on how those policies impact the lives of immigrants and migrants coming to the U.S.

Federal judge blocks Trump administration from moving Forest Service headquarters to Utah

BY KATIE MCKELLAR

A federal judge has issued a preliminary ruling blocking the Trump administration from moving the U.S. Forest Service's headquarters from Washington, D.C., to Salt Lake City while the rest of the lawsuit over the relocation plays out in court.

In the order signed Tuesday, U.S. District Judge Vince Chhabria, in California's northern district, granted a stay on the move, writing in the order that Congress has put restrictions on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "ability to reorganize without congressional buy-in."

The USDA — which oversees the Forest Service — "has almost certainly been violating those restrictions," the judge wrote, adding that "preliminary relief is necessary to protect the congressional prerogative, prevent irreparable harm to federal employees, and vindicate the public interest."

In March, when the USDA announced in a news release it would be moving its headquarters to Utah as part of a "sweeping restructuring" of the Forest Service, Secretary Brook Rollins called it a "common sense" way to position the agency "closer to the landscapes we manage and the people who depend on them."

The restructuring would also close and consolidate nearly two dozen research facilities and open new, smaller state-based offices. Affected employees, including in Idaho, were told they may have to move, find another position, or resign, the Idaho Capital Sun reported in April.

At the time, Utah Gov. Spencer Cox called the agency's move a "big win for Utah and the West" in a

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 21 of 73

statement included in that USDA news release.

"Moving away from a regional model to a more state-focused approach strengthens federalism and helps the Forest Service do its job more effectively," Cox said.

In response to the ruling, the governor and Utah's top Republican legislative leaders — House Speaker Mike Schultz and Senate President Stuart Adams — issued a joint statement Wednesday calling the decision a "setback for common sense and responsible management of our public lands."

"Decisions affecting Western forests and communities should be made closer to the people who know these lands best, not by bureaucrats and special interests thousands of miles away in Washington, D.C.," Cox, Schultz and Adams said. "We hope this decision is quickly reversed so Forest Service leadership can better serve the West."

Last month, a group of nonprofits, local governments and labor union organizations filed a lawsuit to block the plan as unlawful, calling it an "unprecedented reorganization" that would close offices across the country and force thousands of USDA employees to "choose between their families, communities, churches, and lives they have built, and their careers."

In a response to the lawsuit, USDA officials said they estimated about 250 employees would be relocated, not thousands. However, the judge determined that regardless of that number, the proposed reorganization would "certainly affect more than 10 staff members and therefore fall within the definition of reprogramming" that would require congressional approval.

In the lawsuit, the groups said USDA leaders — after they first announced the reorganization plan in July of last year — failed to get congressional approval for the plan. Congress not only rejected it, the plaintiffs wrote in the lawsuit, but it "went beyond rejecting the Administration's budget proposal that reflected the reorganized and downsized USDA, and expressly prohibited the reorganization of the agency without further congressional approval."

In the ruling issued Tuesday, the federal district court judge agreed.

"Congress did not contemplate USDA using its appropriated funds to shut down offices or relocate employees," Chhabria wrote. "To the contrary, Congress was actively working to restrict the agency's ability to do so."

While the rest of the lawsuit plays out in court, the order blocks Rollins and other USDA leaders from closing offices or reassigning employees to new locations outside of their areas. The judge noted the order doesn't prevent the department from relocating or reassigning employees from within the National Capital Region in Washington, D.C., but it does prevent moving positions outside of the area.

However, the judge also noted in his ruling that the "temporal scope of this relief could end up being quite short."

"The relevant appropriations statutes are set to expire in less than two months. If the agency wishes to move forward with its plans to close offices and relocate employees, it will soon have the opportunity to convince Congress of the merits of those plans," the order says. "Congress, if it agrees, can choose not to extend the restrictions at issue in this case."

"But until then," the judge wrote, "USDA is preliminarily enjoined from spending appropriated funds on the challenged office closures and employee relocations."

This story was originally produced by Utah News 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.

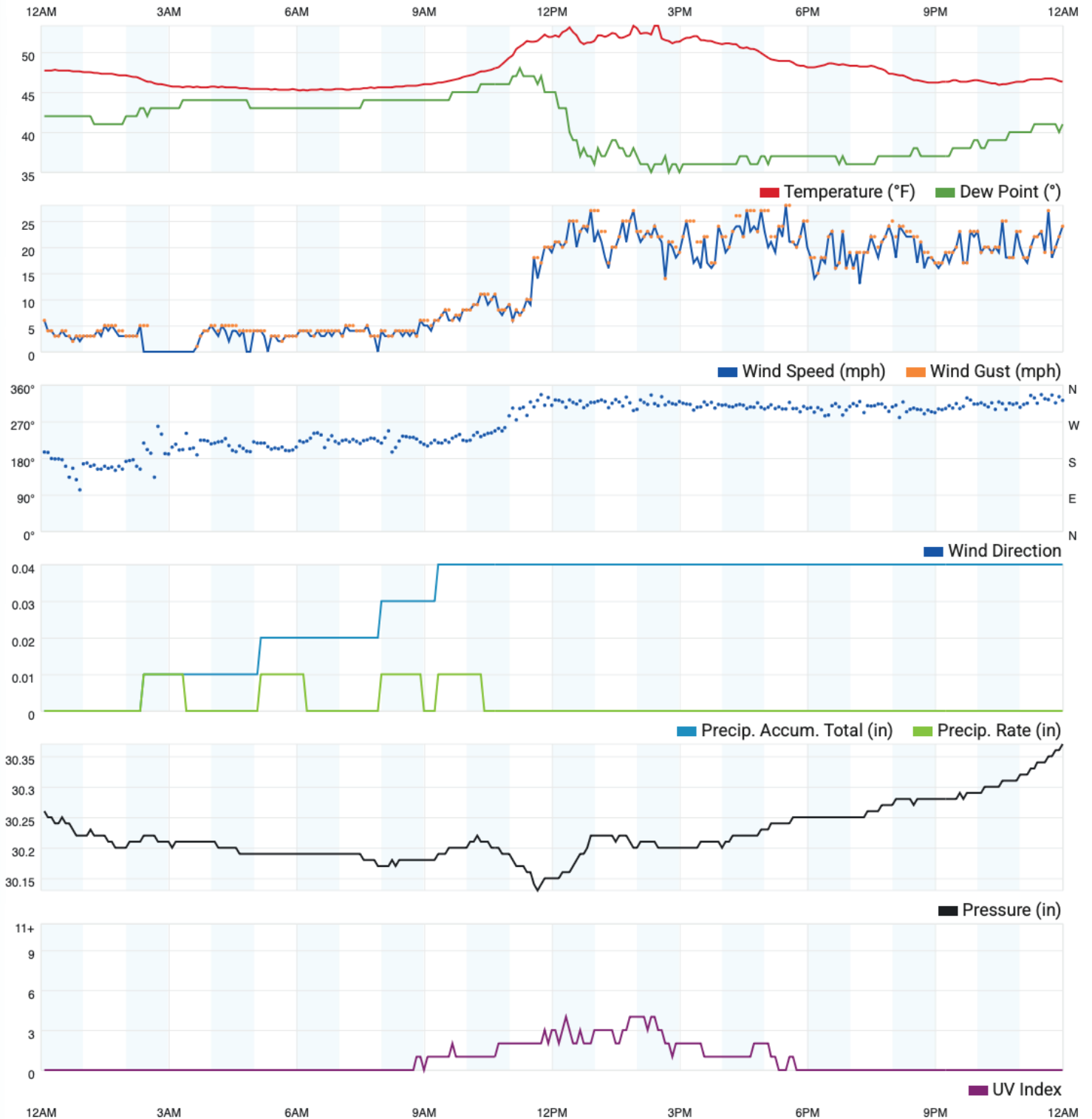
Katie McKellar covers Utah government as a senior reporter for Utah News Dispatch. She specializes in political reporting, covering the governor and the Utah Legislature, with expertise in beats including growth, housing and homelessness. Utah News Dispatch is part of States Newsroom, the nation's largest state-focused nonprofit news organization.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 22 of 73

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

October 15, 2026



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 23 of 73

Friday

Friday Night

Saturday

Saturday Night

Sunday



High: 50 °F

Partly Sunny
and Breezy
then Sunny



Low: 34 °F

Mostly Clear



High: 62 °F

Sunny and
Breezy



Low: 41 °F

Mostly Clear



High: 66 °F

Sunny

For The Weekend



Friday

Highs: 45 - 52°

Clear & Chilly With Light Winds



Saturday

Highs: 57 - 75°

Morning Frost Eastern SD & Western MN
Sunny & Breezy Through The Day



Sunday

Highs: 64 - 69°

Sunny & Breezy



NWS Aberdeen, SD

Fri Oct 16, 2026 2:55 AM

Winds will continue to slowly diminish through mid day, with chilly temperatures (about 10 below normal) expected today. The weekend looks mild and dry with temperatures about 5 to 10 degrees above normal.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 24 of 73

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 53 °F at 2:30 PM

Low Temp: 45 °F at 5:29 AM

Wind: 38 mph at 3:21 PM

Precip: 0.05

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1991

Record Low: 19 in 1976

Average High: 59

Average Low: 33

Average Precip in Oct.: 1.21

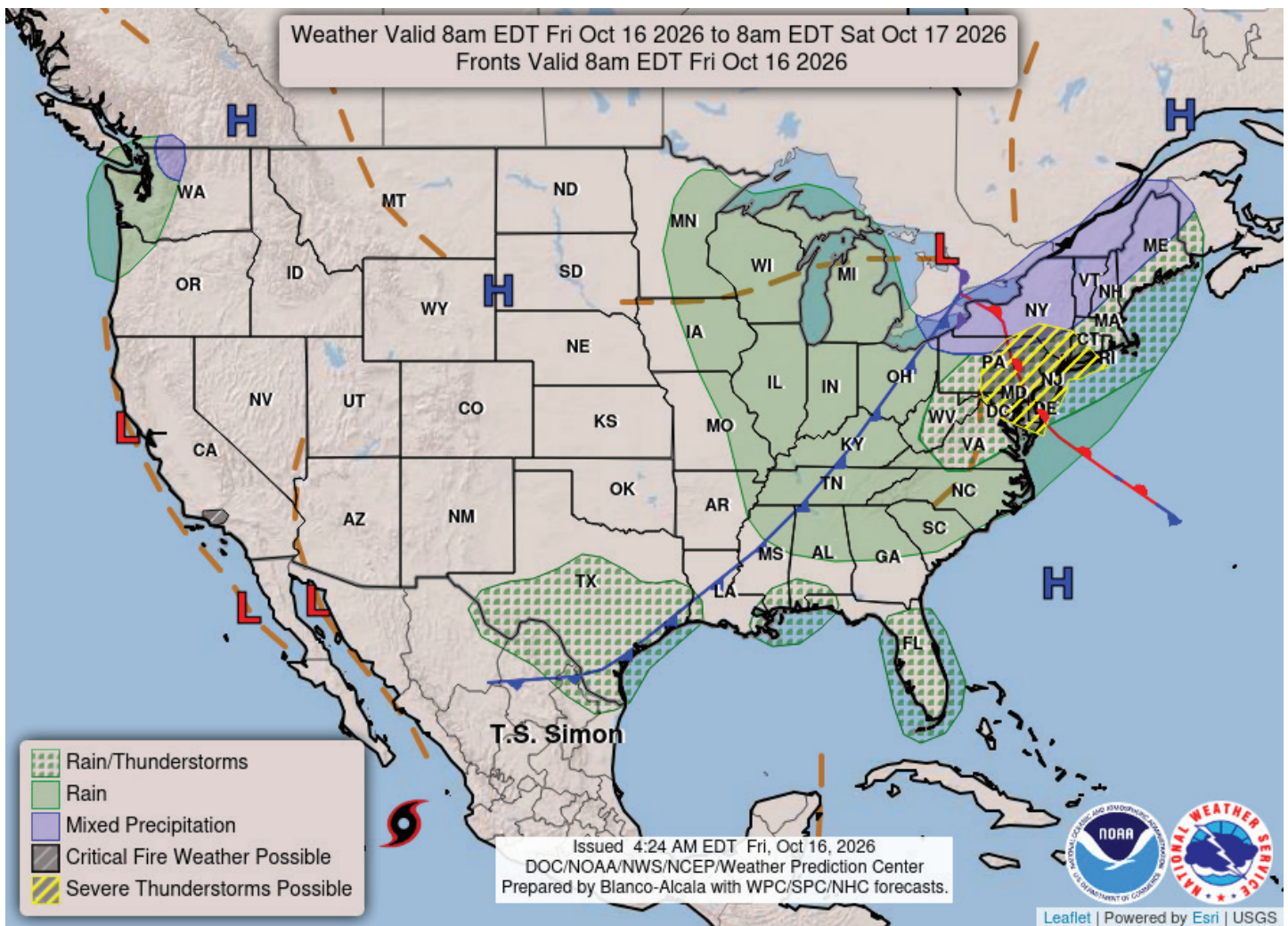
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.05

Average Precip to date: 19.54

Precip Year to Date: 22.13

Sunset Tonight: 6:45 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:51 am



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 25 of 73

Today in Weather History

October 16, 1980: A squall line packing damaging winds developed across portions of central South Dakota and raced into Minnesota during the afternoon and evening. The line of thunderstorms developed around 2 pm CDT and moved east and northeast at over 50 miles an hour. A large portion of southeast South Dakota was belted with winds of 50 to 70 miles an hour. Yankton reported winds of 60 to 70 mph while Sioux Falls was hit with a 62 mile an hour gust. Considerable damage was done in southeast South Dakota to trees, farm structures, and small buildings. Damage estimates were 100 to 200 thousand dollars. By late afternoon the thunderstorms were roaring through southwest Minnesota. Numerous outbuildings and many trees were downed or damaged. In Redwood County, two combines and a 24-foot travel trailer were tipped over and damaged.

1913 — The temperature in Downtown San Francisco soared to 101 degrees to equal their record for October. (The Weather Channel)

1937 — An unlikely winter-like storm produced as much as ten inches of snow in Minnesota and Iowa.

1944: The 1944 Cuba – Florida hurricane, also known as the Pinar del Rio Hurricane, struck western Cuba on this day as a Category 4. This storm killed an estimated 300 people in Cuba and nine in Florida. This hurricane is currently the 7th costliest U.S. Atlantic hurricane, with an estimated \$46.9 billion (2015 USD) in damages.

1987 — Ten cities in the southeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. The low of 34 degrees at Augusta GA marked their third straight morning of record cold. A cold front brought showers and thunderstorms to parts of the central U.S. Lightning struck a bull and six cows under a tree near Battiest OK. (The National Weather Summary)

1988: An F2 tornado carved a 6 mile long, east-northeast path through a mostly rural area of north-central Indiana. The extremely slow-moving tornado touched down 1.5 miles north of Nappanee, just 300 yards north of a high school, and shortly after that moved through a subdivision where 11 homes sustained damage.

1988 — Late afternoon thunderstorms produced severe weather in southwestern Lower Michigan and northern Indiana. One thunderstorm spawned a tornado north of Nappanee IN which caused half a million dollars damage. Six cities in California reported record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 100 degrees at Red Bluff CA was the latest such reading of record for so late in the autumn season. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Heavy snow blanketed the foothills of Colorado. Up to three inches was reported around Denver. Echo Lake was buried under nineteen inches of snow. Temperatures again warmed into the 80s and lower 90s in the eastern and south central U.S. Thirteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Atlantic City NJ with a reading of 84 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1999: Hurricane Irene moved across the Florida Keys producing heavy rainfall, strong winds, and high waves. A gust 102 mph was reported in Big Pine Key.

2007: A blinding sandstorm in the high desert north of Los Angeles wreaks havoc with local traffic causing a highway pileup involving dozens of vehicles. Two people die, and 16 are injured as a result of the storm, which reportedly raised dust to 1000 foot high.

2015: A well-defined waterspout was visible from Marquette, Michigan.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 26 of 73



Daily Devotion

The Victorious Life

We all face giants, but we never have to face them alone—the Lord fights beside us.

1 Samuel 17:32-51: 32 David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."

33 Then Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth."

34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock,

35 I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him.

36 "Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God."

37 And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you."

38 Then Saul clothed David with his garments and put a bronze helmet on his head, and he clothed him with armor.

39 David girded his sword over his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. So David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them." And David took them off.

40 He took his stick in his hand and chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the shepherd's bag which he had, even in his pouch, and his sling was in his hand; and he approached the Philistine.

41 Then the Philistine came on and approached David, with the shield-bearer in front of him.

42 When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, and ruddy, with a handsome appearance.

43 The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

44 The Philistine also said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field."

45 Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted.

46 "This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,

47 and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD'S and He will give you into our hands."

48 Then it happened when the Philistine rose and came and drew near to meet David, that David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 27 of 73

49 And David put his hand into his bag and took from it a stone and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead. And the stone sank into his forehead, so that he fell on his face to the ground.

50 Thus David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and he struck the Philistine and killed him; but there was no sword in David's hand.

51 Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.

The Philistine army was ready to fight. Sent from home with food for his older brothers, young David arrived at the front lines and heard Goliath taunting Israel across the valley. While seasoned soldiers shrank back, David was outraged. Who was this giant to defy the armies of the living God?

What set David apart wasn't bravado or military skill. It was perspective. He had spent years in the fields tending sheep and protecting them from wild animals. In those quiet places, he had learned who God was. So now, facing Goliath with a sling and five smooth stones, he wasn't relying on his own strength; he told the giant plainly that the battle belonged not to him but to the Lord (1 Sam. 17:47).

We face our own giants: a diagnosis, a strained relationship, a fear that won't let go. Like David, we don't overcome them by gathering more resources or steeling our nerves. Instead, we overcome by remembering Whose we are and Whose battle it is (Nehemiah 4:20).

The victorious life isn't without challenges. It's a life lived in the steady awareness that God goes before us. The same Lord who stood with David in the valley of Elah stands with us today, and that changes everything about how we step forward.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 28 of 73

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Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 29 of 73



WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.15.26

14 16 21 51 53 1

TOP PRIZE:
\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 42 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.13.26

11 12 15 40 66 17

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$403,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 27 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.14.26

6 10 14 29 34 9

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,250,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 42 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.14.26

6 8 17 25 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$91,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 57 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.14.26

11 17 37 58 69 9

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 26 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.14.26

3 34 37 42 46 20

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$600,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 26 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 30 of 73

News from the  Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL

Aberdeen Christian def. Leola-Frederick High School, 25-12, 25-12, 25-16
Alcester-Hudson def. Beresford, 26-24, 25-11, 25-21
Avon def. Centerville, 25-18, 25-11, 21-25, 25-11
Bennett County def. Todd County, 25-14, 25-17, 25-21
Bison def. Bowman County, N.D., 25-15, 25-14, 25-16
Brookings def. Riggs, 25-21, 25-8, 25-21
Burke def. Gregory, 23-25, 25-12, 25-11, 25-11
Chester def. Madison, 25-18, 25-17, 25-16
Clark-Willow Lake def. Sisseton, 25-12, 25-13, 25-8
Colman-Egan def. Oldham-Ramona-Rutland, 25-13, 25-16, 25-8
Corsica/Stickney def. Winner, 25-23, 32-30, 16-25, 23-25, 15-12
Dell Rapids St Mary's def. DeSmet, 25-10, 25-11, 25-19
Deubrook def. Arlington, 25-22, 25-13, 25-11
Elk Point-Jefferson def. Kingsley-Pierson, Iowa, 25-19, 25-24, 27-25
Estelline-Hendricks def. Castlewood, 25-21, 20-25, 25-19, 25-21
Florence-Henry def. Wilmot, 0-25, 0-25, 25-21, 25-22, 15-10
Gayville-Volin High School def. Mitchell Christian, 3-0
Great Plains Lutheran def. Waverly-South Shore, 24-26, 25-20, 25-11, 25-19
Groton def. Deuel, 25-20, 25-21, 25-11
Hamlin def. Britton-Hecla, 25-22, 25-14, 25-16
Hanson def. Bon Homme, 24-26, 25-15, 25-16, 25-21
Harrisburg def. Aberdeen Central, 25-12, 25-13, 25-12
Highmore-Harrold def. Crow Creek Tribal School, 25-8, 25-7, 25-11
Hill City def. Wall, 3-1
Hills-Beaver Creek, Minn. def. Garretson, 25-23, 25-19, 25-23
Hot Springs def. Douglas, 25-19, 25-15, 25-12
Hulett, Wyo. def. Edgemont, 25-17, 25-15, 25-17
Ipswich def. Hitchcock-Tulare, 26-28, 25-22, 23-25, 25-18, 15-12
Irene-Wakonda def. Marty, 25-16, 25-7, 25-9
Kadoka def. Jones County, 25-21, 25-15, 22-25, 25-20
Lemmon High School def. Mott-Regent, N.D., 25-17, 25-16, 25-20
Lyman def. Philip, 25-16, 25-13, 25-27, 27-25
Mahpíya Lúta def. Tiospaye Topa, 25-6, 25-12, 25-18
McLaughlin def. Takini, 25-10, 25-17, 25-11
Milbank def. Tiospa Zina, 25-14, 25-8, 25-14
North Central def. Wakpala, 25-9, 25-8, 25-17
Northwestern def. Gettysburg, 25-14, 25-10, 25-10
Omaha Nation, Neb. def. Flandreau Indian, 25-6, 25-6, 25-9
Parkston def. Parker/Marion, 25-14, 20-25, 25-15, 25-16
Platte-Geddes def. Chamberlain, 25-11, 25-13, 25-17
Rapid City Christian def. Gordon/Rushville, Neb., 25-10, 25-12, 25-14
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket def. Kimball-White Lake, 25-21, 26-24, 25-21
Sioux Falls Christian def. Brandon Valley, 20-25, 25-21, 21-25, 25-23, 15-8
Sioux Falls Jefferson def. Sioux Falls Lincoln, 25-19, 25-20, 19-25, 25-20
Sioux Falls Lutheran def. Freeman, 3-1

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 31 of 73

Sioux Valley def. Baltic, 25-16, 25-21, 25-15
St Thomas More def. Custer, 25-11, 25-13, 25-12
Stanley County def. Dupree, 25-10, 22-25, 25-20, 25-17
Tripp-Delmont-Armour def. Scotland, 25-18, 25-11, 25-18
Vermillion def. Canton, 25-21, 26-28, 25-20, 25-20
Wagner def. Andes Central/Dakota Christian, 25-6, 25-19, 25-10
Warner def. Faulkton, 26-24, 25-14, 25-14
Watertown def. Huron, 25-23, 25-21, 22-25, 25-22
Waubay/Summit def. Tri-State, N.D., 25-15, 25-8, 25-21
Webster def. Redfield, 25-17, 27-25, 24-26, 25-19
West Central def. Mt. Vernon/Plankinton, 25-23, 25-14, 26-24
Wolsey-Wessington def. Wessington Springs, 25-15, 25-6, 25-7
Yankton def. Mitchell, 20-25, 25-19, 25-23, 25-8

Some high school volleyball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

PREP FOOTBALL

Flandreau Indian 22, Crow Creek Tribal School 14
Todd County 56, Little Wound 0
Winnebago, Neb. 54, St. Francis Indian 0

Some high school football scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Authorities investigate letters with 'suspicious substances' sent to congressional, election offices

By LISA MASCARO and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal authorities are investigating letters with "suspicious substances" that have been mailed to congressional and election offices nationwide and are urging recipients to treat the mailings as "potentially hazardous."

The investigation by the FBI, U.S. Postal Inspection Service and U.S. Capitol Police was first disclosed in a message from the Senate Sergeant at Arms obtained Thursday by The Associated Press. The notice, sent to Senate offices, said that law enforcement officials were working to intercept any additional letters, but "it is possible that some letters may reach their destinations."

In Congress, the threat appeared limited to the Senate, though the House was monitoring the situation, according to a person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to discuss the investigation publicly.

The office of Sen. Lisa Blunt Rochester, a Delaware Democrat, said in a statement that it was sent a letter with a "suspicious substance" that was intercepted by Capitol Police. Democratic Sen. Alex Padilla of California said the Postal Service intercepted a suspicious package before it reached his office. And Democratic Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand said postal inspectors intercepted a suspicious piece of mail addressed to her New York City office.

An FBI statement said the bureau and the Postal Inspection Service were "investigating a series of suspicious mailings sent to various addresses nationwide, including Secretary of State offices and their related election offices."

"Some of the letters contained an unknown substance and we are working closely with our law enforcement partners to respond to each incident," the statement read. "We are also working with our partners to identify the individual or individuals responsible for the letters."

Mailed packages containing a powdery substance led to the evacuation this week of election offices in at least two states, Louisiana and Oklahoma. The Ohio secretary of state said the Postal Service intercepted

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 32 of 73

a package containing a white powder intended for its office and noted that similar mailings had been sent to election officials in multiple states. Numerous states, from Idaho to Florida, said their election offices either received letters or had them intercepted by the Postal Service.

The Wisconsin Elections Commission said in a statement that it received a letter and the white powder enclosed in it was not hazardous, according to tests. "Let this be very clear: this incident will not shake us," Wisconsin elections administrator Meagan Wolfe said.

News of the letters comes just three weeks before Election Day and is reminiscent of a similar threat in 2023, when election offices in six states received mailings that contained a white powder. In some cases, the incidents disrupted work around local elections.

Some of those letters contained threats and traces of the powerful opioid fentanyl, leading some election offices to stock up on the overdose reversal medication naloxone.

The National Association of Secretaries of State and the National Association of State Election Directors issued a joint statement condemning what they said were threats against election staff.

"Those who administer our elections should never fear for their safety while carrying out their essential duties," they said in their statement.

Deputy Postal Inspector Brendan Donahue told reporters Thursday that "any threat or attack on election officials is unacceptable" and that "we are also working with our partners on identifying the individual or individuals responsible for the letters."

Vatican games out possible Sunday prayer appearance as Pope Leo recovers from lung surgery

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Leo XIV's recovery from lung surgery has progressed so normally that the Vatican on Friday stopped providing morning updates confirming he had woken up and had breakfast, even as questions continued about what his cancer means for the future of his young pontificate.

In the near term, Vatican officials were gaming out possible scenarios for Leo to recite the traditional Sunday noontime Angelus prayer. Vatican media personnel were seen at the Gemelli hospital laying cables for a possible live broadcast, as past popes have done when hospitalized.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, said a recitation of the noontime prayer on Sunday from the hospital was a possibility, but would depend on how Leo's post-operative recovery progresses. Such appearances have often served as a welcome confirmation of a hospitalized pope's well-being for the 1.4-billion strong Catholic faithful and others.

Parolin said he remained concerned about the pope, but indicated that was also a function of his surprise at learning that Leo needed surgery.

"We can't make any type of predictions," Parolin said Thursday on the sidelines of a diplomatic event, according to the LaPresse and ANSA news agencies. "The question now is when he will return, under what circumstances he will return, and what the doctors say. And based on all these factors, the pope will then adjust his pontificate, if it needs to be adjusted," he was quoted as saying.

The 71-year-old Leo had the lower lobe of his right lung removed on Tuesday after doctors identified a suspected cancerous nodule. The surgery confirmed he had adenocarcinoma, the most common type of lung cancer.

On Thursday, the American pope resumed working from his hospital room and met with his chief of staff, while continuing with respiratory exercises. His doctors said overall his recovery was proceeding as expected.

Doctors are still awaiting the results of tests to understand the precise molecular and genetic makeup of the cancer, whether it has spread beyond the lobe and whether any further treatment is necessary.

Pakistan orders school inspections as relatives say they warned of risks before deadly collapse

By RIAZ KHAN and MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

PESHAWAR, Pakistan (AP) — Pakistani authorities ordered inspections of all private schools in the north-western province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after a school roof collapsed and killed 34 children and a teacher, as some victims' relatives said the structure previously was reported to be weak.

The provincial government announced an investigation into the cause of Thursday's collapse at Al-Khair school as victims' families demanded justice. At least one family member said he had warned the school owner about leaks.

Police on Thursday arrested the school's owner, Mohammad Khan. Peshawar Police Chief Saeed Ahmed said the building was structurally weak and Khan told officers that recent rains had weakened one of the roofs.

Authorities have locked the school building, where investigators were expected to arrive later Friday as part of the probe. Men and children gathered in the narrow street outside, where Muhammad Murtaza, a young boy dressed in brown and wearing a white bandage around his head, stood near a closed gate.

Other children from the neighborhood gathered around him, asking how he had survived. Murtaza said he was lucky to have survived after the roof of his classroom collapsed. "I will no go back to this school, as this is not a good one," he said.

The government order, which was seen by The Associated Press, directs Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's education department to establish district committees to inspect private school buildings throughout the province and submit findings and recommendations within three days.

The inspections must cover premises that are owned as well as those that are rented. Specific areas to checks in the buildings include roofs, ceilings, walls, columns, beams, foundations and staircases. Districts must require urgent technical assessment and classify school buildings as safe, in need of repairs or improvements, or potentially unsafe, the order says.

On Friday, government spokesperson Samar Haroon Bilour expressed grief over the deaths and injuries of children. In a video message, she appealed to parents to provide information about schools housed in structurally weak buildings, saying the government also was conducting inspections to help prevent similar tragedies in the future.

Survivor and families describe collapse and aftermath

Emergency crews arrived within five minutes of being alerted and everyone trapped beneath the rubble was recovered by the time the operation ended Thursday. Rescuers pulled at least 40 children alive from the debris, said Bilal Faizi, a spokesperson for emergency services in Peshawar.

The collapsed roof was a traditional structure made of mud and bricks and some of the children trapped beneath died of suffocation, Faizi said.

Speaking from a hospital bed, injured teacher Mahwish Zaman said the collapse happened so suddenly that no one had time to escape.

Zaman described being in her classroom when she heard a loud crash from the floor above. Before she could warn her students to run to safety, the ceiling fell in. She was unconscious when she was taken to the hospital and learned only later that many of her students had died.

Residents visited victims' families, many of whom lived in Peshawar's Dir Colony neighborhood, where the school is located.

Mohammad Zaman, whose two nephews died in the collapse, said he and other relatives had complained to the school's owner about rainwater repeatedly seeping into classrooms. Zaman said he warned that the building's condition could lead to a tragedy.

Zaman, 36, said through tears that his nephew Abdul, 9, was in second grade, while Abuzar, 10, was in third grade. Abuzar's sister, Samiya, a nursery student at the school, survived because she had gone outside to buy sweets.

Zakir Ullah lost both sons, Abu Bakr and Mohammad, who were in the same classroom. His daughter was

in a different class and ran home after the collapse to tell the family the school had fallen. They rushed back with her and found the boys' classroom buried under rubble, he said.

Nothing was visible beneath the debris, said Ullah, who described the building as weak and demanded punishment for any officials who authorized its use as a school.

"How could I have known this would take both my sons away from me?" he said.

In June, a roof collapse at a tutoring center under construction in the eastern city of Lahore killed 14 children.

Policing of France's school protests clouds Macron's final months and sparks uproar

By JOHN LEICESTER and SAM McNEIL Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — On one side, legions of determined teenagers protesting for their future by blockading schools and taking part in marches that have sometimes spiraled into violence.

On the other, one of the largest internal security forces in Europe, deployed by the government of an unpopular and outgoing president.

The result, playing out almost daily outside high schools and on the streets of France, is a nationwide storm of unrest. The mayhem of recent weeks — with mass arrests and hundreds of injured — has sparked an uproar in a country steeped in a centuries-old culture of protest. Even some police have turned on the government's handling of the demonstrations.

Discontent shrouds Macron's final months

For President Emmanuel Macron, who leaves office in May, it's hardly the dream ending to his decade in power. He has faced a succession of protest movements that sapped his popularity and fueled broad criticism of how his ministers use police against demonstrators.

With the high schoolers, the outcry has grown particularly loud. That's partly because the vast majority of the 8,000 people arrested in recent weeks are under 18 and because police riot-control weapons are blamed for life-changing injuries suffered by some young teens.

The protesters' push for better-resourced schools, particularly in poorer Paris suburbs and other cities and towns, also has a sympathetic audience as France hurts from record poverty and record public debt.

But police complain that they're facing violent rioters who are latching onto the protests and using the crowds as cover to attack officers, pelting them with rocks, fireworks and other projectiles and wreaking havoc with fires, vandalism and other destruction. By the government's count, more than 900 officers and more than 150 teachers and other school staffers have been injured. More demonstrations, by a variety of groups with broader complaints beyond schools, are planned Saturday.

French history partly explains why protests are veering into confrontations between riot police and some demonstrators who come ready to fight in masks and black clothes, says Walid Hrar, a police officer and union representative in the northern suburbs of Paris.

"This is the country of the French Revolution. Everyone boasts about it, in fact. Some political parties don't hesitate to say that we need to disobey the law. That's what Robespierre and other revolutionaries taught us in 1789," he said.

"France always tends to react rather than anticipate," he added. "In other words, we're always going to extremes."

Attention focusing on police weaponry

The police have drawn sharp scrutiny for their efforts to control crowds using a variety of so-called non-lethal weaponry, particularly grenades and other projectiles, but also tear gas, water cannons and riot shields equipped with powerful strobe lights.

"We're sending poorly equipped, untrained public security police officers to violent demonstrations who are likely to become agitated very quickly out of anger and fear," said Jean-Marie Godard, an author who specializes in French policing.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 35 of 73

Hrar said some of his police colleagues "aren't specialized in crowd control and aren't equipped for it. We send them in because we need the manpower, so we have officers wearing uniforms that aren't flame-resistant. And if you're hit by a firework mortar and your uniform isn't flame-resistant, you can catch fire. We also have officers with worn-out helmets. We have shields that aren't suitable."

He said officers who haven't been given permission to use riot-control projectiles and grenades sometimes struggle to keep attackers at a safe distance.

"So unfortunately we make do," he said. "You'll inevitably end up in direct physical confrontation. When that happens, there are injuries on both sides."

His Alliance police union announced this week that it is filing a legal complaint against the state, accusing it of endangering lives. It alleged that officers are being issued with vague and contradictory orders, leaving them "isolated, betrayed, abandoned, exposed to violence."

Probes of alleged misconduct grow

French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said this week that security forces have used crowd-control weapons at least 18,000 times during the protests — mostly smoke and tear gas but also projectiles and grenades.

They include a deafening launcher-fired grenade that Nunez said was used "about 40 times" before he suspended its deployment against high schoolers, after a 15-year-old lost a hand.

"All this equipment, all these forces, all these intermediate weapons, are used whenever necessary, with proportionality, to mark an escalation of the response, to keep people at a distance or sometimes to put them out of action," he said.

The minister said rules governing the use of riot-control projectiles are "very clear, very strict."

"We avoid everything above the neck," he said.

Still, an officer suspected of firing a round that partially blinded a 16-year-old was this week charged with aggravated violence.

That case is among a growing number of investigations — totaling 36 as of Tuesday — into alleged police misconduct.

Four involve "mutilating injuries," another six involve "significant injuries" and others are for "blows, insults and suspected sexual assaults" and include the case of an officer accused of attempting to drown a protester, Nunez said.

Expert says different groups get different policing

France has more than 250,000 police and gendarmes.

Sebastian Roché, a policing specialist at France's National Center for Scientific Research, said their use can depend on the political needs of the government, which commands them. Officers have been less forgiving with the teenagers than they previously were with farmers, a powerful lobby in France, who doused government buildings with manure, blocked roads and set fires.

"It's the political definition of the movement that defines the police response," Roché said.

Public perceptions of the police also change and are influenced by what people see on social media, said Hrar, who noted that officers were applauded for their bravery during terror attacks in 2015.

"When you bombard people every single day with images of police intervening with batons, shields and tear gas, you're inevitably going to create a negative impression."

Heat, scarce snow melting away Slovenia's Alpine glaciers. One is still standing

LJUBLJANA, Slovenia (AP) — Drop by drop, Slovenia is losing its ice.

Faced with rising temperatures and declining snow in winter, the Alpine nation has seen one of its two glaciers melt away, and the remaining one shrinking irreversibly.

Slovenians know that they are no exception to the global trend of warming that scientists say partly is the result of human-induced climate change.

A record hot and dry summer in Europe this year further aggravated the situation — the glacier on Mount

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 36 of 73

Triglav, Slovenia's highest peak, completely melted away by the end of the summer, while the remaining one is still holding on. It is called Skuta and is located in the Kamnik-Savinje Alps to the north.

Andrej Slak, a mountain guide, has been in the mountains for the past 35 years. The change, he said, has been especially noticeable over the past decade or so.

"We are standing here by the last remaining glacier in Slovenia," Slak showed an Associated Press reporter after the two climbed a rocky terrain to reach the remains of Skuta. "Just look at what is left of it — barely anything more than a small patch covered in grit and debris. The change is striking."

What remains is a patch of ice on the surface of the mountainside, and the rest buried under stones, with a narrow opening leading into a crevasse.

Slak said the glaciers have served as vital water reservoirs for the surrounding valleys over centuries. Shepherds once used icy hollows like this to store and preserve meat but such ice pockets can no longer be found, he explained.

In the capital Ljubljana, Anton Melik Geographical Institute at the Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts has kept the monitoring records for both glaciers for the past 80 years.

Geographer Miha Pavsek said Skuta initially had about 2.5 to 3 hectares (6.1-7.4 acres) of ice underneath. Now there are 1.5 hectares (3.7 acres) and the ice has thinned from dozens of meters (feet) to just a few meters thick.

The now-gone Triglav Glacier had covered a little more than 14 hectares (34.5 acres) 80 years ago. Five or 10 years ago, it was down to between half a hectare and one hectare (2.4 acres). It then gradually disappeared.

The tipping point, Pavsek said, came from a combination of two factors: very little snow, meaning a very low maximum seasonal snow depth, followed by a very warm summer. These two factors, he said, "coincided very well this year."

On Skuta, a marker painted on a rock shows how far the glacier reached in 1994. The ice has pulled back from it since then, and Pavsek predicted that Skuta is on the same trajectory as the lost Triglav Glacier.

Most of the remaining ice surface on Skuta is covered in gravel, which gives it some protection from the sun, Pavsek said. Still, though 80 to 90% of the ice was covered in gravel a week ago, the glacier was still melting — water could be seen dripping in a cave below.

The effects of the glacier melting are felt far beyond the mountains.

In Slovenia, meltwater from glaciers and the snow normally feeds major rivers, including the Drava in Croatia and the Mura, which originates in Austria. Experts predict that all glaciers below 3,500 meters altitude in Austria are also expected to disappear by 2050, which would further affect the two rivers, Pavsek explained.

"These rivers feed the groundwater, where we have wells and pumps for drinking water," he said.

Already, mountain huts at high altitudes in the Slovenian Alps have faced water shortages during past two summers and are asking visitors to economize.

Known as a nature-loving country, Slovenia has mountain climbing and hiking as part of the country's tradition. Locals have followed closely the change as it unfolded before them.

Tanja Plavec, from Ljubljana, is worried that the entire world is yet to face the consequences.

"Glaciers serve as a vital reserve of the Earth's water. As they disappear, that reserve disappears with them," she said. "Furthermore, glaciers host a unique ecosystem that also vanishes as the perennial ice disappears."

Italy's air traffic cut 50% after network problems as delays spread nationwide

ROME (AP) — Italy cut in half the number of aircraft that could be handled in its airspace Friday after overnight problems hit the data transmission network supporting air traffic control services nationwide, air navigation company ENAV said. It ruled out a cyberattack.

ENAV said it was using alternative data transmission systems to allow as many departures as possible

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 37 of 73

Friday morning, including intercontinental flights, while operating at 50% of overall air traffic capacity.

The company said contingency systems had allowed air traffic to operate normally until 6 a.m. But as traffic increased and the problems persisted, it introduced measures to regulate flight flows and reduce the number of aircraft that could be handled in Italian airspace.

The disruption caused delays at airports across the country, including Rome's Fiumicino airport and airports serving Milan and Bergamo.

ENAV said technicians had traced the anomalies to the data transmission network and were deploying all available resources to restore full operations and minimize disruption.

It ruled out malicious activity and said flight operations remained safe.

Teen shooter kills 4 at Oregon elementary school before being shot by a witness

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, ERIC TUCKER and GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

A 16-year-old shot his way through locked doors to get into an elementary school in Bend, Oregon, on Thursday, killing three children and a teacher. He was then shot by a person at the scene who followed him inside, authorities said.

The suspect was found dead inside the school minutes after the shooting was first reported, Bend Police Chief Mike Krantz said.

The three children killed were aged 5, 8 and 11. Another child, 7, and a teacher, 54, were injured and taken to the hospital in critical condition, he said.

The first 911 call came just before 1 p.m. from a person in a vehicle outside Silver Rail Elementary who reported being shot at by someone with a long gun, Krantz told reporters. Further 911 calls came from inside the school, and officers arrived on scene within minutes, police spokesperson Sheila Miller said.

The attacker, who police identified as a Bend resident, was shot and went down inside the school shortly after officers arrived, she said.

Police said they did not know if the shooter knew anyone at the school or whether he had attended.

Children were taken by bus to a nearby church serving as a reunification center for families. Parents hugged, kissed and held their kids' hands as they walked to their cars, with some bringing along favorite stuffed animals or other comfort items from home.

The school in Bend, which is about 125 miles (200 kilometers) southeast of Portland, had 459 enrolled students as of last year, according to the Oregon Department of Education. The school serves students in kindergarten through fifth grade.

The high-desert city has ballooned in population over the past three decades and is a tourism and outdoor recreation hub near Mount Bachelor.

Classes, sports and extracurriculars were canceled Friday for all 32 schools in the Bend-La Pine district.

The shooting was the 28th mass killing in the U.S. this year, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University.

The attacker used a pump-action shotgun that was purchased by his mother, according to a law enforcement official briefed on the shooting. The official spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss the investigation.

At a news conference, Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek said her heart was "absolutely broken" and thanked the civilian who pursued the shooter.

"To the community member who heroically intervened to stop further loss of life: Your actions carry a heavy emotional burden, and I just want you to know that my thoughts are with you as well," she said.

Talarico compares his campaign to the biblical David after GOP invests over \$158M against him

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press

At a packed rally in Texas on Thursday, James Talarico compared his U.S. Senate campaign to David — who fought Goliath — as the Democrat faces more than \$158 million in outside spending by Republican leadership and the world's richest man, Elon Musk.

Talarico told rallygoers under bright lights that David may not have had Goliath's strength, but he had a slingshot.

"You are my slingshot," he continued, without mentioning Musk or the other spending against him. "We are going up against our own Goliaths."

The description falls in line with Talarico's past rhetoric painting politics not as right versus left, but the ultrawealthy versus everyone else, as he tries to become the first Democrat to win statewide in over 30 years. Talarico's own campaign has raised record amounts of money in one of the nation's more expensive and competitive Senate races.

The national conversation around Talarico's campaign has evolved over the past months. Initially, the state lawmaker was considered just the latest of several Democratic candidates over the past years who gave the party a hope of flipping Texas, only for that hope to deflate come Election Day.

Now, Talarico is seen as a real contender to win the seat against Republican candidate Ken Paxton. Talarico's success so far can partly be chalked up to voters' apprehensions toward Paxton, who faced questions in his past over corruption, including being impeached by his own party in the Texas legislature. He was later acquitted.

Texas will help decide control of the US Senate

While outside spending in support of Paxton has flooded the Texas airwaves with ads, Talarico's campaign itself has outpaced Paxton's in fundraising from donors eager for Texas to forgo its solidly Republican title.

The prospect of a flagship GOP state turning blue doesn't just fill Democrats with glee and Republicans with alarm. Whoever wins will help determine which party controls the Senate in President Donald Trump's final two years in office, making it either smooth sailing for Trump or a bog of investigations and opposition.

Talarico, a seminarian and state representative, has also tread a very careful path — as nonpartisan as he can — from the major metros that already tilt Democratic, along the border towns that flipped from blue to red last election, and to the rural Republican high plains and desert.

The candidate has distanced himself from former President Joe Biden's administration and his own party, and while progressive Sen. Bernie Sanders is coming to Texas this month, he won't be sharing a stage with Talarico.

Talarico's talk of affordability resonated at rally

Talarico's strategy is to take direct aim at what voters say they are most concerned about: the costs that have inexorably grown for years. That unaffordability, Talarico argued at the nighttime rally in Texas that was packed with younger voters, is because billionaires and corrupt politicians have rigged the system. It resonated.

"They think that they can buy us, and that they can essentially be the kings of the country," said Kaitlyn Johnson, a 29-year-old bartender who attended the rally.

Johnson felt that Talarico put words to that feeling she'd held for a while, and the high costs keep nagging at her, too.

"I make decent money," she said, "but there's no way in hell that I'm going to be able to buy a house anytime soon."

Paxton has backing from Musk, Trump

Trump and Republicans are well aware of Talarico's ability to connect with voters, and of Paxton's struggles to find purchase in what would otherwise be a relatively easy race for a Republican. The president has made several trips to Texas to rally for Paxton.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 39 of 73

Paxton has received significant financial support from Musk, who last year headed Trump's Department of Government Efficiency. Musk contributed \$158 million to the Senate Leadership Fund, federal campaign spending filings showed Thursday. The Senate Leadership Fund gave \$158 million to Texas PAC, the largest contributor to Paxton's campaign.

Musk also provided \$10 million to Lone Star Liberty PAC, a group that supports Paxton.

The rally Thursday in the small city of San Marcos south of Austin follows nine days earlier this month when Talarico was out of the public eye due to the flu. His absence sparked a swirl of conspiracies online, including the false claim that he was at a mental health treatment center in Ohio. Shared by conservative social media influencers, the claim quickly fell apart at closer inspection.

Alaska's Sullivan and Peltola clash over Iran and high prices in testy Senate debate

By BECKY BOHRER Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Alaska's major U.S. Senate candidates clashed over the Iran war, soaring consumer prices and personal credibility Thursday during a high-stakes debate in a contest that will play into control of the closely divided chamber.

Two-term Republican Sen. Dan Sullivan said the war needs to end soon, and he wants the Strait of Hormuz to open and a deal to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Democrat Mary Peltola, a former congresswoman, said an agreement is "so far out of sight" and lamented the deaths of 20 military personnel.

"This war is driving up our energy bills and hurting Alaskans with no end in sight," she said.

Sullivan said the best way to bring down energy costs "is to produce more Alaskan energy by and for Alaskans."

The debate followed contours of Senate contests around the country, with Peltola blaming the Trump administration for rising gas and consumer prices and pulling back from traditional alliances around the globe, while Sullivan warned that Democratic leadership in Congress would undercut the military and curb domestic energy production.

The debate also took on an edgy, deeply personal tone, as the candidates repeatedly accused each other of being dishonest or misleading.

"I think that Alaskans have had it up to here with the lying and the dishonesty," Peltola said at one point, addressing her rival.

Sullivan repeatedly accused Peltola of lying throughout their campaign and said "it's revealed character challenges."

Foreign conflicts and their impact at home produced some of the sharpest exchanges.

Asked about Ukraine and President Donald Trump's deal to buy Russian diesel, Peltola said, "I think it's so important that we stand with Ukraine and our allies. We have been making new adversaries out of our traditional allies across the globe."

"I think we should be doing everything in our power to help support them, not bolstering up Russia," she added.

Sullivan said he was a strong supporter of Ukraine, then said Democrats were always "cutting our military, undermining readiness."

Peltola appeared to be reading from note cards during several of her answers, at one prompting Sullivan to question the moderators and say he didn't think the candidates were supposed to get questions ahead of time. A moderator said they did not.

Visits by Trump on Tuesday to conservative Wasilla and by Vice President JD Vance the week before to Fairbanks, the hometown of Sullivan's wife, underscore the stakes involved as both parties seek control of the chamber. Alaska last elected a Democrat to the Senate in 2008.

The contest is playing out in a turbulent political year in which voter angst over the Iran war, soaring gas and diesel prices and a rising cost of living have put the House and Senate up for grabs.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 40 of 73

Before the debate, noisy supporters of both candidates gathered with signs — and at least one bullhorn — outside the Alaska Public Media studios.

There was a brief moment of agreement when the candidates were asked about the possibility of a third Trump term in the White House. Sullivan said it would be unconstitutional, and Peltola said that the law was clear, “Two terms for every president.”

The race also includes two Republicans who have done virtually no campaigning, including another Dan Sullivan. To participate in Thursday’s debate, candidates had to win at least 5% of the vote in August’s open primary.

Dan J. Sullivan, a retired teacher who dominated attention ahead of the primary and was called a sham candidate by the senator and his allies, including Trump, finished third with about 2.5% of the vote. Dan J. Sullivan said he received no invitations to any candidate forums.

The incumbent finished second to Peltola in the August primary, in which the top four vote-getters, regardless of party affiliation, advanced to the ranked vote general election. Sullivan, a retired Marine, said the race comes down to record, vision and character.

“I saw her up close and personal. It wasn’t pretty,” he told reporters after the debate, referring to Peltola’s time in office.

He said Peltola was ineffective during her time in Congress. But in an interview Wednesday, Peltola said she worked well with Sullivan as part of Alaska’s three-member congressional delegation and said he was engaging in “kind of revisionist history.”

“Our delegation worked so well together the two years that I was there,” she said, citing as accomplishments the approval of the major Willow oil project in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. Peltola won special and regular elections for the state’s only House seat in 2022 before losing reelection in 2024.

Israel’s Arab-led parties could decide the election if anyone would partner with them

By SAM METZ Associated Press

BAQA AL-GHARBIYYE, Israel (AP) — Mansour Abbas has done nearly everything Israel asks of its Palestinian citizens.

The leader of a small Arab political party condemned Hamas’ Oct. 7, 2023, attack. He rarely speaks about the war in Gaza or Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, instead focusing on local issues like crime. He broke a taboo in 2021 by bringing an Arab party into an Israeli government, in which he served as a loyal partner. This time around, the second-ranked member of his party list is a mainstream Jewish candidate.

But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his chief rivals have said they won’t form a coalition with his or any other Arab-led party after the Oct. 27 election — even if that means months of gridlock and another round of voting.

It’s a measure of where Israel’s long-marginalized Arab minority finds itself three years after the Oct. 7 attack. Their speech is heavily policed, their leaders have been branded as traitors, and at one point their parties were outlawed before a court lifted the ban. Yet in a tight race, Abbas and other Arab politicians are poised to play a potentially decisive role in choosing the next prime minister — a rare opportunity to wield their influence.

The stakes in the coming election are “existential,” said Yousef Jabareen, leader of the Joint List of Arab parties, which adopt a less conciliatory line than Abbas’ Islamist Ra’am party.

“We have to use our political power in order to basically block the deterioration of the situation,” he said at a small campaign event in Tel Aviv, before slipping out the back to avoid a crowd of far-right protesters.

Activists say protests are heavily policed — crime less so

Palestinians who remained within Israel after the 1948 war surrounding its creation, and their descendants, today make up about 20% of the population. They have citizenship, including the right to vote, but their close family ties and support for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank lead many Jewish Israelis

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 41 of 73

to view them with suspicion.

They face discrimination and suffer from soaring crime rates, a problem that Arab activists blame on police negligence and the police say is rooted in the refusal of community leaders to work with them.

The homicide rate among Palestinian citizens is more than 22 times higher than among Jewish Israelis, while arrest and indictment rates are far lower. The Abraham Initiatives, an Israeli organization that advocates for equal rights, has tallied 184 crime-related killings in Arab communities so far this year. The group said in July that only 12% reported in the first half of 2026 had been solved.

Authorities have meanwhile aggressively curtailed freedom of expression, activists say. Police have routinely broken up anti-war protests, restricted displays of Palestinian flags, and arrested hundreds of people over social media posts, according to the Israel-based rights group Adalah.

"They're not writing 'Kill the Jews.' Some of them are writing, 'We pray for Gaza,'" Hassan Jabareen, its general director, said.

The Israeli government says it is a Jewish state in which minorities have equal rights, and that its crack-down on certain kinds of speech and protests is rooted in security concerns.

Jabareen said the perceived over-policing of protests and under-policing of violent crime leaves Palestinians feeling less like citizens and more like threats to be contained.

"We have to choose between the danger of being killed and being discriminated against," he said.

A taboo was broken, and then Netanyahu returned

Arab-led parties have long served in opposition to a system they believe is fundamentally unfair. Until 2021, none had joined a coalition government.

Abbas' decision to do so five years ago marked a major shift. The 52-year-old dentist argued that Arab leaders needed a seat at the table. Critics accuse him of sidestepping the larger Israeli-Palestinian conflict to court potential coalition partners, while he argues that focusing on local issues is the best way to serve his constituents.

"Crime and murder are issues linked to people's lives and there is no value higher than the value of human life. We're responsible, as representatives elected by the Arab public, to serve this public," he said at a campaign event in northern Israel last week.

The government he joined lasted a little over a year, until new elections in 2022 returned Netanyahu to power at the head of the most nationalist and religious government in Israel's history.

Far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has described Palestinian citizens of Israel as an "internal front" in the war and "an existential threat to the state."

With the far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir in charge of law enforcement, at least 200 Palestinian citizens indicted for speech-related offenses have been classified as security prisoners, according to Adalah. They've been subjected to brutal conditions, including overcrowding and severe restrictions on food, often in the same facilities as suspected militants from Gaza.

In theory, they could be kingmakers

Multiple parties compete for the 120 seats in Israel's national assembly, known as the Knesset. None is expected to win anywhere near 61 seats, so whoever succeeds in cobbling together a majority coalition will be the next prime minister. That can give small parties outsized influence.

Netanyahu won't work with the Arab-led parties, and they have also ruled that out. Netanyahu's main opponent, the centrist retired general Gadi Eisenkot, also says he won't ally with Arab-led parties. Even Yair Lapid, a center-left leader of the 2021 government, told The Associated Press in May that he would not form another coalition with Ra'am.

They could change their minds, or form a minority coalition backed by Arab-led parties from the outside. Otherwise, a big win for the Arab-led parties would likely lead to another round of elections, with Netanyahu's government staying on as a caretaker.

Tensions have worsened since Oct. 7

The vast majority of the roughly 1,200 people killed and 251 taken hostage in the Oct. 7 attack were Israeli Jews, but Palestinian citizens of Israel were also among those killed and abducted. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 74,000 Palestinians in Gaza, according to local health authorities.

Mohammad Darawshe is a director at the Givat Haviva Center for a Shared Society, a decades-old organization that campaigns for Jewish and Arab equality. His nephew, a Palestinian citizen of Israel and a paramedic, was killed in the Oct. 7 attack.

He said there was a brief moment of solidarity between Jewish and Palestinian citizens after the attack, but it soon faded as Israel's military response alienated many Palestinians. Rather than work to heal divisions, Netanyahu and his ministers have fed them, Darawshe said.

"This government provides the ecosystem for racism," he said.

Still, some Palestinian citizens see it as a duty to participate and vote, even when the government makes them feel like outsiders.

Ahmed Kadan, a 50-year-old guidance counselor in the Arab town of Baqa al-Gharbiyye, said he plans to vote for Ra'am.

Palestinian citizens have a huge presence in Israel's medical community and other professions, and they pay taxes, but he said the government ignores their needs.

Last month, three young men were found dead in a burning car on the outskirts of the town – apparently a criminal attack. Police have yet to identify any suspects.

"We live in this state and not in any other place," Kadan said. "We're doing our duty but not getting what we need."

Commercial goods are no longer entering Gaza, raising fears of worsening shortages in the territory

By SAM METZ and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — No commercial goods have entered the Gaza Strip for two days, Israeli authorities said Thursday, blaming the suspension on merchants angered by taxes imposed by Hamas — a claim that Palestinian importers deny.

The halt to commercial shipments, including fruit and winter clothing, cuts off a key source of food and other critical supplies as fears grow about procuring supplies needed to get through winter in the territory.

The move stands to immediately reduce Gaza's supplies, because the closed-off territory is completely reliant on whatever goods Israel allows in through border crossings.

Aid groups generally bring in staples such as flour, while merchants import more perishable foods like fruits and meat, according to data released earlier this year by COGAT, the Israeli military body that oversees humanitarian affairs in Gaza.

The suspension is raising fears about affordability, with humanitarian workers saying a combination of aid and a robust commercial market is needed to keep prices under control.

"The humanitarian sector on its own cannot meet the needs of all the people," said Shaina Low, a spokesperson for the Norwegian Refugee Council, an aid group. "The markets need to be functioning."

COGAT announced the suspension of commercial shipments Wednesday. Its deputy spokesperson, Lt. Daniel Kantorovich, said the agency was acting on a decision made by Palestinian merchants a day earlier and could reverse it at their behest.

"We were prepared to coordinate the entry of their trucks as usual, but the vendors informed us that they were cancelling the coordination due to Hamas's taxation mechanism and threats against them," Kantorovich said. "The merchants don't want to bring goods into Gaza."

The world's leading authority on food insecurity reported earlier this year that conditions in Gaza had improved since famine was declared in the territory in August 2025, but were still at crisis levels. Most families in the war-battered enclave weren't getting nearly enough to eat, said the report, adding that "even small disruptions to humanitarian access could rapidly reverse recent gains."

Merchants in Gaza coordinate directly with vendors outside the territory, whose shipments are examined by Israel's military before entering Gaza.

In announcing the measure, COGAT claimed to be communicating a decision made by local merchants

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 43 of 73

in Gaza who had grown tired of Hamas taxing their trucks and threatening them. Israel has long accused the militant group of levying fees on imports to fund its operations.

COGAT said no private-sector vendors had attempted to import goods to Gaza since the merchants alerted Israel on Tuesday.

But the head of Gaza's private truckers union, Nahed Sheheiber, disputed Israel's account, saying they were the ones who had made the decision.

"The merchants are not the ones who stopped the shipments," he said. "The Israeli coordinator is claiming that Gaza's merchants are responsible, but the truth is that the Israelis are the ones who imposed the restrictions."

Following COGAT's announcement, Sheheiber's union met with Gaza's Ministry of Economy to express concern and say Israel was citing fees levied by the ministry as a pretext to cut off commercial goods.

The ministry had been asking merchants to pay 10,000 shekels (about \$3,226) per truck entering Gaza, Sheheiber said. At the meeting, ministry Undersecretary Khaled Al-Raqab told the union that the amount was not a tax, but rather a donation sought by the ministry to help pay civil servants in the strip.

It was not clear from the COGAT announcement if aid agencies would be allowed to increase shipments into Gaza to compensate for the loss in commercial goods.

The agency claimed that Gaza's population — of roughly 2 million people — required approximately 250 truckloads of goods each day. That's far below the minimum of 600 trucks a day stipulated by a ceasefire brokered by the U.S. a year ago.

The war started when Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people on Oct. 7, 2023, and took 251 hostages. Israel responded with a massive bombardment and a ground invasion that has killed more than 74,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

That includes over 1,400 Palestinians killed since the ceasefire took effect, the ministry says. Sporadic attacks have killed five Israeli soldiers in Gaza in the same period.

The ministry, part of the Hamas-run government, maintains detailed records and is seen as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and independent experts. It does not distinguish between civilians and militants in its toll but says women and children make up around half the dead.

Trump will rally Georgia Republicans despite party divisions in battleground state

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Donald Trump's midterm campaign blitz arrives in Georgia on Friday for a rally with top Republican candidates in a state that has long been the epicenter of the president's false claims about election fraud.

In Dalton, the population center of conservative northwest Georgia, Trump will appear with Senate candidate Mike Collins and gubernatorial nominee Rick Jackson as part of the White House effort to boost Republican enthusiasm in an election that could reshape the final years of Trump's second presidency.

"President Trump is the unequivocal leader, best messenger, and unmatched motivator for the Republican Party," said White House spokesperson Davis Ingle.

Yet unlike some of Trump's recent trips to solidly Republican states — Alabama, Montana, Tennessee — Georgia is a critical battleground. That means Jackson, a billionaire businessman, and Collins, a two-term congressman, need more than Trump stalwarts to defeat their respective Democratic opponents, former Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms and Sen. Jon Ossoff.

"I'm surprised Georgia Republicans want the president here," Ossoff said. "The president coming to town reminds Georgians that Donald Trump and Mike Collins" have pushed policies that have "driven the cost of groceries, fuel and healthcare to their all-time highs."

Collins spokesperson Meyer Siegfried said the congressman welcomes the president's attention. But he also stressed that Collins is a "bipartisan workhorse who will work with anybody," while adding that "Os-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 44 of 73

soff hates Trump more than he loves our state."

Bottoms also seemed thrilled with Trump's visit.

"When Donald Trump says he wants people to imagine that he is on the ballot, I am asking the people of Georgia to do just that," she said, pointing to Jackson's promise to be Trump's "favorite governor."

The risks have been evident even in the heavily Republican corner of Georgia where the president will visit. Voters there sent erstwhile Trump ally Marjorie Taylor Greene to Congress before she broke with the president and resigned. Trump won the district by about 37 points in 2024 and Greene won by 29. In the April special election to replace Greene, Republican Rep. Clay Fuller won by 12 points.

Republican candidates have run separately

The Dalton event will be the first time this fall that Jackson and Collins have appeared at the same venue. That contrasts with Ossoff and Bottoms holding joint rallies across Georgia, with the next scheduled for Saturday in Cobb County outside Atlanta.

Collins has been dogged by anemic fundraising and controversies that leave even Republicans questioning his viability against Ossoff. Jackson has focused on sharing the stage with other statewide Republican nominees and party leaders, and none mention Collins.

"That was not a neglect," Trump's former agriculture secretary and onetime Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue said after one rally. "I think it was really respecting a Rick Jackson event and focusing on his election as governor."

Asked about the joint rally, a Jackson spokesman said only, "Rick will be in Dalton and looks forward to reminding Georgia voters that bad mayors do not make good governors."

Trump was last in Dalton on Jan. 4, 2021, the day before Ossoff and Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock won concurrent Senate runoffs. He had already lost the presidential campaign to Joe Biden but was unwilling to accept it.

"There is no way we lost Georgia. There's no way," Trump said that day. "That was a rigged election but we're still fighting it."

Election denial lingers in Georgia

Collins was elected to Congress in 2022, and he's echoed Trump's lies about 2020. He declined to recant those views this week when Ossoff pressed him during a debate. "There was a lot of doubt in that election. Yes, Joe Biden was the president," Collins said, without saying Biden was duly elected.

Trump endorsed Collins days before his June runoff victory over former football coach Derek Dooley. When announcing his decision, Trump complained that Dooley had conceded that Biden was elected legitimately.

Gov. Brian Kemp did not endorse Collins until September, and he warned voters during the primary that the congressman could not win in November.

Trump did not endorse Jackson until after he'd won a Republican primary runoff over the president's original pick, Lt. Gov. Burt Jones, who had been part of Trump's effort to overturn Biden's victory. The president cited Jones' loyalty in his endorsement.

Jackson doesn't regularly mention Trump like he did during the primary campaign, when the first-time candidate compared his business background to Trump. He's more likely in recent weeks to compare himself to Kemp.

But the governor won't be with his fellow Republicans on Friday, according to his top political adviser.

"He has a family obligation that day," said Cody Hall.

Trump wants the midterms to be all about himself. Judging by the ads, Democrats are happy to oblige

By JILL COLVIN and AARON KESSLER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President Donald Trump says he wants voters to pretend that he's on the ballot in this year's midterm elections.

His rivals are doing their best to help his case.

Democratic candidates and their allies have spent more than \$163 million since Sept. 1 on television

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 45 of 73

advertising that mentions the president, according to an Associated Press analysis of data from AdImpact, which charts media spending.

That includes airing ads that reference Trump on broadcast, cable and streaming nearly 180,000 times, the data shows. Republicans, meanwhile, have run ads that talk about the president just 16,000 times, at an estimated cost of \$11 million, over the same period.

It's a noticeable silence about the party's dominant yet unpopular leader.

Many of the Democrats' ads accuse Republican opponents of siding with the president over voters, particularly on issues like tariffs and the Iran war, which they blame for jacking up costs.

The ads include one from the campaign of Georgia Sen. Jon Ossoff, who is running for reelection and has spent nearly \$3 million on a Trump-focused ad attacking his rival, Rep. Mike Collins, for his close relationship with the president.

"Mike Collins voted for Trump's war in Iran, sending gas prices through the roof. He voted for Trump's tariffs, sending grocery prices soaring. And Mike Collins voted with Trump to double health insurance premiums for more than a million Georgians," it says. "Mike Collins sides with Donald Trump and makes you pay more."

Republican National Committee spokesperson Natalie Baldassarre said Democratic messaging reflected the party's hollowness instead of its strength.

"Democrats are lighting money on fire talking about President Trump because they have no agenda other than investigation, obstruction and impeachment," she said. "Trump Derangement Syndrome isn't a policy platform, it's a \$160 million way of saying you have nothing to offer to the American people."

Democrats link Trump and his allies to economic woes

Another ad from the House Majority PAC, a super PAC dedicated to electing Democrats to the House, opens with a middle-age woman standing over her kitchen stove and talking about how her family is "barely getting by" before she expresses her disappointment in Pennsylvania Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, who is one of Republicans' vulnerable incumbents.

"He used to be independent. But now it seems like he's in lockstep with Donald Trump. It really bothers me," she says, adding, "Congressman Fitzpatrick is not for us anymore."

Indeed, all the Democratic ads that have aired in Pennsylvania's tightly contested 1st Congressional District since Sept. 1 have mentioned Trump, even though Fitzpatrick voted against Trump's tariffs and his power to wage war against Iran without congressional approval.

All four of the ads talking about Trump have aired a combined 2,000 times in that period, the AdImpact data shows. Fitzpatrick is being challenged by Democrat Bob Harvie, a county commissioner who is a former social studies teacher.

Democratic strategists say the messaging reflects the sentiment of voters.

"Every single poll and every single focus group shows affordability to be voters' number one issue, and they specifically point to corrupt politicians as being responsible for driving up prices," said House Majority PAC spokesperson Katarina Flicker.

Republican ads back away from the president

Out of dozens of issue categories tracked by AdImpact, the analysis found that Trump was the fourth most common issue mentioned by Democrats in House and Senate races' final stretch. It was topped only by healthcare, taxes and accusations about opponents being beholden to special interests.

For Republicans in the same races, Trump-themed ads clocked in at number 33, by comparison. The top issues in their ads were taxes and crime.

Idaho Republican Senator Jim Risch tells viewers he "fought alongside President Trump to pass the biggest tax cuts for working families in American history."

Overall in the race's final stretch since Sept. 1, Democrats have spent or plan to spend \$1.8 billion in ads across all federal, state and local elections. Republicans have spent or reserved \$2.2 billion nationwide.

Republican strategist Alex Conant said Democrats are banking on Trump motivating their base to vote, an approach they've routinely used over the last decade.

"Democrats want this election to be a referendum on Trump. They want to equate a vote for a Repub-

lican candidate to a vote for Trump," he said.

For Conant's party, it's a different calculus.

"We have a ton of money and we're throwing every kind of message on the wall to see what sticks," he said. "There's not a cookie-cutter Republican ad this year. Whereas the Democratic ads are pretty obvious."

Drone strikes in the Black Sea raise fears of Russian escalation to test NATO's response

By STEPHEN McGRATH and VESELIN TOSHKOV Associated Press

SOFIA, Bulgaria (AP) — A string of drone attacks on at least seven cargo vessels in the Black Sea this month, off the coasts of NATO members Romania and Bulgaria, has some members of the alliance wondering if Russian President Vladimir Putin is seeking escalation to test their support for Ukraine in its war against Moscow's full-scale invasion.

The attacks in the two countries' exclusive economic zones threaten a global shipping route and have left two people dead, with at least 25 still missing. They also run the risk of drawing other countries directly into the war for Ukraine.

Throughout the war, Russia has repeatedly bombarded Ukraine's Black Sea and Danube river ports, leaving Kyiv increasingly reliant on alternative routes to get its grain exports to markets in Africa and the Middle East. Russian drones have repeatedly violated Romanian airspace near some of Ukraine's Danube ports.

In the latest incidents, fires broke out on two ships struck by drones Wednesday and Thursday, one in Romania's territorial waters.

Romanian President Nicusor Dan said Thursday in Brussels that "two drones" had hit the vessels but did not say whose drones they were. "There will be a reaction from the Romanian state," he warned.

Increasingly, the suspicion falls on Russia. "There is no logic in Ukraine attacking its own ships and crews, given that the outcome of all these attacks favors Russia — and indeed, the logic points in that direction," Bulgarian Prime Minister Rumen Radev told his country's Parliament.

"The problem is that we cannot prove it."

Multiple vessels struck by drones in October

The San Marino-flagged Wine Trader, a chemical tanker traveling from Tunisia to Romania, was struck by a drone Thursday and caught fire. Five crew members were rescued but another seven are missing.

On Wednesday, a drone strike and fire were reported on the Comoros-flagged Yara J, a chemical and oil tanker traveling from Turkey to Romania. Romania's acting Defense Minister Radu Miruta said an investigation was underway.

On Tuesday, two ships were struck by drones off Bulgaria's coast. Rescuers evacuated all 15 crew members from the Ukraine-operated Chelsea 3, sailing under a Maltese flag, but 11 crew from the Guinea-Bissau-flagged HS Dignity are still missing.

The crew of the Chelsea 3 reported the ship's deck and hull were hit by three aerial drones.

Earlier this month, sea and aerial drones attacked two other commercial vessels in Bulgaria's exclusive economic zone. A Togo-flagged ship sank with no sign of the 12 sailors reported on board, while a Bulgarian ferry evacuated 18 crew members from a Palau-flagged vessel that was damaged.

A day earlier, a Turkish-owned cargo ship carrying corn caught fire following a drone attack and later sank off the coast of Romania. Two people died and 11 crew members were rescued. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described the attack as "a horrific strike by two Russian drones on a civilian vessel" in neutral waters.

Russia's ambassador in Sofia, Bulgaria, said she didn't have any information from the Russian defense ministry.

NATO's defense clause under scrutiny

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said on X on Thursday that he met Radev and Dan to discuss security in the Black Sea and "the latest attacks on commercial shipping."

"NATO has strengthened our posture along the eastern flank including with increasing counter-drone

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 47 of 73

capabilities," he said. "NATO will continue to work closely with our Allies in the Black Sea, adjusting our deterrence and defense posture as needed."

Article 5 of the NATO charter has a mutual defense guarantee — an attack on one is an attack on all — but Romanian defense analyst Radu Tudor said it was uncertain as to whether it covers many of the Black Sea drone strikes because they occurred in the alliance members' exclusive economic zones.

"It's a matter of discussion whether the exclusive economic zone is included in the Article 5-type reaction or not," he said. "And it seems that until now, it isn't — which raised a lot of questions."

NATO has been too slow to respond in the Black Sea, he argued.

"Tens of incidents are happening and Russia is getting closer to NATO borders. ... Words are not enough," Tudor said.

A growing threat

The Black Sea drone incidents in October are just the latest in a long string of drone airspace incursions to rock Romania and other NATO members since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. While most have come from Russia, Ukrainian drones have also crossed borders.

In August, Romania deployed two F-16 fighter jets to destroy a naval drone that was reportedly carrying explosives and was spotted near a major Black Sea gas project, a decision that Acting Defense Minister Miruta said was made to "protect the lives of the several hundred people" working on the gas platform.

A source in Romania's defense sector, who was not authorized to speak publicly about the incidents, told The Associated Press that the attacks are designed to hurt Ukraine economically and that "Romania is not the target right now."

"All summer we've been hunting all kinds of (drone) debris, water drones, sea drones, air drones, debris in the water, on the beaches," they said. "If this continues ... someone should do something about that."

Potential calls for an escort corridor

The source added they have heard Turkey "would like to summon all the riparian (Black Sea) states to plan a mission to escort these convoys" through a militarized safe corridor.

"I'm not sure about Turkish, but our Romanian vessels don't have anti-air defense systems to protect against drones," they said. "That would be a high risk for the Navy, for military vessels to escort this."

In July, Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey expanded the Black Sea Mine Countermeasures Task Force naval pact to "expand the missions to the protection of critical submarine infrastructure," according to Romania's defense ministry. It would include, it said, a permanent naval presence in Romania's exclusive economic zone.

Many commercial vessels are flagged to one country and owned by a company based elsewhere.

"Why would Romania and Turkey escort a ship from Bermuda with, I don't know, an Argentinian owner just to transport a few hundred tons of grains from Egypt?" the source said. "It's difficult."

Bulgarian Defense Minister Dimitar Stoyanov said Wednesday that the country plans to join NATO's Drone Edge project by the end of October. Launched in July, the initiative — which Romania also joined — aims to invest over \$40 billion in "counter-drone capabilities" over the next five years.

Cezar Gheorghe, founder of grain consultancy firm Agricolumn, told the AP that the drone incidents have not negatively impacted trade at Romania's Black Sea port of Constanta. The main concern is a rise in insurance costs in the wider Black Sea, he said.

"The (premium) for the risk is increasing, ... everyone that wants to come to Constanta, let's say from Turkey, from the Bosphorus Strait and across that area, will have a (premium) on insurance costs," he said. He added his main concern is a "serious incident" occurring at or near Constanta. In June, a Ukrainian maritime drone exploded at the port, and three others nearby.

"It's a matter of time," he said.

Prime Minister Mark Carney says US is trying to break Canada as Alberta votes on separation path

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

CALGARY, Alberta (AP) — Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney warned Thursday that the United States is trying to break Canada so it can “own us” as he urged oil-rich Alberta not to begin a process toward separation in Monday’s referendum.

The vote is not a direct referendum on independence. Alberta, which has the world’s fourth-largest proven oil reserves, will decide whether to remain a province or instruct the government to begin the legal process toward a future referendum on separation.

“This referendum comes at the worst possible time,” Carney told a large pro-Canada rally in Calgary. “The world has become more dangerous and divided. Some outside our borders are working to break us so they can own us.”

He did not directly mention the U.S. or its President Donald Trump in that passage, but has done so in similar past speeches. Carney’s warning came as U.S. President Donald Trump wages a trade war with Canada and after his repeated threats to make Canada the 51st U.S. state. Carney has argued that Canada needs to become more economically resilient and less dependent on the United States.

Carney urged Albertans not to use the vote simply to send Ottawa a message, saying a decisive result could settle the separation question.

“Don’t be fooled by the idea you can ‘send a message’ with your vote,” Carney said. “This is not poker. A vote against Canada is a dangerous bluff that will lead to years of deep division and great uncertainty.”

Carney makes the case for Canada

Carney, who grew up in Alberta, spent Thursday campaigning in Calgary before addressing the Forever Canadian rally at the BMO Centre. His office estimated about 5,000 people attended, with some waiting more than two hours to get through security. Organizers were also holding a second rally with Carney in Edmonton on Friday.

Earlier Thursday, he pointed to the many Albertans who were born or educated elsewhere in Canada and to firefighters who come from across the country to help Alberta during wildfires as examples of the ties binding the province to the rest of Canada.

At the rally, Carney also acknowledged the grievances that have fueled alienation in Alberta.

“The frustrations that many Albertans have felt are real,” he said. Carney said that while growing up, Ottawa made Albertans feel “like our resources weren’t our own” and that more recently the province was made to feel its energy contributions were “against the tides of history.”

A Liberal prime minister finds unlikely support

The setting is striking for a Liberal prime minister. Alberta has spent decades feuding with Liberal governments in Ottawa, particularly over energy and federal power. But Carney has broken with some of the policies associated with his predecessor, Justin Trudeau, fast-tracked a proposed new oil pipeline to the Pacific and called Canada an energy superpower.

Carney pointed to the Pacific Link pipeline as evidence of a changed relationship, saying it would create more than 140,000 jobs and generate revenue for social programs.

His biggest cheer came when he said the pipeline would reduce Canada’s dependence on the United States.

“Careful, they might think that’s election interference. A little touchy,” Carney joked, drawing laughter. He was referring to U.S. Ambassador Pete Hoekstra’s warning to Canadian politicians not to interfere in the U.S. midterm elections.

Tanya Clemens, co-chair of the pro-independence group Let Alberta Decide, acknowledged Carney presents a challenge.

“He’s formidable for sure,” Clemens told The Associated Press.

Clemens argued, however, that Carney’s agreements with Alberta Premier Danielle Smith amount to “pinky promises” that do not resolve long-standing grievances with Ottawa.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 49 of 73

Keith Wilson, another leader of Let Alberta Decide, rejected Carney's argument that global instability made this the wrong time for the vote.

"The worst timing for this, why? I don't understand what's the logic," Wilson said. "Then it's the best time for him to get back to Ottawa."

Wilson said Carney should ask Parliament to repeal federal measures that separatists say have hurt Alberta, including authority he says could be used to tax oil exports in retaliation against the United States. He predicted Carney would eventually impose such a tax despite Carney saying he sees no value in using Canadian energy exports as leverage against the U.S.

"It's one cabinet meeting away," Wilson said. "He's gonna do it. He has to do it."

Smith, who called the vote but supports remaining in Canada, cast her ballot Wednesday and said she voted for Alberta to remain in Canada. She has said support for separation remains too high for her liking.

"Canada can still work," Smith said after voting. "We just need to make some changes."

Daniel Béland, a political science professor at McGill University, called Carney's popularity in Alberta "highly unusual" for a Liberal prime minister. He said Carney has also benefited from a "Trump effect," as Trump's trade war and 51st-state threats have rallied Canadians around their leader — even in Alberta.

From the political fringe to a provincewide vote

The referendum marks a remarkable rise for a cause long relegated to Alberta's political fringes. After the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2022 Freedom Convoy, activists who had organized against vaccine mandates and other restrictions turned their attention to Alberta independence.

The convoy began over vaccine requirements for cross-border truckers but grew into a broader protest against pandemic restrictions, paralyzing downtown Ottawa and blocking major Canada-U.S. border crossings.

Clemens said COVID accelerated the movement by teaching people how to organize politically and become more involved in party politics. She said separatists also see Monday's vote not simply as a step toward independence but as a way to give Alberta leverage in negotiations with Ottawa.

Advance voting runs through Saturday, with the final vote Monday.

A rare family of barn owls moved into Manhattan's Upper West Side. New Yorkers are captivated

By JOSEPH FREDERICK and JOSH KELETY Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Manhattan's Upper West Side has been reveling in the company of its latest celebrities: A family of barn owls nested in a water tower atop a building near Central Park.

This is the first documented instance of barn owls nesting in Manhattan in modern history, according to one expert, and the owls have attracted nightly crowds of people in the street eager to get a glimpse of the elusive birds.

"It was, like, totally shocking," Andrew Farnsworth, a migration ecologist at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, said of the barn owls. "To the best of our knowledge, like the collective birding knowledge, there hasn't been a nest in, you know, in Manhattan, at least in recorded history."

Word of the barn owl family didn't get around until last week, when Elisabeth Williams, an Upper West Side resident, notified a local news outlet on Oct. 6 that she and her husband saw multiple owls at the water tower atop a building on West 75th Street close to Central Park West.

The couple had previously seen a single owl on an apartment windowsill a few days earlier and were shocked even then, Williams recalled.

"In a place like Manhattan, you normally really have to go out of your way to encounter nature," she said. "And here it was, just sort of right outside our window."

Barn owl sightings are rare in New York City

It's not the first time that birds have captivated New Yorkers. Residents have fallen in love with American woodcocks, who are known to stop in Midtown Manhattan's Bryant Park every year as they migrate north

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 50 of 73

in early spring. After Flaco the Eurasian eagle-owl died in 2024, dozens of mournful fans gathered to say goodbye to the beloved creature who flew around Manhattan and became a joy to many after someone let him out of his zoo enclosure the previous year. Then there was Pale Male, a red-tailed hawk who nested above Fifth Avenue for three decades before dying in 2023.

But barn owl sightings in New York City parks are very rare, according to the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. New York is at the northern fringe of the barn owl's range and the barn owl population has declined "at an alarming rate" over time, according to the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

"There's lots of excitement among New Yorkers, both birders and non-birders alike, about these owls because owls really capture the attention," said Jessica Wilson, executive director of NYC Bird Alliance. "They're magical, they're nocturnal, they are secretive, they're not commonly seen, especially on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. And to have this chance to see these birds is really thrilling."

Photographers and casual onlookers have gathered on the street on a nightly basis to spot the owls.

"I've only seen one barn owl ever, and that was in California," said Val Coleman, a retired New York City resident who was on the Upper West Side earlier this week trying to spot the owls. "At dusk, we hope they will come out to hunt. We hope they don't eat poisoned rats with rodenticide in 'em."

David Barrett, a Manhattan-based birder who runs the popular social media account, Manhattan Bird Alert, said he's observed at least one adult barn owl and five fledglings at the water tower. He's also seen an adult owl carrying rodents back to the water tower. There are believed to be two adult owls, and some photographers have claimed to have seen six fledglings, Barrett added.

"Having one barn owl is a rarity, but it's not national news. Having a family, for the first time ever, breeding in Manhattan in recorded history, that's special news," Barrett said.

Screeching was heard by residents

Before the recent barn owl sightings, Williams and her husband heard periodic screeching noises outside going back to early September. They initially assumed it was a bird of some kind but were skeptical when a phone app indicated the noise was from a barn owl.

Thomas Obersteiner said that he first heard bizarre screeching and wailing noises from outside one evening in mid-September. It sounded like someone was "being murdered outside," he said.

"That lasted for two or three weeks, every night, sometimes more, sometimes less, coming from different directions," Obersteiner added. "But I had no idea what that was."

On multiple occasions, Obersteiner or his wife ran into their children's bedroom after mistaking the owls' screech for a child in pain, he said. It wasn't until he saw a news report that he realized that owls were making the sounds.

Farnsworth said the screech is typical of barn owls, who use it to communicate with one another. The screech is like a "horror movie kind of experience," he said.

Obersteiner, who said his roof deck is "probably the best location in town right now" to watch the owls, has been letting nature photographers access that perch to observe the owls "almost every night" since news of the barn owls spread. On one night last week, 20 people had gathered.

"We can't say no because it's so much fun and these people are so serious," Obersteiner added. "It's beautiful."

Williams and her husband were not bird watchers before the barn owl family moved in to the water tower. But that may change soon after their "delightful" experience.

"I think we're about to become birders," Williams said.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 51 of 73

Hurricane Trudy strengthens off Mexico's coast with major storm expected

MIAMI (AP) — Hurricane Trudy strengthened as it approached the Pacific coast of Mexico, authorities said Thursday.

Trudy was located about 230 miles (370 kilometers) southwest of Acapulco, Mexico, with maximum sustained winds of 105 mph (168.98 kph), according to the U.S. National Hurricane Center in Miami.

The hurricane was moving north-northwest at 7 mph (11.27 kph) and was expected to approach the coast of southwestern and west-central Mexico this weekend, the center said.

Trudy was on track to become a major hurricane on Friday, bringing rainfall of 4 to 8 inches (101 to 203 millimeters) through the weekend across Colima and Jalisco states, the center said.

Also in the Pacific, Tropical Storm Champi was centered about 750 miles (1,207 kilometers) east of Guam on Friday local time, moving west-northwest at 12 mph (19 kph), according to the National Weather Service. Guam, Rota, Tinian and Saipan are under typhoon and flood watches.

Youths clash with police for a 3rd day in Albania's anti-government protests

By ZANA CIMILI and DEREK GATOPOULOS Associated Press

TIRANA, Albania (AP) — Student-led demonstrators clashed Thursday with Albanian police in the capital Tirana for a third day running, joining a broader anti-government movement launched in opposition to a major development project linked to U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

Youths protesting Albania's long-serving Socialist government hurled rocks at a police cordon outside the Education Ministry, and riot police responded with tear gas and water cannons. Police detained several demonstrators.

Protesters in masks aimed fireworks at government offices and set fire to trash bins, sending thick clouds of smoke into the air. Television reporters gasped for breath during live broadcasts as smoke and tear gas filled the air.

The latest clashes followed hours-long riots on Wednesday when protesters attacked government buildings, banks and businesses, leaving dozens of people injured.

The protests were led by student groups seeking education reforms. They have joined the so-called flamingo movement, which is calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Edi Rama over allegations of widespread corruption and in opposition to the large luxury tourism development on Albania's southern coast, associated with an investment firm founded by Kushner.

The movement earned the name after protesters used signs depicting the pink birds, which live in their thousands in a nature reserve on the island where the development is planned.

On Thursday, high school students joined thousands of protesters on marches through the center of the capital, chanting "Rama Resign!" as they brought the city to a standstill.

"We will be in the square every day," Mateo Yskollari, a prominent protest organizer, wrote in an online post. "Our response to any attempt to silence us will be to expand the protest, civil mobilization, and disobedience."

Though initially peaceful, the rallies turned violent when confronting police cordons. Groups of youths also broke away from the rallies to attack government buildings and commercial storefronts.

Police prioritized protection of government buildings. They joined government officials in appeals to parents to keep their teenage children at home.

National police chief Skender Hita said 71 officers had been injured. He urged police to act with "professionalism and restraint," adding: "The national police guarantee the right to peaceful protest and assembly but that cannot be used as cover for violence, arson and vandalism."

As smaller clashes broke out in at least three other Albanian cities, the country's education minister, Mirela Kumbaro, issued her appeal in a video message.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 52 of 73

"As minister of education, but also as a mother, I want to share with you a call for cooperation," she said. "While the 'dark hands' create dark smoke with destructive actions against public properties and private businesses, we must not let our children near that smoke."

Rama Thursday greeted cleanup crews and issued a video message from a burned-out college building. He directly accused political opponents of inciting the violence, promising to stay on as prime minister to further Albania's bid to join the European Union.

"We will all get through these difficult hours together because Albania will continue to climb, because Albania will continue on its path to Europe," he said. "No one can grab Albania by the throat. Anyone who thinks the law does not apply to them is mistaken."

Rama's Socialists won a fourth consecutive election victory last year and Albania is not due to hold another parliamentary election until 2029.

The conservative opposition Democratic Party backed the student protests and called on Rama to appoint a caretaker government to prepare for early elections. It retained a group of lawyers to provide legal assistance for detained protesters.

"This movement is not simply a protest against the government," the party said. "It's a revolt against a model of government created by Edi Rama that has stolen hope from young people, violated citizens' trust and is increasingly distancing Albania from its European future."

A European Union delegation in Albania called late Wednesday for a proportionate response from authorities, expressing concern at "the violent escalation at the protest in Tirana."

FBI agents and analysts fired for roles in Trump classified files probe sue to get their jobs back

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — FBI employees fired for their roles in the investigation of President Donald Trump's retention of classified documents at his Florida estate sued Thursday to get their jobs back, calling their terminations unlawful acts of "political retribution."

The complaint adds to the growing list of legal challenges to the mass terminations by FBI Director Kash Patel of agents who participated in investigations of the Republican president or who were perceived as opposed to Trump administration interests.

The suit was filed in federal court in Washington on behalf of nine agents, intelligence analysts and staff operations specialists who were fired in February following earlier dismissals of agents who had investigated Trump's efforts to overturn his 2020 presidential election loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

Patel has said in congressional testimony that the fired employees had "weaponized" the FBI and that terminations at the bureau follow internal investigations that turn up inappropriate conduct. But the agents deny that claim in the lawsuit, noting that they were fired without any investigation, notice or hearing. They said that between them they had more than a century of distinguished and apolitical FBI service that involved responding to the Boston Marathon bombing, hostage recoveries and the investigation into the 2024 assassination attempt of Trump in Butler, Pennsylvania.

Their firings, the lawsuit says, create an "immeasurable loss" to "America's national security."

"In return for their service, they were fired because they did their jobs, as they always did, to follow the facts and law without bias or favor. To this administration, this is an offense. To the rest of us, it is heroic," said a statement from their attorneys, Margaret Donovan, Abbe Lowell and Rebecca Tinio.

"This lawsuit will prove their unlawful dismissal and hold the administration accountable for this blatant attack on the rule of law," the statement added.

The Mar-a-Lago investigation produced criminal charges against Trump

The suit includes a detailed recitation of the allegations against Trump, describing how he improperly stored dozens of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, that he took with him after leaving the White House, showed them to people not authorized to see them and obstructed FBI efforts to get them back.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 53 of 73

The investigation resulted in a 2022 FBI search of Mar-a-Lago that recovered classified records, and a federal indictment in Florida the following year charged Trump with dozens of felony counts.

Trump denied wrongdoing, and the case was dismissed in 2024 by a Trump-appointed judge, Aileen Cannon, who ruled that the special counsel who filed the charges, Jack Smith, had been illegally appointed by the Biden administration Justice Department.

The nine fired FBI employees did not volunteer for the investigation but were rather assigned to it as part of their work on counterintelligence and counterespionage squads, according to the lawsuit, which says they were terminated because of a baseless perception that the performance of their law enforcement duties had run "afoul of the political and personal loyalty to Trump that Defendants demanded."

"By casting Plaintiffs' work on the Plasmic Echo investigation as 'politically weaponized,' Defendants incorrectly presumed to know the personal political convictions of Plaintiffs and took unlawful action based on that presumption," the lawsuit says, using the FBI code name for the classified documents investigation. "Worse still, Defendants incorrectly concluded that those personal political convictions affected or drove their work."

Several of the fired employees participated in the search, and one signed the affidavit that was presented to a magistrate judge for approval, the lawsuit says. But beyond that particular case, the suit says, the agents and analysts had a diversity of career experience, including expertise in the counterintelligence threat from Iran and instances of helping recover American hostages held abroad.

At least one participated in the investigation into pipe bombs placed in January 2021 near the headquarters of the Republican and Democratic national committees. The investigative team was praised at a news conference by Patel, who shook the hand of one of the employees who would later be fired, Harrison Kaufman, and thanked him for his work, the complaint says.

The lawsuit seeks remedies including reinstatement to the FBI, an awarding of back pay and a court order declaring the firings unlawful.

The suit says the firings were the culmination of a retribution campaign

Lawyers for the fired employees suggest their clients' "fate was sealed" well before the February terminations, casting the ousters as the culmination of a long-running retribution campaign that kicked into gear once Trump returned to the White House in 2025.

The lawsuit notes how Patel, in his capacity as a conservative podcaster before becoming Trump's FBI director, had derided the Mar-a-Lago search as "unlawful" and had called agents who participated in it "corrupt government gangsters."

Days after Trump was inaugurated, a top Justice Department official demanded that the FBI produce a list of employees who had investigated the Jan. 6, 2021 riot at the U.S. Capitol, an order that the then-director, Brian Driscoll, resisted and that was seen within the workforce as a potential prelude to mass firings of employees involved in Trump-related inquiries

Over the following year, the FBI and Justice Department fired waves of employees involved in investigations of Trump, without hearings or proper notice that the plaintiffs' lawyers say are required by law. Besides the Mar-a-Lago agents, other employees were dismissed for kneeling at a racial justice protest in Washington in 2020 and for their involvement in a dispute intelligence assessment from 2023 warning of a potential threat from Catholic violent extremists.

The lawsuit suggests the February 2026 firings may have been an attempt to take public attention away from negative publicity Patel received days earlier from his attendance at the Winter Olympics in Milan, where he was seen chugging beer and partying with the U.S. men's hockey team after their gold medal win.

"The Plaintiffs were unlawfully terminated not for any cause or any legitimate reason, but only to satisfy the President's personal vendetta," the lawsuit states. "The firings did not follow any internal investigation or disciplinary process within the FBI, and Plaintiffs were not given any notice, a hearing, or an opportunity to appeal."

New White House press secretary Katie Zacharia defends her legal background and short first briefing

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — New White House press secretary Katie Zacharia on Thursday defended her legal background and justified her truncated inaugural briefing as she navigates a rocky first week as the president's chief spokeswoman.

Zacharia sat down for an interviews with conservative media. She told the conservative Human Events outlet that she did not have time to get fully prepared ahead of her first briefing on Tuesday and that it was always the plan to keep it short because President Donald Trump would field questions from journalists later that morning.

"It was absolutely my goal to keep it short, considering he is his own best spokesperson, and he would love -- and does love -- gagging with the media as he goes to Marine One," Zacharia said. "So I wanted to give ample deference and not barge into his time."

The initial briefing materials were given to Zacharia on Monday evening, then completed Tuesday at 8 a.m., less than two hours before she would appear before the White House press corps. She had been up since 3 a.m. preparing, Zacharia said.

"I never had a full briefing beforehand, and I went out and I effectuated the briefing," she said.

Later, speaking to Fox News commentator Sean Hannity, she said she "probably should have stepped aside" instead of taking questions from the press corps without having time to prepare.

"I could have just given a brief intro and said, 'I'm only here to introduce myself, and I want to engage with the press corps,'" she said.

Zacharia calls failure to pass bar exam 'inconsequential'

As for her legal background, Zacharia said she was preparing to take the bar exam in California at a time that she had just gotten married and was readying a move to China to join her new husband, who had been working in private equity in Beijing.

"I was obviously incredibly distracted and overwhelmed and excited for finally being married to someone who I'd been long distance from for at least a year," Zacharia said.

She said the results of the bar exam, which she did not pass, were "somewhat inconsequential" because she would not need to be a barred attorney while living in China.

Zacharia, who has been under scrutiny for calling herself a "lawyer," said she consulted several legal experts to ensure that title was accurate when offering legal analysis.

"It's unfortunate that people dub this as some kind of conspiracy or want to put me in a camp. The truth is, I was very careful how I executed this, and I never came across as someone who was an attorney-at-law."

She will not weigh in on legal matters in her White House capacity, Zacharia said.

She says she didn't lobby for the job

She also divulged details of how she went about securing the White House press secretary job. Zacharia stressed that she did not want to be seen as lobbying for the position, left vacant when Karoline Leavitt announced she would depart the administration to spend more time with her family.

Zacharia, who was a communications adviser for the company that runs Truth Social, said she closely monitored the president's social media posts to determine what was top of mind for him, then would go on air to talk about those topics.

"My philosophy is, I'm on TV enough where if he sees me and he likes me, then I will be recruited for the job. I do not believe that lobbying for that job would have been successful, and I wanted to work for it. I wanted to audition for it."

Then on Oct. 7, as Zacharia was preparing to take one of her children to a pumpkin patch, she received a phone call from Trump about the press secretary position.

She promptly flew out the next day from her home in California to Washington, met with the president about the job on Friday and formally accepted the position later that day.

What to know about Starshield and why its disruption rattled Ukraine's forces

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Sudden restrictions on Starshield — SpaceX's military-grade version of the Starlink satellite internet service and the backbone of Ukraine's drone operations and communication — alarmed the country's military and government officials this week, with commanders reporting lost drones and disrupted missions.

The episode raised fresh questions about Ukraine's reliance on the Starshield program and who actually controls access to it.

By Thursday, some Ukrainian units said their connectivity had returned to normal, though uncertainty remained over what had caused the restrictions.

The episode added to tensions between Kyiv and Washington, a relationship already strained by President Donald Trump's reported deal with Moscow on Russian diesel imports, which Ukraine viewed as a betrayal.

"The Starshield shutdown was short, lasted only one day, but several drones and other systems were affected. Some missions failed, and we lost drones because communications were cut off," said Yevhen Karas, the commander of Ukraine's 413th Separate Unmanned Systems Regiment, known as Raid, which specializes in tactical and deep-strike drone operations.

Here's what to know about the SpaceX satellite services that have become critical to Ukraine's war effort. What is Starshield?

Starshield is SpaceX's satellite program for governments and the military. Built on Starlink technology, it is designed for national security missions and includes secure communications, Earth observation and satellites equipped with specialized sensors. It also incorporates additional encryption and security measures for sensitive government operations.

The Starlink system uses thousands of satellites in low Earth orbit to provide broadband connectivity to terminals on the ground, including in areas where conventional internet infrastructure is unavailable or damaged.

Unlike Starlink, Starshield is tailored to government requirements and can include dedicated satellites and special equipment.

Starshield "is the version where you have much higher speeds, you have better connectivity and it's not available for civilians; it's available only for the military," said Olena Tregub, founder and secretary-general of Ukraine's Independent Anti-Corruption Commission.

Tregub said reliable, high-speed connectivity was essential for Ukrainian military operations involving drones and units moving rapidly on the ground and in the air. Operators need clear, real-time video feeds to identify what is happening and make decisions, she said.

Ukraine's increasingly digital battlefield also relies on systems such as Delta, which helps manage and share battlefield data. Transmitting large volumes of information requires fast and reliable connections, Tregub said.

"It's not just about being able to connect. We need to make sure that this speed is there, that it's not reduced," she said, adding that standard civilian Starlink access alone would not meet the military's needs.

The U.S. government is a major Starshield customer. SpaceX founder and CEO Elon Musk said this week that the U.S. government owns and controls the system, with decisions about its use resting with the U.S. military and, ultimately, the president. His remarks have fueled questions about who was responsible for the latest restrictions affecting Ukraine.

How are Starlink and Starshield linked?

Starlink and Starshield are different services, but they share much of the same technological foundation, including SpaceX's satellite engineering and capabilities.

The difference lies in the customer, security needs and end purpose. Starlink provides commercial services, while Starshield is designed for government and national security missions.

The distinction is not always straightforward. Starshield can draw on the wider Starlink satellite network

and related infrastructure, while also drawing on separate and dedicated satellites and systems.

Initially developed for commercial use, Starlink became a crucial communications tool after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Its terminals have helped Ukrainian authorities, emergency services and military units stay connected despite Russian attacks on communications infrastructure.

On the front line, the service supports communications between military units and enables operations requiring a continuous connection between drones and their operators, including missions in which operators need to receive video while aircraft are in flight.

The Starlink and Starshield services are not interchangeable, even when they rely on overlapping technology.

For Ukraine, that matters because restrictions affecting particular terminals or military services do not necessarily mean the entire Starlink network has been switched off. Neither does the continued operation of civilian terminals guarantee that specialized military connectivity will remain available.

What happened during the restrictions?

Ukrainian military personnel reported that the restrictions affected terminals transmitting data at high speeds, interfering with some drone missions and causing losses when operators could no longer maintain communications with flying drones.

Responsibility for the restrictions remained unclear after Musk's comments raised questions about the role of Washington. The Pentagon has not answered questions about the slowdown from The Associated Press.

By Thursday, Karas said his unit's connectivity had returned to the required speed and its missions were continuing.

"We are very happy," he said, adding that he did not know whether the episode had been caused by a temporary technical malfunction or something else.

The incident nevertheless reinforced the need for backup communications, he said. Ukraine's army was preparing alternative solutions, although they would be more expensive and less effective, he added.

AP gets exclusive look at 'StarGate,' Ukraine's first aerial drone to evacuate wounded soldiers

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

Six propellers whir to life, lifting a drone above a field somewhere in Ukraine. A weighted stretcher secured to its frame simulates a wounded soldier in body armor.

Far from the front line, the demonstration offers a glimpse of a far more dangerous mission: flying into a battlefield where enemy drones and artillery can leave wounded troops stranded for weeks or months, then carrying them to safety without an evacuation crew.

The Associated Press was granted exclusive access to a field demonstration of the drone. This week, StarGate was handed over to a combat brigade for evaluation under front-line conditions.

The aerial medical evacuation drone was developed over the past year by Ukrainian defense technology company SkyFall. If it proves reliable in combat, it could transform battlefield evacuations, reaching soldiers in places that ground vehicles cannot access and potentially saving those so severely wounded that hours of waiting could cost them their lives.

"The idea came directly from the front line, from the trenches," said SkyFall's spokesperson, who asked not to be named because of the security risks facing Ukrainian military technology personnel. He spoke to AP wearing a balaclava. The AP was not permitted to disclose the testing location.

In some sectors, the so-called kill zone — the area under constant threat from drones and artillery — stretches 10 to 15 kilometers (6 to 9 miles) or farther. StarGate has a one-way range of 15 kilometers, potentially allowing it to reach critically wounded soldiers trapped deep inside the kill zone.

A request from a military commander

The idea grew out of a military request, the spokesperson said. Last year, Flint, commander of the 475th Separate Assault Regiment, known as Code 9.2, approached SkyFall's founder about developing a safer way to evacuate wounded soldiers from hard-to-reach positions.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 57 of 73

For troops in Code 9.2, reaching a front-line position to retrieve the wounded can mean traveling on foot through areas where vehicles are vulnerable to drones. Unmanned ground vehicles have taken on a growing role in evacuating casualties and delivering supplies, but they struggle through mud, craters and shattered roads. Rivers, mines and drones can stop them altogether.

Ground robots typically take two to three hours to reach a position, depending on distance, road conditions and the threat from above, said KVN, a commander with Code 9.2.

"Covering 10 kilometers in minutes would be a drastic change on the front line," he said.

Evacuations continue regularly in his unit's area, he said, but it is not always possible to retrieve a wounded soldier on the same day. For someone with severe injuries, the wait can be critical.

Both Flint and KVN were identified only by their call signs in line with Ukrainian military protocol.

SkyFall emerged after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, and has grown into a Ukrainian drone manufacturer. Its Vampire heavy-lift drone, known to Russian forces as "Baba Yaga," is used by Ukrainian troops for battlefield missions. The company also makes Shrike first-person-view drones and has developed the P1-SUN aerial interceptor.

Named after the science-fiction franchise in which portals connect distant worlds, StarGate can carry a payload of up to 150 kilograms (330 pounds), according to the company - enough for a wounded soldier wearing body armor and carrying combat equipment. Its medical evacuation cabin is built around a stretcher.

The drone cruises at 65 kph (40 mph) and can reach speeds of up to 105 kph (65 mph). SkyFall says it can be prepared for flight in about 10 minutes.

Dueling drone tests

At the test field, StarGate lifts off as first-person-view drones buzz toward it, simulating the aerial threats that dominate Ukraine's front line. Electronic jamming is activated. As one attacking drone closes in, a net shoots out, ensnaring it and sending it off course.

The encounter resembles a futuristic duel fought by machines. But carrying a wounded soldier raises the stakes.

One of SkyFall's biggest challenges was ensuring the drone could navigate when electronic warfare disrupts communications or interferes with GPS signals. StarGate uses two communication channels — Starlink and the company's proprietary L-Link system — alongside an artificial intelligence-based system to help it maintain control when satellite navigation is unavailable.

The drone is operated manually, but has several AI functions that allow it to operate in GPS-denied environments or when signals are spoofed or frequencies are jammed, the spokesperson said.

If communication is lost entirely, SkyFall says, the drone can plot a route back to a safe area. It is designed to operate in rain and snow, with thermal-imaging cameras for nighttime missions.

SkyFall also says it has demonstrated the drone's ability to continue flying after losing one of its arms. The company has not provided data showing how reliably it can withstand damage under combat conditions. The drone began front-line tests this week.

From prototype to combat ready drone

StarGate has undergone multiple design changes, including detachable arms for easier transport, a medical-grade stretcher and improved software and defenses.

The company estimates each system will cost at least \$50,000, depending on configuration, and aims to produce up to 1,000 a month by the end of 2026.

For KVN, however, it is too early to judge. His unit needs at least a month of experience with the drone before it can provide meaningful statistics on its success rate.

"It's a completely new method of evacuation," he said. "It's difficult to talk in depth about the pros and cons right now. We need to work with it more."

SkyFall confirmed the unit is evaluating StarGate but declined to disclose the results.

More roller coasters shut down as authorities investigate fatal fall at Georgia amusement park

By RUSS BYNUM and SUDHIN THANAWALA Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A growing number of amusement parks have shut down roller coasters as police and state regulators investigate what caused a man to fall out of his seat and plummet to his death at a Georgia park.

Sea World Orlando in Florida and La Ronde theme park in Montreal, Canada, confirmed on Thursday they had temporarily closed rides, bringing the total number of roller coasters halted to 11.

Police and a state regulatory agency are investigating what caused Hassan Jihad Ibn Kariem, a 42-year-old school employee from Atlanta, to fall from the Goliath coaster at Six Flags Over Georgia on Monday. Witnesses described seeing him ejected from the coaster; some people who rode the Goliath before him that day said they had concerns about its restraints.

Nine of the roller coasters taken out of service have the same manufacturer and a similar restraint system as the Goliath at Six Flags.

Mom says her son's restraint didn't work properly

Erica Billups said her son and daughter rode Goliath about an hour before Kariem's death and encountered a problem with the restraint on one seat. Her son initially sat in that seat and tried to lock it, but then moved when it repeatedly became unlocked. The roller coaster embarked with the seat empty and the harness up, she said in a post on X.

She confirmed the post in a text message to The Associated Press on Thursday.

She said staff did not tell her kids there was a problem.

Summer Bates, who was at the Georgia park with her husband and three children and saw Kariem fall, told the AP previously that her older two children kept trying to push their restraints down tighter while on the ride. She understood why they were doing that later when she was on the coaster, she said, because the restraints didn't feel secure.

Six Flags did not immediately respond to an email for comment on any issues with restraints.

At least one of the other closures is for safety

La Ronde in Montreal said one of its coasters — also named Goliath — is offline "while we conduct a thorough safety review in collaboration with the ride's manufacturer." Sea World Orlando said that it closed its Mako roller coaster with no set date to reopen.

Neither La Ronde nor Sea World Orlando said why those specific rides were closed. Both were manufactured by the Swiss company Bolliger & Mabillard, which also built the Goliath ride in Georgia and eight of the other coasters that Six Flags closed. Bolliger & Mabillard declined Thursday to answer questions about the shutdowns.

In an updated list of ride closures provided Thursday, Six Flags no longer included the Goliath coaster at its Six Flags Magic Mountain park in California. The coaster has a different manufacturer and restraint system from the others. Six Flags had listed it as closed earlier in the week.

Online photos and videos of most of the closed coasters show each equipped with so-called "clamshell" restraints, mounted in front of each seat on a vertical bar that sits between the rider's knees. The bar locks the padded restraint into place over the rider's lap and upper legs.

It's unclear from the images whether any of those coasters also have seat belts or other secondary restraints. Goliath in Georgia has no such backup restraints.

Dennis Spiegel, a theme park consultant and past president of the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions, a trade group, said the similar restraint systems are almost certainly why most of the coasters were closed.

Spiegel said they're likely to remain shut down until investigators have determined what went wrong on the Georgia coaster, but he said that "obviously it was something with the restraint."

Roller coaster manufacturers decide what type of restraints to use after considering speed, force and the track's transitions, said Brian D. Avery, a University of Florida professor and amusement ride safety expert.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 59 of 73

He advocates the use of a backup restraint for riders, but there is a long-running debate in the industry over whether that would increase wait times, Avery said.

Bolliger & Mabillard says it is investigating

The company said in an email it would have no further comment until it had a "better understanding of what transpired" on Monday.

Kariem was thrown from his seat and struck other patrons before landing below the ride. Goliath, one of Six Flags Over Georgia's headline attractions, towers above the park's entrance. It opened in 2006 and features a series of hills and turns. It doesn't take riders upside down, but its first hill rises to 200 feet (61 meters) and it has a top speed of 70 miles per hour (112 kilometers).

Nick Mendenhall, who had just ridden Goliath with his son and was watching the coaster cars passing overhead, said it looked like Kariem was hovering because the car was moving underneath him. He fell headfirst back into the coaster, Mendenhall said, and then was ejected from the ride on its final turn.

Six Flags has faced legal trouble before

A class-action lawsuit filed by investors in 2025 alleges that Six Flags concealed the poor state of its amusement parks — including long-neglected maintenance — ahead of its merger with major amusement park operator Cedar Fair.

"Prior to the Merger, Legacy Six Flags had for years deferred or foregone basic park maintenance, operational improvements, infrastructure repairs, and ride design and development updates," the complaint said. The company also cut staffing to reduce costs, it alleges.

Timothy Loranger, a California attorney who sued Six Flags in a fatal case, said it's a positive step that the theme park chain closed down rides at other parks as a precaution. Loranger represented the family of 22-year-old Christopher Hawley, who died after riding the X2 roller coaster in 2022 at Six Flags Magic Mountain.

"In all instances, X2 had many reports of injury in the past, and instead of doing a deep dive investigation into the ride, they did things like blame the passengers, the injured person for not sitting properly or holding their head against the headrest or they blamed an imaginary pre-existing condition," Loranger said.

Six Flags permanently closed the X2 ride last month.

Georgia park to reopen

Six Flags Over Georgia is set to reopen on Friday. The Goliath, however, is not expected to be running.

The park, which has about a dozen roller coasters, is in Mableton, about 15 miles (24 kilometers) northwest of Atlanta.

Trump administration sues California to block state from counting alleged noncitizen mail-in ballots

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, SOPHIE AUSTIN and SAFIYAH RIDDLE Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — The Trump administration sued California election officials Thursday, asking a judge to bar the state from counting mail-in ballots for next month's midterm elections from people the federal government has identified as "likely" noncitizens until their immigration status can be confirmed.

The lawsuit comes after the Justice Department said California officials failed to meet a 48-hour deadline to review a password-protected thumb drive that contains a list of 20,000 names. The federal government says those are likely noncitizens who were sent ballots to participate in the Nov. 3 election, although the secretary of state said the administration has provided no evidence to support that claim. The state mails ballots to all registered voters.

The lawsuit follows a letter sent earlier this week by a top Justice Department official who threatened potential legal action if California didn't comply.

The federal government didn't specify where the 20,000 voters were concentrated, but the list was sent directly to Los Angeles County Registrar Dean Logan on Tuesday, his office confirmed in a statement. His office said the list contained names of voters throughout California, not just Los Angeles, even though Logan is the only county election official named as a defendant in the lawsuit. He doesn't have jurisdiction

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 60 of 73

over ballots outside Los Angeles County.

In a statement Thursday, Logan said his office can't withhold ballots or refuse to count them "based solely on unverified allegations."

Over 23 million people are registered statewide, and there are a handful of competitive congressional races in other California districts that could determine which party has control of the U.S. House for the final two years of President Donald Trump's term.

Expert says lawsuit could set stage for false election claims

California Secretary of State Shirley Weber said in a letter to the Justice Department that the federal government hasn't provided evidence to support its allegation that 20,000 names on the state's voter rolls are of noncitizens. She referenced an instance in which the federal government initially alleged nearly 16,000 possible noncitizens were listed on Nevada's voter rolls, but the state determined that all the people flagged were, in fact, U.S. citizens.

She also noted that voting is already underway in the state. Weber, a Democrat, said the Justice Department was "demanding unprecedented measures that threaten thousands of Californians' right to vote, based on unverifiable information or methodology that you still fail to explain or provide."

California's elections are in "full compliance" with federal law, she added.

David Becker, an election law expert who heads the Center for Election Innovation and Research, called the Justice Department's lawsuit "fairly frivolous."

"If they were seeking to work in good faith to clean up the voter list that they believed had issues, they would have done this months ago in a much different fashion," Becker said. "However, it does raise questions as to whether or not the sole purpose of this is to set the stage for false claims about elections."

List of alleged illegal voters delivered on a thumb drive

Logan said his office received the thumb drive along with a "hand written note providing a password" to access the list of alleged noncitizens on the voter rolls. He said he did not consider the thumb drive a secure device. The secretary of state's office said the password was written "on a sticky note."

Becker said most election officials' cybersecurity protocols would not allow them to comply with the Justice Department's request as it was sent.

"Election offices do not just stick thumb drives into their technology, for very good reason," he said.

The Justice Department's lawsuit says the federal government sought to "work collaboratively" with California to identify noncitizens registered to vote in the state, and "California made no serious effort to do so."

"The United States thus seeks commonplace election relief when a ballot is called into question," the lawsuit says. "This Court should enjoin California from presently tabulating vote by-mail ballots from likely noncitizens in the upcoming federal election until the voter's citizenship status can be determined."

Weber, who is named in the lawsuit, suggested the federal government's outreach had not been collaborative.

She said that over the summer, the Department of Homeland Security claimed that California had 190,000 noncitizens on its voter rolls but refused to provide the methodology or data sources when the office asked for them.

In her letter Thursday, she called the recent demands "an emergency of the DOJ's creation."

Letters sent weeks before elections

The letter sent by acting Deputy Attorney General Trent McCotter gave the state 48 hours to research the list of the 20,000 people it claims might not be citizens. For those whose citizenship cannot be independently verified, the state is to instruct local election officials to segregate their mail-in ballots until their immigration status can be determined, and to not provide a ballot to anyone who has not yet received one.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta said at an unrelated press conference Thursday morning that state officials would not carry out the federal government's requests to withhold ballots for the alleged noncitizen voters. He noted that the administration's alleged number of noncitizens on the state's voter rolls had dropped from the 190,000 flagged over the summer by the Department of Homeland Security to the 20,000 noted by the Justice Department.

"What happened to those 170,000? They just got those wrong," Bonta said.

He also said the Trump administration was violating a federal law that prohibits states from changing voter rolls within 90 days of an election.

"They are in unprecedented, baseless, lawless territory," he said.

The Trump administration has made the hunt for noncitizen voters a priority this year, even though the problem is exceptionally rare. The Justice Department has charged about 90 people for various types of election misconduct so far this year, including 50 who are alleged to have voted as noncitizens. There were more than 227 million registered voters in the United States during the 2024 presidential election.

Bill Essayli, the first assistant U.S. attorney for the Central District of California, defended the Justice Department's move to take California to court.

"This is not political or controversial," he wrote in a post on X. "We will not allow California to dilute the votes of American citizens."

Car registered to man accused of planning mass shooting was at Hindu temple he targeted, police say

By CYBELE MAYES-OSTERMAN Associated Press/Report for America

CHICAGO (AP) — Illinois authorities believe a 19-year-old man charged with planning a mass shooting at a Hindu temple in suburban Chicago entered the building's parking lot on Sunday, hours before police arrested him near his home after receiving a tip about the alleged attack plan.

Authorities announced Wednesday that they had arrested Alexandros Paporakis and provided the additional detail about his suspected movement during a news conference Thursday. The leaders of Sri Venkateswara Swami (Balaji) Temple in a statement said a security threat had "targeted our Temple" and announced an increased security presence.

Palatine Police Chief William Nord said a red Acura RDX registered to Paporakis entered a temple parking lot on Sunday around 12:25 p.m. and left less than 15 minutes later. He was seen alone inside the car around 2 p.m. near his home in another suburb.

Paporakis faces felony charges of making a terrorist threat and unlawfully possessing a rifle. Prosecutors have said his co-workers at a Taco Bell location called 911 after Paporakis told them he "couldn't wait to kill Indian people" and said Sunday would be the "special day."

Temple adds security after threat

Sri Venkateswara Swami (Balaji) Temple in Aurora, around 40 miles west of downtown Chicago, said leaders were in contact with police.

"Please know that the safety of our devotees, employees and volunteers is our highest priority, and we have implemented additional security measures effective immediately, including increased armed security presence at the Temple," a statement said.

Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, who represents Illinois' 8th congressional district, said he was at the Hindu temple on Sunday.

"I visited not knowing that there was an attacker lying in wait with a sinister motive to commit a mass shooting, and only because his AR-15 weapon jammed was he not able to commit a massacre that day," Krishnamoorthi told The Associated Press on Thursday.

Krishnamoorthi said he had increased his security in response to the alleged planned attack. He called on the FBI to "investigate and prosecute this particular matter as a hate crime," and the Trump administration to release federal nonprofit security grants to bolster security at religious institutions.

"People are really shaken up," he added.

Aurora Mayor John Laesch said at a Thursday news conference at the Council on American Islamic Relations' Chicago office that police were "made aware" of other scheduled celebrations and are reaching out to other temples in the area "to make sure that they know they have a number to call."

Court records detail the accused attacker's words

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 62 of 73

Paporakis told a coworker on Sunday afternoon that his gun jammed and he left quickly, but promised to "retry," according to prosecutors. He sent the coworker a video showing an AR-style rifle and a photo of himself wearing a tactical vest, they added.

Paporakis also sent the coworker an eight-page document in which he used racial slurs to describe non-white people and outlined a plot to kill as many of them as possible, according to prosecutors. He also described himself as a white supremacist and a neo Nazi who fantasized about mass murder.

Police arrested Paporakis later that day near his home in Palatine, which is located about 40 miles (64.37 kilometers) northeast of the temple. Detectives who searched his home found an AR-style rifle without a serial number, loaded magazines and "hundreds of rounds" of ammunition, a gas canister labeled with a slur referring to South Asians, a tactical vest and a patch depicting Nazi symbolism, authorities say.

Paporakis' mother was questioned, but she is not cooperating with the investigation, police said on Thursday.

At a Wednesday court appearance, a judge ordered Paporakis to remain in detention. His next court hearing is scheduled for Oct. 30.

"This case is in the earliest stage of what will likely be a lengthy process," the office of the Cook County Public Defender, which is representing Paporakis, said in a statement emailed to the AP. "We would remind the public that statements made by police and prosecutors are only allegations and that cases can change significantly as they continue to be investigated."

The targeting of the Hindu temple is another example of heightened threats in the last few years against South Asians in the U.S., according to Stop AAPI Hate, the national reporting center for anti-Asian hate incidents. Online slurs and threats have risen significantly, co-founder Manjusha Kulkarni said in a statement.

"We are grateful this violent plot was thwarted and that no one was hurt -- but it doesn't erase the fear Hindu, Indian, and South Asian people feel after years of escalating hate," Kulkarni said. "Violence against South Asian people is not inevitable. It is fueled when leaders stoke fear of immigrants and people of color for political gain."

She attributed some of the anti-South Asian sentiment to the Trump administration's rhetoric around Indian immigrants who hold work visas. She also pointed to a Texas Republican last month posting a social media video of South Asian students cheering at a University of Texas football game and referring to them as "foreigners."

The temple, like other Hindu temples and households around the country, has been celebrating Navratri, a Hindu festival that lasts nine days. It "should be a time for celebration and unity, not terror and hate," Kulkarni said.

Pennsylvania man who killed family had controlled their movements and finances: police

By JOHN RABY Associated Press

A Pennsylvania man who fatally shot eight others, including seven family members, before killing himself had exercised strict control over his relatives, including their finances and interactions with others, police said Thursday.

Investigators still don't know why family patriarch Matthew Stone Sr. gunned down his wife, their three children, two grandchildren and two women who had rushed to the home and were shot outside, Erie Police Chief Rick Lorah said at a news conference.

Lorah painted a picture of a family living in a home in isolated, filthy conditions. He said the authoritarian behavior of Stone, 45, started after his wife became pregnant with their first child more than two decades ago.

The adult victims of the Oct. 9 shooting previously were identified as Stone's wife, Michelle Stone, 44; their daughter, Angelina Stone, 24, who was due to give birth Monday, three days after the shooting; sons Jonathan Stone, 19, and Matthew Stone Jr., 21; and two women who lived at other addresses: Lora

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 63 of 73

Roberts, 37, and Twila Tanner, 51. Roberts was Michelle Stone's sister.

A 5-year-old boy and a 22-month-old girl who were identified by relatives as Angelina Stone's children also were killed. State law prevented authorities from releasing their names.

Family members told detectives that the elder Stone "restricted when family members could leave the residence or spend time with relatives," Lorah said. In addition, Michelle Stone "stopped maintaining contact with friends."

The elder Stone also kept a tight grip over the family's money, including supplemental government income received for one of the grandchildren, Lorah said.

In 2019, Stone was arrested and charged with threatening his wife with the same .40-caliber handgun that he used in the Oct. 9 shootings. However, at a preliminary hearing, Michelle Stone "changed her original statement and those charges were withdrawn," Lorah said.

A year ago, daughter Angelina filed a petition to change her last name, citing concerns about the elder Stone's "declining mental health," according to Lorah. She had planned to pursue a career in medicine and didn't want her last name associated with her father. But that application was closed in April 2026.

Angelina Stone posted ultrasound photos of her unborn child on social media on Sept. 25. Lorah said she had been sending messages to others indicating she was going to leave the home after giving birth. She also said her father had been physically abusive toward her brothers. After the shootings, detectives found bags and boxes that were packed in Angelina Stone's bedroom.

Detectives described conditions in the home as "extremely filthy." A shower, toilet and kitchen sink didn't appear to be working, and there were numerous soda bottles filled with urine throughout the house. Water service remained active but had an outstanding balance of \$1,900, the chief said.

During their search, detectives also found drug paraphernalia, "but we cannot establish what role, if any, mental health or substance use played in the shooting," Lorah said.

Video and audio evidence recovered by investigators included muffled gunshot sounds coming from inside the home just before Roberts and Tanner arrived and began pounding on the door. The gunman then came out and shot them as they ran toward him, before returning inside. Tanner was the only non-relative killed, Lorah said.

As circumstances of the family's living conditions and history came to light, Mayor Daria Devlin said some difficult questions, too, have surfaced.

"Were there opportunities to recognize that this family was struggling?" Devlin said. "Were there places where our systems could have responded differently? And how do we make sure that families in this community who are suffering and struggling like this don't fall through the cracks?"

"We cannot assume that any one intervention could have prevented what happened on Friday. But that can't stop us from examining where each one of us can do better."

FACT FOCUS: Social media posts falsely claim ballots marked by a poll worker will be disqualified

By MELISSA GOLDIN Associated Press

As early voting begins in the 2026 midterm elections, social media users are claiming that if a poll worker marks a ballot it will be disqualified.

Posts making the claim have spread on multiple platforms, often with the same text. "A very reliable good friend of mine just finished the pollworker training, and she texted to this to me," they begin. They then go on to advise: "When you are checking in at the polls and they happen to write anything on your ballot before they give it to you to put in the voting machine...a letter, a checkmark, a letter star, an R or a D any writing of any kind."

The posts conclude: "Please forward this to everyone you know. Make sure poll workers do not write on your ballot. It will cause your ballot to be disqualified."

But some jurisdictions require poll workers to mark ballots and election officials say that ballots will not be disqualified because of this.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 64 of 73

Here's a closer look at the facts.

CLAIM: Ballots marked by poll workers will be disqualified in the 2026 midterm elections.

THE FACTS: Voting procedures vary by jurisdiction, but it is not unheard for poll workers to mark ballots as part of the process. There are multiple reasons a poll worker might write on a ballot, according to election officials in multiple states. Experts advise voters to check what the rules are in their district and to avoid making stray marks of their own.

"I always like to say, get your facts straight from the source, and the source is your local election official," said Pamela Smith, president and CEO of Verified Voting, a nonpartisan group focused on election technology. "Not your friends, cousin, uncle, on Facebook."

Smith encouraged voters to seek out information on the websites or social media accounts of those officials. She also suggested asking a poll worker who marks a ballot why they've done so if a voter has concerns.

The North Carolina State Board of Elections explains on its website that "election workers write on ballots for different reasons as required by law" and that "this in no way affects whether your ballot will be counted." For example, most counties have workers write "P" for provisional or "A" for absentee in a box in the upper left corner of a ballot so that they can be identified if they are put into a tabulator instead of sealed in an envelope as they are supposed to be.

These markings may include a number on the ballots of mail-in or early voters that allow officials to retrieve them if they are challenged later on. Some poll workers are instructed to write precinct names on ballots in preparation for postelection sorting.

Tennessee Secretary of State Tre Hargett said in a statement responding to the viral post that "in Tennessee, a ballot is not disqualified simply because an election official or poll worker makes an administrative notation on it." He called the claim spreading online "incorrect."

The Illinois State Board of Elections also quashed the rumors.

"FACT CHECK: Under Illinois law, election judges must initial ballots before issuing them to voters," the agency wrote in an X post. "These initials are an important safeguard and will NOT disqualify your ballot."

Trump, after bipartisan backlash, says Pentagon won't livestream execution of Fort Hood shooter

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Thursday that the Pentagon will no longer livestream the firing squad execution of Fort Hood shooter Nidal Malik Hasan, after the announcement faced bipartisan criticism and Vice President JD Vance said he wouldn't watch it.

Trump said on social media that publicly airing the execution "might have been a strong deterrent for the World to witness how America deals with Terrorists and SCUM like Hasan."

But, he continued, "many very good and well meaning people would rather not watch him die, through streaming, or through any other visual device."

The Pentagon has said Hasan's execution is scheduled for Dec. 3. Trump said the execution can be viewed in person by immediate families of the victims, "if they so choose."

The announcement earlier this month from Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth that Hasan's execution would be public — and subsequent confirmation from the Pentagon that it would be livestreamed — prompted significant blowback from both Republicans and Democrats, with many pointing out that the images could be used to fuel radicalization.

Pentagon chief spokesperson Sean Parnell said Trump and Hegseth discussed the decision to drop the livestream plans before the president's announcement on social media.

"The Secretary supports the President's decision, and they are completely aligned," Parnell said.

Catholic bishop called the plan 'barbaric'

When asked how the public execution comported with his Christian faith earlier this month, Vance said,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 65 of 73

"I don't know that that's actually going to happen."

"So whatever the controversy is about the method of the execution, I hope that people don't forget that this is a guy who brutally murdered a lot of innocent people," Vance said, adding, "Now, that said, I mean, look, if it's ultimately livestreamed, I'm not going to be watching it."

Vance is Catholic, and the church has long opposed capital punishment. The head of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops had condemned the Trump administration's decision to livestream Hasan's execution, with Archbishop Paul S. Coakley saying the move was a "barbaric promotion of a culture of death and must be reconsidered."

Other top Republicans, including House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., voiced similar sentiments.

For his part, the president has defended his decision to approve the use of a firing squad, but had for days distanced himself from Hegseth's announcement that it would be public.

"Well, they're making a determination about that," Trump said Friday when asked about the livestream. As for Hasan and the method of execution, Trump said then: "He will be killed. He will be, through firing squad. I really don't care how he goes, as long as he goes. And I think the death penalty is a very worthy way of going for him."

Hasan, an Army psychiatrist who held the rank of major, walked into a medical building on Nov. 5, 2009, where soldiers were waiting in long lines to receive immunizations and medical clearance for deployment. He shouted "Allahu akbar" — Arabic for "God is great!" — and opened fire with a laser-sighted handgun. He also shot at the backs of soldiers fleeing toward the parking lot.

Hasan said it was an effort to stop them from going to Afghanistan and killing his fellow Muslims. A military judge barred him from presenting that as a defense during his 2013 trial. Hasan was left paralyzed from the waist down after being shot in the back by law enforcement and now uses a wheelchair.

Hasan could seek a lengthy delay of his execution, though given his behavior at trial, he may not want to.

The U.S. military hasn't executed a service member by firing squad since World War II. The last military execution took place on April 13, 1961, when Army Pvt. John Bennett was executed by hanging.

Lawsuit by 2 women accuses ex-Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz of sex trafficking

By ED WHITE Associated Press

Two women filed a lawsuit Thursday against former U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz, saying they were sexually exploited by him and other men in violation of a federal anti-trafficking law.

The lawsuit, filed in federal court in Orlando, comes nearly two years after the House Ethics Committee said the Florida Republican had regularly paid for sex, including once with a 17-year-old girl, purchased and used illicit drugs, and violated state laws while a member of Congress.

Gaetz had left office when the report was released and denied wrongdoing. But the report helped to tank his nomination to become attorney general in President Donald Trump's second administration.

Two women said they were in their early 20s in 2017 when they met Gaetz through Joel Greenberg, who was a tax official in Seminole County and is now in prison for a raft of crimes, including a sex crime.

Gaetz provided drugs and paid the women for sex, out-of-state travel, lodging and other expenses, according to the lawsuit.

"Much of the conduct alleged against me is false," Gaetz said in response.

"The lawsuit relies almost exclusively on a Congressional Committee report that didn't allow me to confront my accusers. Now I will finally have that chance," he said in a statement.

Gaetz also appeared to mock the women on the social platform X, sharing a 2018 social media photo of the backs of three women in bathing suits looking at the ocean in the Bahamas.

"I'm shocked nobody responded to their repeated cries for help, posted to instagram," he said Thursday.

The lawsuit also names Greenberg, another man and businesses tied to Greenberg's family.

"Every part of this venture ran on an exploitative power imbalance," the women's attorney, Spencer Kuvin, said in the lawsuit. "On one side stood a sitting congressman, an elected tax collector, and a former

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 66 of 73

state legislator, men with public office, private homes, and money to spend. On the other stood young financially vulnerable women in their early twenties."

Gaetz hosts a political talk show on One America News Network. He was recently appointed to the board of Triumph Gulf Coast, which oversees how Florida spends money recovered for damage from the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

US consumers are muscling through higher prices, but for how long?

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — High gas prices are intensifying inflation and vacuuming up more of Americans' dollars, yet consumers are still digging deep to spend, powering the economy, at least for now.

A slew of economic data Thursday showed that inflation accelerated last month as more expensive oil and gas began to lift prices in other parts of the economy, including shipping and warehousing, before the increases reach most Americans.

Wholesale food prices jumped, which could make groceries more expensive in the months ahead.

At the same time, consumers also ramped up their spending, according to data released Thursday. Though much of the increase reflected higher prices, consumer resilience is powering solid U.S. economic growth.

Workers are enjoying an unusual degree of job security despite scattered layoffs, which likely encourages spending despite surveys showing that many Americans have a gloomy economic outlook.

It all adds up to an economy in which people are spending money but don't feel good about it.

"Consumers may have gritted their teeth and looked through higher gas prices," said Jim Baird, chief investment officer at Plante Moran Financial Advisors. "They're not happy, but they're still spending."

Higher costs strain producers, the last stop before they reach consumers

A report Thursday on wholesale prices helps explain the gloom: The government's producer price index, which measures costs before they reach the consumer, jumped 6.3% in September from a year earlier, the biggest increase in nearly four years. On a monthly basis, prices soared 1.3% from August to September, powered by a 20% rise in gas prices.

Higher diesel prices have made shipping more expensive because long-haul trucks and freight trains rely on the fuel. Higher transportation costs may have helped push up food costs, which rose 1.2% from August to September, the biggest monthly gain since February. The wholesale price report followed the latest consumer price figures, released Wednesday, which showed inflation rising to 3.7% in September, far above the Federal Reserve's 2% target.

"The jolt to transportation prices affects every good in the economy, since inputs to manufacturing move to factories and goods at all stages of production move from producer to wholesaler to retailer by truck, train or rail," wrote Carl Weinberg, chief economist at High Frequency Economics. "This is how increases in energy prices 'bleed through' to prices of core goods."

Farmers also rely on diesel to power most of their equipment, which could further push up food prices. Diesel prices averaged \$6.32 a gallon nationwide Thursday, according to AAA, up from just \$3.66 a year ago.

Despite those cost pressures, retail sales rose a solid 0.8% from August, more than economists had forecast. The increase was driven by a 6.4% jump in spending at gas stations, but consumers also spent elsewhere, including a healthy 1.1% rise at restaurants and bars.

Excluding gas, retail sales rose just 0.2% last month, with much of that also reflecting higher prices.

Economists say that as long as unemployment stays low and Americans continue working, spending will likely stay resilient. Hiring has been sluggish, but layoffs are also unusually low.

The US job market remains relatively strong

Another report Thursday showed that the number of people seeking unemployment benefits stayed below 200,000 last week, a historically low figure. Applications for unemployment aid are a proxy for layoffs.

"If the unemployment rate remains low, meaning consumers have a job, they will continue to spend, even if more cautiously and leaning increasingly on savings and credit," Kathy Bostjancic, chief economist

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 67 of 73

at Nationwide, said in an email.

Many economists worry, however, that as inflation stays high, it will steadily erode Americans' spending power and start to weigh on the economy. Weekly paychecks, adjusted for inflation, actually declined in September compared with a year ago for the first time since May.

And September hiring slowed to a disappointing 29,000 jobs from a revised 133,000 in August, according to the Labor Department early this month. The unemployment rate ticked higher to 4.2% from the previous month, which is still low. Yet economists had expected September payrolls to come in around 90,000.

Inflation may soon boost the cost of credit cards, mortgages and more

Stubbornly elevated inflation also means the Federal Reserve will likely raise its key interest rate in the coming months in an effort to slow spending and bring down inflation. When the Fed raises its rate, that can raise borrowing costs for mortgages, car loans, and credit cards over time.

According to minutes released from the most recent meeting, most Fed officials expect that another interest rate increase will likely be needed this year to combat inflation.

The Fed increased its key interest rate by a quarter-point to about 3.9% in September, its first increase in three years.

The increase defied President Donald Trump's repeated calls for the Fed to cut rates and prompted the president to criticize the Fed's rate-setting committee, though he still expressed support for Chairman Kevin Warsh, whom he appointed earlier this year.

Average long-term US mortgage rate holds at 7.4%, remaining at highest level in nearly 3 years

By ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writer

Mortgage rates held steady this week, keeping the average long-term U.S. home loan rate at its highest level in nearly three years.

The benchmark 30-year fixed-rate mortgage was unchanged from last week at 7.40%, mortgage buyer Freddie Mac said Thursday. One year ago, the average rate was 6.27%.

The latest reading ends a seven-week climb for the average rate, which is at the highest level since Nov. 16, 2023, when it was at 7.44%.

Meanwhile, borrowing costs on 15-year fixed-rate mortgages, often sought by borrowers refinancing a home loan, eased this week. That average rate dropped to 6.71% from 6.73% last week. A year ago, it was at 5.52%.

Rates on home loans are influenced by inflation, Federal Reserve policy and bond-market investors' expectations for the economy, among other factors. They generally follow the trajectory of the 10-year Treasury yield, which lenders use as a guide to pricing home loans.

Mortgage rates have been climbing since late February, when the U.S. war with Iran began, pushing up the price of oil and driving inflation higher. The run-up in rates also reflects heightened bond market volatility, which has pushed up yields on U.S. Treasuries.

U.S. home sales remain stalled this year in large part because of rising mortgage rates, which can add hundreds of dollars a month in costs for borrowers, limiting homebuyers' purchasing power and prompting many to put off buying a home.

The recent string of mortgage rate increases snapped as the 10-year Treasury yield pulled back from its highest level since 2002.

The yield was at 5.10% at midday Thursday on the bond market. It had topped 5.30% earlier this month amid worries about high inflation, signals of a strong U.S. economy and other factors. It's still well above its 3.97% level from before the war with Iran began.

In late February, the average rate on a 30-year mortgage briefly dipped to 5.98%, its lowest level going back to late 2022. The 1.42 percentage point increase in the rate since then translates roughly into an additional monthly cost of \$376 for a borrower financing a \$400,000 home loan at the current average rate.

Depending on a borrower's income, credit and other factors, they may qualify for a rate on a 30-year

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 68 of 73

mortgage that is below or above the current average.

The U.S. housing market has been in a slump since 2022, when mortgage rates began to climb from pandemic-era lows. Sales of previously occupied U.S. homes were essentially flat last year, stuck at a 30-year low.

This week, the National Association of Realtors said that existing U.S. home sales rose in September from the previous month, but slowed compared to a year earlier amid rising mortgage rates and home prices.

The surge in mortgage rates in recent weeks has put off many would-be homebuyers.

Mortgage applications, which include loans to buy a home or refinance an existing mortgage, fell 2.7% last week from the previous week as mortgage rates rose, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association.

Faced with higher borrowing costs due to rising mortgage rates, more homebuyers are opting for adjustable-rate mortgages, or ARMs. Such loans, which typically offer lower initial interest rates than traditional 30-year, fixed-rate mortgages, accounted for 10.5% of all mortgage applications last week — the highest level in a year, MBA said.

Despite holding steady this week, it's likely that the recent upward march in mortgage rates is not over.

Reports this week showing prices at the consumer and wholesale level rose more than economists expected flashed the latest sign that inflation has worsened as rising oil prices add on costs to all manner of goods and services.

The reports could persuade the inflation-fighters at the Federal Reserve to hike their key interest rate by December, and could set the stage for more rate increases early next year, said Jiayi Xu, a senior economist at Realtor.com.

"In other words, mortgage rates are unlikely to ease anytime soon, but bringing inflation under control would pave the way for lower rates and a much-needed boost to affordability for the year ahead," Xu said.

Wall Street traders now expect the Fed will keep its short-term rate unchanged at its next policy meeting this month, but the odds of a rate increase in December have jumped to 64.6% from 49.9% a month ago, according to data from the CME Group.

While the central bank doesn't set mortgage rates, its decisions to raise or lower its short-term rate are watched closely by bond investors and can ultimately affect the yield on 10-year Treasuries.

In its latest forecast, mortgage buyer Fannie Mae projects that the rate on a 30-year mortgage will average 7.4% in the final quarter of this year and average 7.5% in 2027.

Retail sales up 0.8% in September, but a big chunk of spending went to paying gasoline bills

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Shoppers showed their willingness to spend in September even after a better-than-expected splurge in August.

But a big chunk of their purchases last month went toward paying the bills at the gas pump, according to the Commerce Department's latest snapshot on retail sales released Thursday.

Retail sales increased 0.8% last month, after a revised 1.3% gain in August, the Commerce Department said. Economists were anticipating a 0.3% increase for the month, according to FactSet.

Excluding business at gas stations, retail sales rose 0.2% in September. The government figures aren't adjusted for inflation, which accelerated last month as gasoline and many other goods and services became more expensive.

In fact, business at gas stations rose 6.4%, according to the Commerce Department's report.

Elsewhere, business at furniture and home furnishings stores rose 1.3%, while electronics and appliance stores saw a 0.6% increase. Business at online retailers rose 0.3%, according to the report. Clothing and accessories stores saw business unchanged from the previous month.

The data offers only a snapshot of consumer spending and doesn't include activities like travel and hotel stays. But the lone services category — restaurants — registered a solid 1.1% increase.

"The large jump in headline retail sales in September was almost entirely due to rising gasoline prices,"

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 69 of 73

Michael Pearce, chief U.S. economist at Oxford Economics, wrote in a note.

Pearce noted that consumer spending is still on track for a 3.3% annualized gain during the third quarter, but he expects spending to lose momentum heading into the key holiday shopping season as the drag from higher prices weighs more heavily on consumers.

Many Americans have continued to spend despite skyrocketing gas prices that have accompanied renewed fighting in the Middle East.

The average price for regular gasoline rose overnight to \$4.33 per gallon Thursday, according to motor club AAA. Before the war began, the cost of gas per gallon was less than \$3.

The retail sales report comes as U.S. employers added a disappointing 29,000 jobs and the unemployment rate ticked up last month, the government reported earlier this month. Still, the U.S. job market has proven solid in the face of a series of shocks, from tariffs to the Iran War.

But rising prices are still a big challenge for shoppers. The Labor Department reported on Wednesday that the consumer price index rose 3.7% in September compared with a year ago, up from 3.4% in August.

On a monthly basis, costs jumped 0.6% from August to September, the biggest gain in five months, up from a 0.4% increase the previous month. The cost of toys, new and used cars, sporting goods, and shoes all rose at a rapid clip last month, the government said.

Natalie Kotlyar, national leader of BDO's retail and consumer products practice, noted that she wouldn't read the retail sales report as a reflection of broad consumer strength.

"With inflation running above 3% and gas prices high, part of this gain is simply higher prices, and many shoppers are leaning on savings and promotions to stretch their budgets," she said.

Kotlyar noted that strong sales alongside paychecks that aren't keeping pace with prices can't last forever, so retailers need to protect their profit margins and keep inventory flexible as they head into November and December.

Pope Leo resumes working, sees top aide in hospital as doctors say lung recovered from surgery

By NICOLE WINFIELD and COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Leo XIV met with a top aide on Thursday and resumed working from the hospital, as doctors reported his lung had recovered well from surgery to remove a cancerous nodule.

Leo's post-operative tests remained within normal levels and his physiotherapy session Thursday involved full mobility exercises, with the pope going about his daily activities independently, said the update from Leo's personal doctor, Dr. Luigi Carbone, and the head of thoracic surgery at Gemelli hospital, Dr. Stefano Margaritora.

"The chest X-ray revealed good recovery of the operated lung," they reported. "Overall, his postoperative recovery is proceeding as expected."

Separately, the Vatican said Leo had received the Vatican chief of staff, or "substitute," Archbishop Paolo Rudelli, and had resumed working from the hospital. Rudelli handles much of the day-to-day administrative work of the Holy See.

For a second day Leo celebrated Mass with other priests in a special chapel set up near his room on the 10th floor of the hospital, spokesman Matteo Bruni said.

The 71-year-old Leo had the lower right lobe of his right lung removed on Tuesday after doctors identified a suspected cancerous nodule. The surgery confirmed he had adenocarcinoma, the most common type of lung cancer.

Doctors are still awaiting the results of tests to understand the precise molecular makeup of the cancer, whether it has spread beyond the lobe and whether any further treatment is necessary.

Asked if any changes to Leo's planned trip to South America from Nov. 6-17 were expected, Bruni pointed to Leo's words on Sunday when he announced the discovery of the nodule and impending surgery.

"Thank you for your prayers for the pastoral visit I will make to Peru," Leo said Sunday in Spanish, in a greeting delivered to a Peruvian group. The trip is also scheduled to include stops in Uruguay and Argentina.

Leo is expected to remain hospitalized until at least Oct. 20.

Police seize robot that groped 16-year-old girl, investigate whether young men were at the controls

By DANIEL NIEMANN Associated Press

COLOGNE, Germany (AP) — German authorities opened an investigation into possible sexual harassment after a robot controlled by two young men touched the buttocks of a 16-year-old girl and made thrusting movements toward her, police said.

Police in the western city of Cologne responded after the incident overnight Saturday to Sunday in which the robot's suspected 16-year-old owner and a 19-year-old companion were said to have filmed the alleged assault.

They were said to have streamed the incident and commentated on it online.

Cologne police spokesman Christoph Bermel said the two male teenagers have not been charged but are considered suspects, and investigators were examining whether the robot's movements were preprogrammed or controlled in real time.

Police were unfamiliar with this type of incident, he said.

"We have not been aware of this phenomenon so far," Bermel told The Associated Press, saying it was "new territory for us."

Emergency teams that were dispatched to the scene near a fast-food restaurant found the robot in the trunk of a vehicle, Cologne police said in a statement on Monday. The robot and the two young men's mobile phones were confiscated.

North Rhine Westphalia Police Cologne, on Facebook, posted an image of the red-and-gold robot lying on the ground.

The robot, said to be 120 centimeters (about 3 ft 11 inches) tall, was dressed in a white tank top, black sweatpants and wearing a gold chain and sunglasses. It also had what appears to be a fake mustache.

Videos circulated on the internet show two young men escorting the robot toward a group of women, bumping into one and hugging others, on a lively nighttime street.

One of the men repeatedly shouts at the robot and pulls it backward after it makes sexual gestures, prompting laughter among people in the area.

On the police's Facebook account on Tuesday, officers criticized inappropriate comments and warned that sharing or joking about such incidents can worsen the impact on any victim.

Frustrated with Trump, voters overwhelmingly want change in Washington, an AP-NORC poll finds

By STEVE PEOPLES and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A strong majority of voters believe that President Donald Trump is falling short at home and abroad, and they want major change in the upcoming midterm elections, according to a new AP-NORC poll that raises serious warning signs for the Republican Party at a critical moment.

The survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, conducted less than four weeks before Election Day, finds that registered voters who identify as Democrats are more enthusiastic than Republican voters about casting a ballot. More voters want Democrats to win control of Congress and have a more negative view of Republicans.

The Democratic advantage is small in some cases, but, taken together, the findings paint a challenging picture for Republicans, who are clinging to control of Congress under the weight of an unpopular war with Iran and surging prices at home.

About 8 in 10 voters overall say the economy or the cost of living is among their top issues for the upcoming election, while about two-thirds say this about healthcare and the war in Iran. Other issues that are stronger for Trump — like immigration or crime — are lower priorities.

"The world is going backwards. We can barely afford anything," said Diana Walker, a 65-year-old Demo-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 71 of 73

crat from Decatur, Georgia. "Everybody's down. I don't care if you're a Democrat or Republican, we're all catching hell."

Democrats are more enthusiastic about voting than Republicans

Less than a month before the final midterm votes are cast, the poll finds that Democratic voters are more motivated to vote.

Overall, about two-thirds of registered voters say it's "extremely" important to vote in the upcoming election, while about 2 in 10 say it's "very" important.

But about three-quarters of Democratic voters say that voting in this November's midterm elections is "extremely" important, compared with roughly 6 in 10 Republicans.

Ryan Longbrake, a 52-year-old Democrat from Columbus, Ohio who works in technology marketing, said he's especially excited about casting his ballot, and he's already taken steps to ensure that his wife and two college-age daughters will vote as well.

"I believe that there is change on the horizon and there is an excitement within our party," he said, pointing to Democrats' momentum in Ohio's elections for governor and U.S. Senate. The party is also investing resources in Republican-leaning states, like Iowa and Kansas, where the political environment has put Democratic candidates on friendlier footing.

Republicans have controlled Congress for the past two years, but about half of registered voters now say they'd prefer to see the Democratic Party control the House or the Senate. A smaller percentage, roughly 4 in 10, say they want the Republican Party to control each chamber, while 15% are undecided.

The vast majority of voters want change

One thing is crystal clear on the eve of the 2026 midterms: Voters want change.

About half of voters say they want "substantial change," and roughly 3 in 10 want "complete and total upheaval" in the way the country is run.

Democrats and independents are much likelier than Republicans to want a full overhaul of the country's direction. But even Republican voters are still looking for something different. Slightly fewer than half, 45%, want substantial change, while 13% want upheaval.

"I'm kind of tired of sending people there and nothing gets done," said Krista Kohles, a 70-year-old Republican from near Davey, Nebraska. "Nothing's changing."

Trump's numbers on key issues are weak

Voters are deeply frustrated with Trump and his leadership on the issues they say matter most.

Only about one-third of registered voters overall have a "very" or "somewhat" favorable view of the Republican president, and a similar share approve of his performance as president.

Voters continue to be frustrated by the high cost of living, an issue that Trump vowed to address before winning a second term in the White House.

Nearly two years after his successful election, about 8 in 10 registered voters disapprove of how Trump is handling the cost of living, in line with a September AP-NORC poll. About three-quarters disapprove of his performance on the economy.

Even among Republican voters, only 44% approve of Trump's performance on the cost of living, while 54% approve of his leadership on the economy. That's a sharp contrast with other issues, like crime, on which Republican approval is much higher.

There are cracks in Trump's Republican base on other issues, too. Just 69% of Republican voters support Trump on foreign policy as the war in Iran stretches into its eighth month, despite his promises that it would only last four or five weeks.

DonnaJean Weber, a 72-year-old Republican from Manistee, Michigan, says she will continue to support Republican candidates this fall, but she's not happy with the state of the economy under Trump's leadership.

"Everything's going up," she said, pointing to the impact of the war with Iran, among other Trump decisions. "I don't agree with him fully on all of these tariffs, either. It's making this country look bad."

The economy and the cost of living are high priorities for voters on both sides of the aisle. The survey found that the vast majority of Republican and Democratic voters say both issues are among the most important for the upcoming election.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 72 of 73

Voters aren't any higher on one of Trump's potential successors in the next presidential election, Vice President JD Vance: About half have a "somewhat" or "very" negative view of Vance, compared with about one-third who have a positive opinion.

Enthusiasm for the Democrats isn't overwhelming

Trump's struggles do not mean that voters are particularly excited about the direction of the Democratic Party.

Overall, about 4 in 10 voters have a "very" or "somewhat" favorable view of the Democrats, while about half view the party unfavorably. That's roughly similar to views of the GOP, although about 6 in 10 voters view the Republicans unfavorably.

Democratic and Republican voters are equally enthusiastic about their own side, with about 8 in 10 saying they have a favorable view of their own party.

But the critical bloc of voters who identify as independents is much more likely to have a negative view of the Republicans than of the Democrats. About two-thirds of independent voters view the GOP negatively, compared with about 4 in 10 who view Democrats negatively.

Michael Russo, a 51-year-old Texas voter who is not registered with either party, described the state of the country under Republican control as "a nightmare."

Does he want Republicans to maintain control of Congress? "No, I want them in prison — several of them," he said. But he's not thrilled with the Democratic Party, either.

"I'm not confident they're going to do anything if they get into power," Russo said.

Today in History: October 16, Cuban missile crisis begins

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Oct. 16, the 289th day of 2026. There are 76 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Oct. 16, 1962, the Cuban missile crisis began as President John F. Kennedy was informed that reconnaissance photographs had revealed the presence of Soviet nuclear missile sites in Cuba.

Also on this date:

In 1758, American lexicographer Noah Webster was born in Hartford, Connecticut.

In 1793, Marie Antoinette, the queen of France, was beheaded during the French Revolution.

In 1859, radical abolitionist John Brown and his small force raided the U.S. arsenal at Harpers Ferry in what was then western Virginia. The attack failed to spark Brown's intended slave rebellion but deepened North-South animosities leading to the Civil War. (Ten of Brown's men were killed, others fled, and Brown and six followers were caught and later executed.)

In 1923, Walt and Roy Disney found the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio, signing their first contract for an animated series and launching what would become The Walt Disney Co.

In 1934, Chinese communists, under siege by the Nationalists, began their "long march" lasting a year from southeastern to northwestern China. The 6,000-mile retreat saved the communist force from destruction, allowing them to regroup in the remote north.

In 1964, China set off its first atomic bomb, code-named "596," at the Lop Nur test site in Xinjiang.

In 1968, American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos sparked controversy at the Mexico City Olympics by giving "Black power" salutes during a victory ceremony after they had won gold and bronze medals in the 200-meter race.

In 1978, the College of Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church chose Cardinal Karol Wojtyla (voy-TEE'-wah) to be the new pope; he took the name John Paul II.

In 1984, Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu was named winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for his decades of non-violent struggle for racial equality in South Africa.

In 1987, 18-month-old Jessica McClure was pulled from an abandoned well in Midland, Texas, after being stuck there for more than two days. The efforts to rescue "Baby Jessica" captured the attention of the nation.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Oct. 16, 2026 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 132 ~ 73 of 73

In 1991, a gunman opened fire at a Luby's Cafeteria in Killeen, Texas, killing 23 people before taking his own life.

In 1995, the Million Man March, a gathering of Black men meant to foster unity in the face of economic and social issues affecting African Americans, was held in Washington, D.C.

In 2017, Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who had been captured and held by the Taliban for five years after walking away from his post in Afghanistan in 2009, pleaded guilty to desertion and misbehavior before the enemy. He was subsequently given no prison time after submitting evidence of torture at the hands of the Taliban. A federal judge vacated his military conviction in 2023.

In 2024, more than 140 people were killed in Nigeria when an overturned gasoline tanker truck exploded as they tried to scoop up spilled fuel. Dozens more were injured in the inferno at the site in Jigawa state.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Fernanda Montenegro is 97. Actor Barry Corbin is 86. Musician Bob Weir is 79. Actor-director Tim Robbins is 68. Rock musician Flea (Red Hot Chili Peppers) is 64. Filmmaker Kenneth Lonergan is 64. Actor Terri J. Vaughn is 57. Singer John Mayer is 49. Former WNBA point guard Sue Bird is 46. Actor Caterina Scorsone is 45. Philadelphia Phillies outfielder Bryce Harper is 34. Tennis player Naomi Osaka is 29. Race car driver Charles Leclerc is 29. Actor Ruby Rose Turner is 21.