

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Saturday, Sept. 28

Volleyball at Miller Tournament.(CSD Conference)  
Boys soccer at Freeman Academy, noon  
Common Cents Community Thrift Store open, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 209 N Main

**Groton Daily Independent**  
**PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445**  
**Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460**



## Sunday, Sept. 29

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 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.  
United Methodist: Conde Worship, 8:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

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# 1440

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

## **Dame Maggie Smith Dies**

Dame Maggie Smith, considered one of Britain's most beloved and prolific actresses, died yesterday at a hospital in London. She was 89. Smith was best known for her role as Professor Minerva McGonagall in the "Harry Potter" films and as the sharp-tongued Dowager Countess in the historical drama "Downton Abbey."

Born in England in 1934, Smith made her acting debut in a 1952 stage production of "Twelfth Night." Her career spanned over seven decades and 50 films, during which she amassed a collection of awards, including two Academy Awards (for 1969's "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie" and 1978's "California Suite"), five BAFTAs, four Emmys, three Golden Globes, and a Tony Award. Smith was made a dame in 1990 by Queen Elizabeth II for her contributions to the performing arts.

Smith's cause of death was not announced. She was diagnosed with Graves' disease (an autoimmune disorder affecting the thyroid) in 1988 and had defeated breast cancer in her 70s.

At least 39 killed, millions without power from Hurricane Helene.

Helene ripped through Florida and Georgia Friday after reaching Florida's Gulf Coast Thursday night as a Category 4 hurricane. By Friday morning, Helene downgraded to a tropical storm. Helene triggered floods across the Southeast and knocked out power for roughly 4.5 million people.

## **Israel says it struck Hezbollah's headquarters in Beirut.**

At least six people were killed and at least 90 wounded, according to Lebanon's health ministry. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah was reportedly the target of Israel's airstrike, which was aimed at Hezbollah's central headquarters in Lebanon's capital, Beirut. It is unclear if Nasrallah was killed. The news of the attack came shortly after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed the United Nations General Assembly, vowing to continue fighting against Hezbollah.

## **New York Mayor Eric Adams (R) pleads not guilty to federal charges.**

Adams entered the plea Friday in a Manhattan courtroom a day after prosecutors unsealed charges against him. Adams allegedly accepted illegal campaign donations and undisclosed gifts in exchange for favors for Turkey's government and Turkish business owners. Adams is the first New York City mayor (of 110 total) to be charged with a federal crime while in office.

## **FDA approves first novel schizophrenia drug in over 70 years.**

The Food and Drug Administration approved Cobenfy, a twice-daily pill from Bristol Myers Squibb that influences dopamine levels in the brain by changing levels of another neurotransmitter, acetylcholine. Schizophrenia affects how a person thinks, feels, and behaves; symptoms include hallucinations and difficulty in organizing thoughts. About 3.7 million US adults live with schizophrenia.

## **Kentucky sues Express Scripts for alleged role in fatal opioid crisis.**

Kentucky accused the pharmacy benefits manager of contributing to the opioid epidemic by failing to properly monitor and report suspicious opioid prescriptions. Express Scripts allegedly placed opioids on preferred tiers and neglected to impose limits in exchange for rebates and other payments from opioid manufacturers.

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## **Japan's ex-defense minister to become next PM after five tries.**

Japan's governing group, the Liberal Democratic Party, elected 67-year-old Shigeru Ishiba to become the nation's next prime minister beginning next Tuesday. Ishiba defeated opposing candidate Sanae Takaichi by a party vote of 215 to 194. Ishiba will replace outgoing Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who announced last month he would step down amid record-low approval ratings.

## **Fed's key inflation gauge rises as expected in August.**

The core personal consumption expenditures price index, which measures costs consumers pay across a wide swath of items, excluding food and energy, rose 2.7% year-over-year and 0.1% month-over-month. Both figures were mostly in line with analyst estimates. The index is the Federal Reserve's preferred inflation measure; the central bank targets 2% annual inflation.



## **Service Notice: Ilse Cameron**

Ilse Dorthea (Rosebrock) Cameron passed away on September 26, 2024, at Bethesda Home in Aberdeen at the age of 94.

Memorial services under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel will be held at Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Groton on October 12, 2024, at 2:00pm. Rev. Kari Foss will officiate. A private family burial will be held at Homer Cemetery in Pierpont.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be directed to Homer Township Cemetery c/o CorTrust Bank, PO Box 231, Pierpont, SD 57468.

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## NSU Volleyball

### **No. 22 Wolves Fall to No. 4 Mustangs in Extras**

Marshall, Minn. – The No. 22 Northern State University volleyball team dropped their second 5-set match of the season to No. 4 Southwest Minnesota State on Friday evening. The Wolves jumped out to a 2-0 lead battling in the second set, however the Mustangs rallied back sweeping the final three sets.

#### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score Match: NSU 2, SMSU 3

Records: NSU 9-2 (1-2 NSIC), SMSU 12-0 (3-0 NSIC)

Attendance: 689

#### HOW IT HAPPENED

The Wolves took the first two sets with scores of 25-21 and 29-27, while the Mustangs closed out the match winning 25-19, 25-16, and 15-11

Northern hit .191 in the match, recording 56 kills, 52 assists, 79 digs, ten blocks, and eight aces; they led the match in both digs and aces

Natalia Szybinska led three Wolves in double figures, notching 15 kills with a .267 attack percentage

Abby Brooks and Hanna Thompson followed with 11 and ten kills respectively

On defense, four Wolves recorded double figure digs led by Abby Meister with 17

Reese Johnson added 15 digs, as well as a team leading two aces, and Mia Hinsz tallied a career high 13 digs

Keri Walker rounded out the top defenders with 14 digs and added 43 assists, two aces, and three blocks

Victoria Persha and Morissen Samuels led the team at the net with five blocks apiece

#### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Keri Walker: 43 assists, 14 digs, 3 blocks, 2 aces

Natalia Szybinska: 15 kills, 1 dig, 1 block

Abby Meister: 17 digs, 5 assists, 1 ace

Reese Johnson: 15 digs, 2 assists, 2 aces

#### UP NEXT

The Wolves travel to Sioux Falls this afternoon for a 2 p.m. match-up against Augustana University.

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## West Nile Virus Update -SD

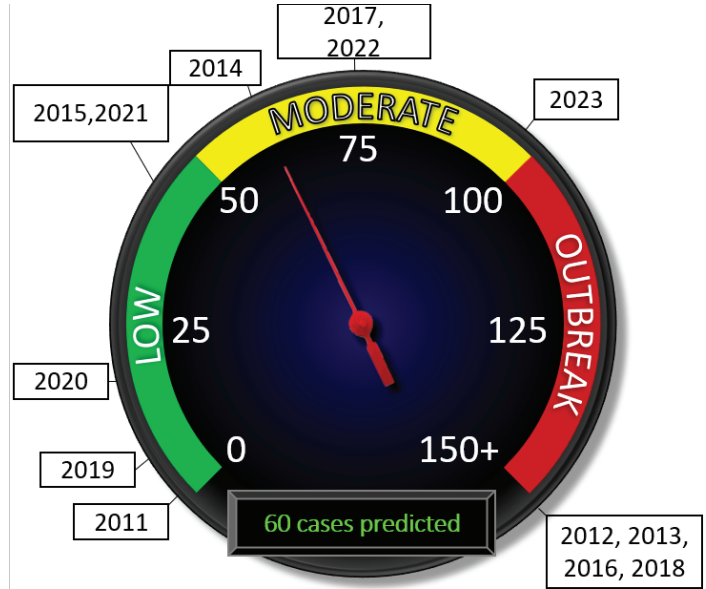
SD WNV (as of September 27):

16 human cases (Beadle, Codington, Davison, Dewey, Gregory, Hutchinson, Kingsbury, Lawrence, Pennington, Potter, Roberts, Walworth, Ziebach )

4 human viremic blood donors (Brule, Dewey, Pennington, Sanborn)

9 counties with positive mosquito pools (Beadle, Brookings, Brown, Codington, Davison, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha, Pennington)

US WNV (as of September 24 ): 748 cases (AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, DE, FL, GA, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, LA, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MO, MS, MT, NC, ND, NE, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OH, OK, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, WI, WV)



WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2024, South Dakota (as of September 27)

Mosquito Surveillance Summary for 2024, South Dakota, Week Ending September 21, 2024 (MMWR Week 38)

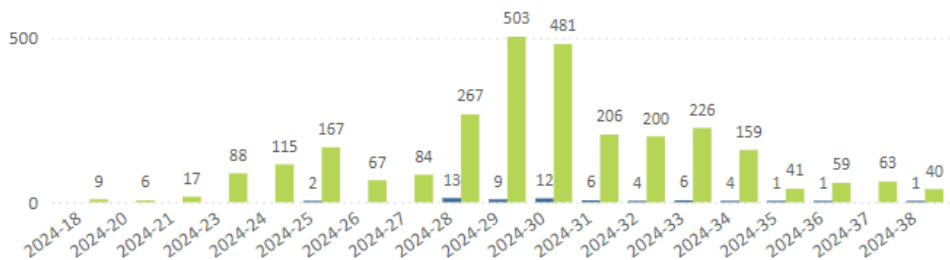
Total sites collecting mosquitoes: 77

Total mosquito pools tested: 2,883

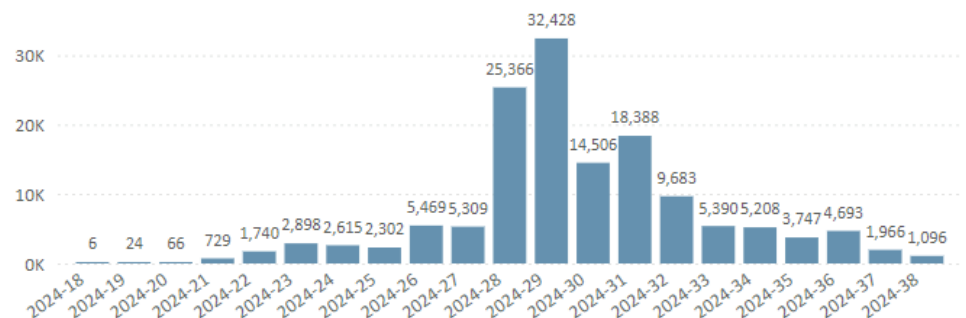
% positivity: 2.08%

Number of Mosquito Pools Tested by MMWR Week and Status

Test Status: ● Positive ● Negative



Culex Mosquitoes Collected by MMWR Week



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## Cyclones whirl past Tigers in NEC matchup

Clark/Willow Lake dominated the football game Friday with a 43-7 win over the Groton Area Tigers.

Groton did not get a non-touchdown first down until the middle of the third quarter. The Cyclones scored three first touchdowns in under five minutes of the first quarter, taking advantage of two interceptions. Ernesto Garcia scored on a 20 yard run with 6:57 left in the first quarter and he also kicked the PAT. Lincoln Reidburn had a 27 yard interception return for a touchdown with 5:23 left in the first quarter. After another interception, the next play was a Josh Kannegieter 18 yard pass play from Emmerson Larson. The PATs were kicked by Garcia.

Groton Area would get on the scoreboard in the middle of the second quarter. Taking over on its own 18 yard line with 7:09 left in the half, Groton Area was forced to punt on fourth and nine; however, the Cyclones would fumble the punt return attempt and Korbin Kucker would recover the fumble as Groton Area took over at its own 46 yard line. Two plays later, Kucker would break free for a 42 yard run and would score with 5:23 left in the half. Joao Nunes kicked the PAT and it was 21-7. Clark/Willow Lake would answer right back when Larson would connect with Lincoln Reidburn for a 55-yard touchdown pass play. Garcia kicked the PAT and it was 28-7 at halftime. The final play of the first half was a Teylor Diegel interception in the endzone as the Cyclones attempted to score one more time.

Clark/Willow Lake would have the ball first to start the second quarter. The Cyclones would start at their own 42 yard line and after four first downs, they would score on a Griffin Musser two yard run. Garcia kicked the PAT and it was 35-7. That drive lasted five and a half minutes with 12 plays in 58 yards.

The younger squads would take to the field in the middle of the fourth quarter. Clark/Willow Lake would score one more time on a 21 yard pass play from Kaden Wookey to Jackson Stormo. Diego Garcia would run in the extra point and it was 43-7 with 41 seconds left in the game.

Clark/Willow Lake had more first downs, 21-6, more yards rushing, 198-63, and more yards passing, 158-43. There were only three penalties in the game for a total loss of just 15 yards. (Groton Area 2-10, Clark/Willow Lake 1-5).

In rushing, Groton Area carried the ball 27 times for 63 yards. Korbin Kucker 12-38, 1TD; Brevin Fliehs 2-3, Ryder Johnson 3-(-10), Christian Ehresmann 3-3, Skyler Godel 4-17, Ryder Schelle 5-12.

Clark/Willow Lake carried the ball 40 times for 198 yards. Emmerson Larson 14-58, Griffin Musser 8-49, 1 TD; and Ernesto Garcia 6-32, 1 TD.

In passing for Groton Area: Korbin Kucker two of 10 for 38 yards, Ryder Johnson two for 6 for five yards, two interceptions; Bradyn Small 0-1. Receivers: Brevin Fliehs 1-28, Teylor Diegel 1-10, Keegen Tracy 1-7, Korbin Kucker 1-(-2).

For Clark/Willow Lake, Emmerson Larson completed seven of 16 for 137 yards, two touchdowns; and Kaden Wookey completed one of one pass for 21 yards and one touchdown. Receivers were Lincoln Reidburn 2-63, 1 TD; Josh Kannegieter 3-33, 1 TD; Griffin Musser 1-33; Cooper Pommer 1-9; and Jackson Stormo 1-21, 1 TD.

Groton Area recovered two of their own fumbles. Clark/Willow Lake had three fumbles and lost one.

Defensive leaders for Groton Area were Christian Ehresmann with seven tackles, Brevin Fliehs with nine tackles, Korbin Kucker with a fumble recovery and Teylor Diegel with an interception. For the Cyclones, Elliott Bratland and Griffin Musser each had five tackles and Lincoln Reidburn and Griffin Musser each had an interception.

Groton Area falls to 3-2 on the season and will host Aberdeen Roncalli on Friday. Clark/Willow Lake goes to 4-1 and will host Deuel on Friday.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, Harry Implement, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Lounge, Krueger Brothers, R&M Farms/Rix Farms and The Meathouse in Andover. Justin Olson provided the play-by-play and Jeslyn Kosel operated the camera. Due to poor cellular signal, the recording of the game has been uploaded to the archives.

## DOE To South Dakota: We Must Hear From the State to Extend \$68 Million Energy Rebate Program Deadline

On August 16, 2024, Governor Kristi Noem missed the deadline to notify the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) about South Dakota's participation in the Home Energy Efficiency Rebate program (HEERA). This decision effectively rejected \$68 million that could have provided households with up to \$14,000 in rebates for energy-efficient appliances like heating, cooling, and laundry systems and upgrades to home electrical wiring and fuse boxes.

By not acting, South Dakota became the only state to opt out of the program. The DOE estimated that households could have saved 30%-40% on utility bills. When Dakota Rural Action (DRA) asked if South Dakota could still apply, the DOE responded, "DOE would need to hear from South Dakota's state energy office directly if a deadline extension would change their plans." The state would need to contact them directly to request an extension.

In response, DRA has launched a petition urging Governor Noem to reconsider and ask the DOE for an extension. The petition allows South Dakotans to express their frustration and demand that the state use its share of federal funds to help with rising costs of living.

Governor Noem's administration claims the program would create ongoing costs for the state, and that they lack the staff to manage it. However, 20% of the \$68 million (or \$13.6 million) is specifically set aside to cover administrative expenses.

With every other state participating, it's clear this is not just a "bad federal program." If we don't act, the money will go to other states, and South Dakotans will get nothing. Given the financial strain families are under, we need the Governor to bring these tax dollars back to our state.

DRA's petition is open until October 15th, 2024, and can be signed at. <https://www.dakotarural.org/heera>



**The City of Groton will be doing adult mosquito control this evening.**

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BROWN COUNTY  
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA  
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY

October 1, 2024 8:45 A.M.

COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS, COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Opportunity of Public Comment
4. Gina Karst – Safe Harbor Update
5. Mike Scott, Landfill Manager
  - a. Set Solid Waste Fees
6. Kelsi Vinger, State's Attorney Grant Coordinator & Lara Nelson, Northern State University Work Study
  - a. Request Funds from the Diversion Reimbursement Incentive
7. Dirk Rogers, Highway Superintendent
  - a. R-O-W for Lynette Durham
  - b. 5-year Highway Plan
8. Consent Calendar
  - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of September 24, 2024
  - b. Claims
  - c. HR Report
  - d. Claim Assignments
  - e. Travel Request
  - f. Approve Travel Reimbursement Rates as of October 1, 2024
9. Other Business
10. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
11. Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting

**Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone.**

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

**You can also dial in using your phone.** United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311)

**Access Code:** 601-168-909 #

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

Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the county commission but may not exceed 3 minutes.

Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes (or at the discretion of the board).

Public comment will be accepted virtually when the virtual attendance option is available.

**Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at**

<https://www.brown.sd.us/departments/commission>



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1. Miller
2. Wolsey/Wessington
3. Groton
4. Potter County
5. Faulkton
6. Highmore-Harrold
7. Sully Buttes
8. Sunshine Bible Academy

9:00am - Match 1 - (1) Miller vs. (8) Sunshine Bible Academy (Armory)

9:00am - Match 2 - (4) Potter County vs. (5) Faulkton (Elementary Gym)

10:15am - Match 3 - (2) Wolsey/Wessington vs. (7) Sully Buttes (Armory)

10:15am - Match 4 - (3) Groton vs. (6) Highmore-Harrold (Elementary Gym)

Match 5 - (Cons. Semi-Finals) - Loser of Match 1 & Match 2 (Elementary Gym)

Match 6 - (Semi-Finals) - Winner of Match 1 & Match 2 (Armory)

Match 7 - (Cons. Semi-Finals) - Loser of Match 3 & Match 4 (Elementary Gym)

Match 8 - (Semi-Finals) - Winner of Match 3 & Match 4 (Armory)

Match 9 - (7<sup>th</sup> Place) - Loser of Match 5 & Match 7 (Elementary Gym)

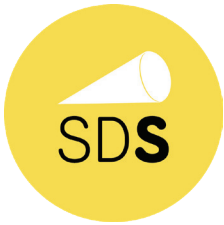
Match 10 - (3<sup>rd</sup> Place) - Loser of Match 6 & Match 8 (Armory)

Match 11 - (5<sup>th</sup> Place) - Winner of Match 5 & Match 7 (Elementary Gym)

Match 12 - (Championship) - Winner of Match 6 & Match 8 (Armory)

## CSDC Volleyball Tournament in Miller

Groton Area matches  
will be broadcast live on  
[GDILIVE.COM](http://GDILIVE.COM).



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Private employers say they were pushed out of state prisons** **Inmate workers paid millions in room and board to state before disputes with agency leadership**

**BY: JOHN HULT - SEPTEMBER 27, 2024 11:41 AM**

Early this year, Terry Van Zanten and his family began to empty out their work space inside the Jameson Annex of the South Dakota State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls.

It took months to move Metal Craft Industries out of the shop where maximum security inmates had worked for more than two decades, earning market-rate wages building parts for lawn mowers and other equipment.

To hear Van Zanten tell it, the Department of Corrections (DOC) bullied his company out the door.

There were unclear and unreasonable demands for change, he said, made with little guidance and a tighter timeline than he could manage without putting his business and clients in jeopardy.

Van Zanten saw Metal Craft's DOC partnership as a benefit for prisoners, the prison system and taxpayers.

Inmates able to pay room and board are expected to, but most can't. Van Zanten's employees could. Between 2020 and 2024 alone, Metal Craft Industries paid \$3.6 million in wages to its inmate employees, according to figures released to South Dakota Searchlight by the DOC. In that timeframe, those employees paid \$219,000 into the state crime victim's fund, more than \$1.3 million for room and board and \$219,000 in child and family support.

"They just threw all that away when they pushed us out," Van Zanten said.

In DOC Secretary Kellie Wasko's version of the story, the company chose to leave. Metal Craft didn't want to comply with DOC mandates and left with "zero notice" in January.

"We did not get rid of the metal shop," Wasko said during a recent Corrections Commission meeting. "We were partnering with the metal shop. The metal shop chose to leave."

Wasko also repeated a line she used in the past: Metal Craft had a captive labor force, and most would never leave prison and use their skills on the outside.

She walked back previous DOC comments about how the shop "only" employed inmates with life sentences, but said "literally 95% of the people that were working in that shop were never going to get out of prison."

"I saw that as cheap inmate labor that was going to put money in the pockets of the people running the organization, and not a benefit to our population," she told the commission.

### **Unique place in prison**

Metal Craft had a unique place in the state's inmate employment framework.

The company's ugly exit underscores how the DOC has quietly upended years of prison industry procedure since Wasko's arrival in the spring of 2022. According to testimony in public meetings, that's come in the form of a heightened focus on security protocols, budgets and job training for shorter-term offenders.

Around 1,300 inmates have jobs "within DOC facilities," the DOC says, although that number fluctuates based on inmate population. Inmates do not work during lockdowns, one of which was ongoing at the time of this story's publication.

Many jobs involve tasks like laundry, cooking or cleaning up.

There are around 170 inmates who work for state-run Pheasantland Industries, the umbrella term for

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shops where inmates translate books into braille for the South Dakota State Library; make road signs or press license plates; make beds, chairs and pillows for the DOC; and build cabinets for the Governor's House program.

The DOC declined to say how many employees work in each Pheasantland shop "for security purposes."

About 150 of the state's working inmates at Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield build the Governor's Houses, which are sold to low-income South Dakotans, municipalities and nonprofits through the South Dakota Housing Development Authority, which itself is a nonprofit organization. Those jobs pay \$1.50 an hour, triple the wage of a typical Pheasantland Job.

By state policy and federal law, the customers of Pheasantland Industries must be state or local governments or nonprofit organizations.

The former Metal Craft employees worked outside those restrictions and under an altogether different inmate employment framework than most of their fellow inmates.

At the urging of former Gov. Bill Janklow, the business came to the prison through the federal Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program. That program allows prisons to partner with private businesses and bypass federal laws against the sale of inmate-produced goods in interstate commerce, provided that the businesses pay a prevailing wage and meet other requirements.

Not everyone loves that.

A Corrections Commission member, labor representative Mark Anderson, agrees with Wasko. He's never liked the partnership, and thinks the Metal Craft shop should've been training inmates more likely to leave.

Most prison industry work could be done in the private sector, he said. But in practice, he said, there's value beyond cheap labor in putting inmates to work.

"You have to balance that with 'does it give these guys a trade, so that when they get out, we don't see them again?'" Anderson said.

A former Corrections Commission member, Canton Republican state Rep. Kevin Jensen, said Van Zanten's shop was valuable to the DOC even if most of its inmate employees never walked free.

"The guards I've talked to say those inmates were some of the most well-behaved out there," Jensen said during the most recent commission meeting.

Jensen argues that Wasko's public version of the story doesn't add up.

"It's not a lie, but it's an untruth," Jensen said after the meeting. "Wasko said he backed away. Well, yeah, he backed away, but that was because he wasn't going to be able to staff it properly with the inmates they were willing to share with him."

Even Anderson, who was never a fan of Metal Craft, said that from what he's learned about DOC's actions, "it would appear to me that it was intentional on their part, to get rid of it."

## Dispute illustrates impact of policy changes

As of this week, three private companies – two of which were tied to the federal jobs program – remain listed as partners on a DOC webpage: Metal Craft, Badlands Quilting, and Hope Haven Ministries.

Just one of those partners still employs inmates.

Inmates at the South Dakota Women's Prison no longer produce star quilts for Martin-based Badlands Quilting, which sells quilts across the country to Native American families to honor graduates, mark major life events or serve as gifts of sympathy to mourning families.

That private industry partnership began in 2018 and employed a largely Native American inmate workforce of around 20 women.

Badlands left the women's prison in April.

Hope Haven still employs five inmates to build wheelchairs, DOC Finance Director Brittini Skipper said during the September Corrections Commission meeting.

The ministry used to have more inmate help. A story on Hope Haven, published last October in nwiowa.com, notes that members of Trinity Reformed Church had to step in and assist the nonprofit.

"For many years, most of the seating systems for the ministry's pediatric wheelchairs were produced

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by inmates at the South Dakota State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls," the story reads. "A shortage of prison guards led to a decline in production at the facility, however, and volunteers from Trinity stepped in to pick up the slack."

A Hope Haven representative was unable to respond to inquiries from South Dakota Searchlight by the time of publication.

## Details of change scant, scattered throughout public testimony

Wasko has never agreed to an interview with South Dakota Searchlight. The DOC has ignored most Searchlight questions on prison industries.

Details of the agency's policy changes and their impacts have trickled out during public meetings of government boards and commissions and legislative committees.

Pheasantland Industries was placed under the purview of the DOC's finance office early in Wasko's tenure. State law requires prison industries to be self-sustaining, and some of the shops were not.

Some areas were targeted for corrective action soon after the change. The prison's metal shop, which operated separately from Metal Craft, has since been closed for failure to maintain profitability.

The state's cabinetry shops moved to Springfield to be closer to the Governor's House operation. The state Housing Development Authority handles sales for that program, which worked through its own hiccups recently.

Wasko said work slowdowns were necessary to tighten tool tracking protocols. It took time, she said, to align the construction zone's long-term approach to its work sites with her newly strict prison security standards.

"It was, 'this is a building site, and so we're gonna leave hammers laying around,'" Wasko said during a summer appropriations committee meeting. "Well, when I walk through an institution and I see a hammer not accounted for, I go cross-eyed."

What Wasko didn't say was that the Housing Development Authority spent about \$18,000 – of its own funds, not state general fund dollars – to get through what she called "pre-marital struggles" and set up an efficient work flow under the new security framework.

The authority designated one employee as a tool control supervisor, which was a new position. It paid \$13,000 for cafeteria equipment to keep inmates on site longer. It also repurposed 2,000 square feet of an existing warehouse for a \$5,000 upgrade to its inventory system.

That trimmed the time needed for the now-required tool check-ins from 45 minutes to about 15, Governor's House Program Manager Mike Harsma told lawmakers during the summer appropriations meeting.

"It's really a neat program where each individual tool now has an individual number assigned to it," Harsma said.

Authority Director Chas Olson would later send the dollar amounts for the upgrades via email. He wrote that the inventory investments were worthwhile, with or without DOC mandates.

"Given the extensive range of tools needed for the program, we have long required a more efficient inventory system to enhance the safety of all Governor's House staff," Olson wrote.

## Different story for private partners

Tool tracking was more contention than kumbaya at Metal Craft.

"We never knew what was going on," Van Zanten said.

It wasn't the tracking that Van Zanten objected to. It was the DOC's rigidity on the transition, he said, which closed the shop for weeks at a time last fall and left his customers in the lurch.

He and the former inmates who now work for his new shop near Baltic insist that company tools were never found in a cell or used as weapons.

"They said they wanted us to mark every drill bit, every tool holder, and log it, which was what we were working on," Van Zanten said. "But they wouldn't let us open until we had it all logged."

The DOC also wanted Van Zanten to transition to using Unit C inmates in his shop, rather than those

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classified as maximum security. Unit C is a work release center on the penitentiary campus.

But the new employees would need training from at least a few of the 40-odd maximum security veteran workers he already had, he said.

The DOC didn't want that.

"They wouldn't allow the guys that were working for us, the maximum security guys, to be in the building at the same time as trustees," he said. "So we had nobody to train these guys."

Around Christmas last year, he said, months after the DOC began to ask for changes at Metal Craft, the agency informed him they'd have to start using Unit C inmates exclusively on Jan. 3.

"It was a disaster," Van Zanten said.

## **Lack of communication, curiosity about programs**

Wasko has talked to lawmakers about "truckloads of contraband" at Metal Craft. She also talked about Metal Craft employees allowing inmates to use cell phones.

But Van Zanten said he's never met her. The alleged problems with his operation came to him largely secondhand, he said, and sometimes defied logic.

The "contraband" Wasko referred to were tools used by employees, he said, as well as extra pairs of work jeans – safer to work in than thin, DOC-issued khaki pants – and personal protective gear.

Jon Dalen, a former correctional officer who quit last fall, recalls Penitentiary Warden Teresa Bittinger's assessment of the area. She became warden in April 2023, years after Dalen began supervising Metal Craft for the DOC.

He was surprised to hear Bittinger refer to a welder as a weapon that could be used to start fires, and to hear concerns about the work wear. It was as though the new administration was unaware of the basics of an operation that had been around for decades, he said.

"They were saying, 'Why do they have these gloves? Why do they have these pants?'" Dalen recalls. "We were like, 'What do you mean, why do they have these pants? That's approved, that's all been approved by you guys.'"

The new penitentiary warden, Dalen said, "manipulated things to make it sound like there were a lot of bad things going on out there, and there were not."

"I was out there for the last 10 years, and there were a lot of good things happening," Dalen said. "This company was actually helping these inmates, helping families on the outside."

The DOC ignored a request for evidence of contraband from South Dakota Searchlight, but reportedly showed pictures to lawmakers during a September tour of the penitentiary.

At this point, the DOC is in discussions on the future of the area that once housed the business.

The DOC submitted a letter of interest to Southeast Technical College earlier this year in hopes of adding a diesel mechanics training program to the area formerly occupied by Metal Craft. Nick Wendell, head of the state Board of Technical Education, said the board is supportive of the idea. Inmates already have access to a welding program through the school.

The Pheasantland metal shop, which was shuttered for failure to return a profit, is now used as an inventory station for commissary, the inmate store. About 20 inmates work there for wages that start at \$1 an hour, Skipper told the Corrections Commission this month.

## **Quilting operation became unworkable**

Vickie VanderMay, the owner of Badlands Quilting, also said she never met Wasko.

For her, the DOC's changes felt like death by a thousand cuts.

The DOC did not respond to questions about the quilting shop.

As with Metal Craft, Badlands Quilting's inmate employees earned a market wage through the federal private industries program, and were able to pay for room and board, fines and child support as a result.

Badlands employees paid \$191,580 to the DOC for room and board between 2019 and 2024, according to figures provided through a records request.

The DOC no longer wanted VanderMay to have access to the shop after hours, she said, which she'd had for years. That allowed her to pick up inventory late in the evening after long days shuttling between her storefront in Martin, delivering to customers and collecting quilting supplies.

Phones were an issue, as well. The DOC didn't want her supervisor using a cell phone in the shop, something VanderMay said was helpful for exchanging photos of quilts in progress or when employees had questions.

"I understand why they shouldn't be in there, but we had to communicate back and forth," VanderMay said.

The DOC installed a landline, but that meant VanderMay started getting a phone bill, and she lost the ability to share photos. There were also newly implemented rules about required searches for inventory coming or going, which often left delivery drivers with tight schedules waiting because the women's prison wouldn't always have a staff member available to perform the searches.

And then there were the inventories. Like Van Zanten, she said orders for change in tool control came with little instruction.

"At one point in time, they shut me down for a month because they wanted me to be compliant," VanderMay said. "Well, then tell me what I need to do to be compliant."

By April, she said, she'd also started to see utility bills, even though the DOC had always paid under the terms of her contract.

"There was no one to ask any questions," VanderMay said. "I had no one on my side."

The end of the relationship with the DOC was unfortunate, she said. Some of the women who started at the prison now work for her on the outside, and they continue to pay their bills and hold on to their sobriety.

That's why VanderMay is especially sad for the supervisor who'd worked for her at the prison. Like nearly all her employees, the supervisor is Native American, and she took the cultural significance of the quilts seriously.

"She felt like she was doing ministry, doing good, teaching all these Native American girls to do star quilts," VanderMay said.

*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.*

## Former inmates lament loss of prison employer and its 'family' atmosphere

**Cheap labor criticisms ignore the good achieved by business, owner and employees say**

**BY: JOHN HULT - SEPTEMBER 27, 2024 11:40 AM**

South Dakota Department of Corrections Secretary Kellie Wasko described Metal Craft Industries as a private business exploiting cheap inmate labor.

At least some of the inmates who worked there for decades disagree.

The private business spent more than two decades employing maximum security inmates, paying prevailing wages that allowed them to pay room and board to the state, child support to their families and restitution to crime victims.

Wasko's concerns about Metal Craft don't make sense to the former inmate employees who now work for the company on the outside.

Long-term inmates helped Metal Craft maintain institutional knowledge and quality control, owner Terry Van Zanten said. But the inmates were offered something to wake up for and be proud of as they stared down a life behind bars.

Those who were able to leave, meanwhile, did so on surer footing than most other parolees.

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Aaron "Coco" Andrews used the pay he earned in prison to put a down payment on a house after his 2016 release.

He credits Metal Craft with turning his life around. He got a shot at the job in 2001, back when he was "a s—head" who could barely go a month without a write-up, he said. A former associate warden cut a deal with Andrews: Go four months without a write-up, and you can get a job with Metal Craft and start saving money.

"That's what he said, and he kept his word," Andrews said.

Even though more than half of every paycheck went to the state, family support and the crime victims fund, he had around \$10,000 in the bank when he left prison 15 years later.

Andrews worked at Metal Craft's shop outside the prison walls for a while, then spent some time working for other companies to develop other skills.

Eventually, he came back.

"It's family out here," Andrews said.

Van Zanten also talks about employees in family terms. His son and daughter are partners in the business, and he said watching inmates mature and grow as people often felt like parenting. He'd hear about the stresses of incarceration or flare-ups between inmates and correctional officers, or inmates and other inmates.

In January of 2024, the Department of Corrections ordered him to replace his long-term inmate employees with work-release inmates who'd never worked the skilled jobs he needed them to perform. Before long, Van Zanten decided that his struggles with communication and the shifting rules for operation were too severe for him to continue on at the penitentiary's Jameson Annex in Sioux Falls.

It wasn't the outcome he'd hoped for when the new security protocols and policy shifts began to interrupt his operations last fall.

He wasn't opposed to working with lower-security inmates. Van Zanten only ever used the inmates the DOC offered him, he said, and he was willing to make changes. He just needed guidance and transition time, and he needed to keep at least a few experienced employees around to train the newbies.

The DOC wouldn't allow that. To save the business, he said, he had to say goodbye.

"There were a lot of tears shed that day," Van Zanten said. "We're talking about 20 years, and I was never going to see these guys again."

He has reconnected with a few of them, including Mark Milk.

Unlike Andrews, Milk was serving a life sentence when he started at Metal Craft. Gov. Kristi Noem commuted his manslaughter sentence, however, based on a recommendation from the South Dakota Board of Pardons and Paroles.

The board was swayed by his work ethic and ascension to a trainer's post at Metal Craft, Milk said, but it wasn't just that.

"The one thing that really impressed them was that when I had that job, the money I had that I was getting paid every two weeks, I took that and opened my own bank account and I put it in there for my nieces and nephews for college," Milk said.

Milk and Andrews both said that Metal Craft's commitment to its employees and the wages explain why maximum security inmates like them – both served decades for manslaughter – were some of the most well-behaved in prison.

"People didn't mess around out there," Andrews said. "They had too much respect for the place."

*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.*

## **COMMENTARY**

### **Open primaries would make South Dakota a 'right to vote' state**

**MICHAEL WAGNER**

I've been a Republican since 1972 when I was South Dakota Teen Age Republican secretary. As an adult, I was elected four times to the South Dakota House of Representatives. I was the assistant majority Leader of the Republican Caucus. And, I support Amendment H – open primaries in South Dakota.

Amendment H is simple – instead of separate primary elections based on politics, there would be one single primary for all voters. All candidates on one ballot. All voters allowed to vote. The two candidates with the most votes would advance to the general election, where all voters will decide who gets elected.

Five key arguments in favor of Amendment H:

#### **Everyone should get to vote**

The most fundamental principle of democracy is one person, one vote. Every citizen is treated equally. Yet, in South Dakota, all citizens are not treated equally in the primary election. Independents are allowed to vote in the Democratic primary, but not the Republican primary. Republicans and Democrats don't vote if all candidates are from the other party. Tens of thousands of citizens are denied the right to vote in these elections. Amendment H guarantees that all voters get to vote. It's true democracy in action.

#### **People, not political parties, should control our elections**

Political parties do not appear in the U.S. Constitution. They are not part of our government or our democracy. Political parties are special interest groups – just like a labor union, a political action committee, or a professional association. Forcing voters to join a political party in order to vote in an election is more like Russia or China than a democracy. We are a "right to work" state – we don't have to join a union to work. We should be a "right to vote" state – we shouldn't have to join a political party to vote. Amendment H allows everyone to vote for any candidate in the primary election regardless of political affiliation. Political party status will not control if you can vote or for whom you can vote.

#### **Tax dollars should not be used for partisan politics**

When a political party endorses one person in an election or chooses delegates for its convention, that is political business. Just like a labor union, the chamber of commerce, or private corporations electing their leadership. Tax dollars should not be used to do political work. In South Dakota, the tax-funded primary election is being used by political parties to conduct private business. Amendment H guarantees that all voters will be able to participate equally in our taxpayer-funded primary. No special status for some voters because of their political registration. Political parties can still endorse candidates, campaign, and select convention delegates. But, they'll have to do it with their own money – not with tax dollars.

#### **All voters should have a choice**

In communist countries, voters often have only one candidate from which to choose. This "no choice election" happens in South Dakota, too. It is not uncommon for all candidates running for office to be of the same political party. When that happens, those candidates only appear on the primary ballot where only some citizens can vote. Frequently, the winner of the political primary is then automatically elected. Many of our elected officials are being chosen by some, not all, voters. Amendment H provides for the top two candidates to be on the November ballot, even if they are from the same political party. Your favorite candidate might get eliminated in the primary. But, you will still have a choice in November as to who will represent you.

#### **Elected officials should be elected by a majority of voters**

South Dakota law allows more than two candidates on the November ballot – Republicans, Democrats,



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third-party candidates, and independents. If three or more candidates are running for office, the person with the most votes – not a majority of voters – gets elected. An elected official can be opposed by a majority of voters and still get elected. Amendment H provides that only the top two candidates face off in the November election. So, a majority of voters will have to agree on who gets elected. All elected officials will have to receive more than half the final votes. Majority rule – a cornerstone of democracy.

## Conclusion

Amendment H will change our election process in South Dakota for the better. Political parties will be influential, but not in control. All voters will have equal opportunities to be heard in the electoral process. Competition among candidates will be greater, and that will lead to elected officials representing all the voters equally. Only in a Democracy does the process – voting and participating – matter more than the outcome – who wins. For a democracy to work, everyone must be able to participate. Amendment H guarantees that.

*Michael Wagner is the founder and principal of the NorthSTAR Leadership Project, a position he has held since 2019. Previously, he served as the executive director of the advisory board from 1996 to 2019 and was an elected member of the South Dakota House of Representatives from 1989 to 1996. He was the executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Greater Sioux Falls from 1994 to 1995 and worked as the director of operations at The Austad Company from 1984 to 1993. He was appointed in 2024 to the Sanford Health Plan board of directors.*

## U.S. government unveils charges against Iranians who hacked into Trump 2024 campaign

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - SEPTEMBER 27, 2024 3:57 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. law enforcement on Friday announced charges against three Iranians who allegedly stole materials from former President Donald Trump's campaign and tried to pass them to news media and Democrats in an attempt to influence the 2024 election.

The Department of Justice unsealed the indictment detailing a yearslong hacking scheme by Iran that targeted the email accounts of U.S. government officials, journalists, think tank experts, and most recently the 2024 presidential campaigns.

"The defendants' own words make clear that they were attempting to undermine former President Trump's campaign in advance of the 2024 U.S. presidential election," Attorney General Merrick Garland said at a Friday press conference. Prosecutors believe the defendants acted from Iran and were never in the U.S.

"We know that Iran is continuing its brazen efforts to stoke discord, erode confidence in the U.S. electoral process and advance its malign activities for the (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps), a designated foreign terrorist organization," Garland said.

The unsealed indictment in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia came three days after Trump's campaign revealed the former president was briefed by the U.S. intelligence officials about "real and specific threats from Iran to assassinate him," according to a statement Tuesday from Steven Cheung, the campaign's communications director.

"Big threats on my life by Iran," Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, posted on X Wednesday. Trump suggested at a campaign stop in Mint Hill, North Carolina, that Iran could be responsible for two assassination attempts on him.

The U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence has not published a statement on the matter. Its most recent press release focuses on the Iranian plot to hack Trump's campaign.

## 'It takes two to tango'

Global politics continued to top the U.S. presidential election headlines Friday when Trump welcomed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Trump Tower after announcing the invitation late Thursday

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at a meandering press conference where he promised, if elected, to strike a peace deal between Ukraine and Russia "quite quickly."

The pair met behind closed doors in Trump's New York City skyscraper on the sidelines of this week's United Nations General Assembly, and one day after Zelenskyy traveled to Washington to meet with Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris, President Joe Biden and bipartisan lawmakers.

"After November we have to decide, and we hope that the strengths of the United States will be very strong, and we count on it. That's why I decided to meet with both candidates," Zelenskyy said during brief joint comments alongside Trump ahead of the meeting.

Trump, who refused during a live presidential debate to say whether he wanted Ukraine to win its war with Russia, detoured from that stance and hinted Friday that he wants a victory for the Western ally.

"I think the fact that we're even together today is a very good sign, and hopefully we'll have a good victory, because (if) the other side wins, I don't think you're gonna have victories with anything to be honest with you," Trump said during the joint remarks.

During the exchange, Trump highlighted his "very good relationship" with Putin and said he could settle the war "very quickly."

"But you know, it takes two to tango," he said.

## Harris at the border

Harris traveled to the U.S. southern border Friday to stump for a bipartisan border security deal that collapsed in early 2024 shortly after Trump publicly lambasted it.

Harris was scheduled to deliver what her campaign billed as a major speech in the border town of Douglas, Arizona, where she planned to talk about setting and enforcing new immigration rules at the border, according to a senior campaign official.

"Donald Trump cares more about self-interest than solutions. He wants a problem to run on, not a fix for the American people," Harris campaign spokesperson Ammar Moussa said in a statement Friday.

"When he was president, Trump created chaos at the border, taking our already broken immigration system and making it worse – leaving behind a mess for the Biden-Harris administration to clean up. Americans deserve a president who puts national security over their own self-interest – that's Kamala Harris," the statement continued.

Trump is attacking Harris over border crossings into the U.S. — his central campaign issue — and calling her by the dishonest nickname "border czar" and claiming she caused the "worst border crisis in the history of the world."

"When you look at the four years that have taken place after being named 'border czar,' Kamala Harris will be visiting the southern border that she has completely destroyed," Trump said at his Thursday press conference.

Biden, in February 2021, tasked Harris with strategizing ways to fight the "root cause" of migration from Central American countries, including economic insecurity, government corruption and gender-based violence.

Trump has historically painted with a broad brush the complex issue of immigration at the U.S. southern border, announcing his first presidential campaign in 2015 by describing Mexican immigrants as "rapists." During his own presidency in 2018 he warned of immigrant "caravans" crossing into the U.S. from Mexico. He has promised mass deportations if elected in November.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security publicly releases numbers of border encounters, apprehensions and expulsions.

## Back on the trail

The presidential and vice presidential candidates are scheduled to make the following appearances:

Harris will deliver a speech in Douglas, Arizona, Friday.

Trump is scheduled to deliver remarks in Walker, Michigan Friday, followed by a town hall in Warren,

Michigan.

Trump is expected to attend the Alabama-Georgia football game on Saturday in Tuscaloosa, the University of Alabama, as confirmed by States Newsroom last week.

Not to be outdone on the college football scene, Harris' running mate Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz is scheduled to attend the Michigan-Minnesota football game Saturday in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Harris will head to Las Vegas, Nevada, Sunday for a campaign rally.

Trump will also host a rally Sunday, this time in Erie, Pennsylvania.

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

## Group starts petition urging Noem to reconsider rejection of \$69 million in federal energy funding

**BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - SEPTEMBER 27, 2024 3:47 PM**

A statewide advocacy group has launched a petition urging Republican Gov. Kristi Noem to reconsider her rejection of nearly \$69 million in federal energy rebates for South Dakotans.

The national Home Energy Rebates program is funded with \$9 billion from the Inflation Reduction Act. The program provides rebates for energy-efficient home retrofits and high-efficiency electric appliances.

South Dakota's allocation is \$68.56 million, but the state did not indicate its intent to participate before last month's deadline. The state previously passed up \$1.8 million to help set up and administer the program.

South Dakota is the only state not participating.

Jim Terwilliger, commissioner of the Bureau of Finance and Management, explained the Noem administration's rationale during a July legislative budget committee meeting. He cited potential administrative burdens, limited staff and policy disagreements about federal spending.

"We just don't believe that it's the right thing for South Dakota," Terwilliger said.

The petition urging Noem to change her mind on the energy program is from Dakota Rural Action, a grassroots organization focusing on family agriculture and conservation.

The group said it asked the U.S. Department of Energy if South Dakota could still participate. The department said the state could request a deadline extension, according to Dakota Rural Action.

"With every other state participating, it's clear this is not just a 'bad federal program,'" Dakota Rural Action said Friday in a news release. "If we don't act, the money will go to other states, and South Dakotans will get nothing."

The petition is open for signatures until Oct. 15 at [dakotarural.org/heera](https://dakotarural.org/heera).

## Changing demographics and the political calculus of anti-immigrant rhetoric in swing states

**BY: GLORIA REBECCA GOMEZ, ARIZONA MIRROR - SEPTEMBER 27, 2024 9:34 AM**

As former President Donald Trump worked to scuttle a bipartisan border deal in Congress because it threatened to derail his campaign's focus on immigration, Republicans in Arizona unveiled a plan to empower local officials to jail and deport migrants, decrying the federal government's lack of solutions.

"Arizona is in a crisis," state Senate President Warren Petersen said in late January. "This is directly due to the negligent inaction of the Biden administration."

What followed were months of GOP lawmakers in Arizona making use of Trump's border security rhetoric, employing xenophobic language to cast immigrants and asylum-seekers as criminals. But there was strident opposition to the plan, too, from many Latino and immigrant Arizonans who traveled to the state Capitol to protest the legislation.

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Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris offer starkly different plans for the future of the 11 million people who live in the United States without legal status. Harris, in a bid to stave off accusations that she's soft on the border, has sought to establish a firm security stance. To that end, she has vowed to bring back and sign the torpedoed bipartisan border deal.

On the campaign trail, Trump has taken a far more hawkish approach, promising mass deportations. He has offered few details, other than that he would be willing to involve the U.S. National Guard. President Joe Biden, Trump and other recent presidents have deployed the National Guard or military troops to support Border Patrol actions, but not in direct law enforcement roles.

Immigration has consistently ranked high among voter concerns nationwide, following heightened political rhetoric and a record-breaking number of unlawful border crossings in late 2023. Those numbers have since plummeted to a three-year low, but the U.S. border with Mexico remains a key talking point for Republican politicians.

But immigration is a far more complex topic than border security alone, and strategists may be miscalculating by failing to consider some key voters and their nuanced perspectives, recent polling shows.

Growing populations of new and first-generation citizens in the swing states — with the power to sway elections — are transforming demographics and voter concerns.

In Arizona, Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs vetoed the legislation that would have allowed local law enforcement to usurp federal authority on immigration, but Republicans repackaged it as a ballot initiative called the "Secure the Border Act." In a state that Biden won by fewer than 11,000 votes four years ago, and where political strategists anticipate high voter turnout, the ballot measure serves as a test of whether the GOP's immigration position will drive people to the polls in a swing state.

While many Republicans hope the immigration issue boosts their chances in down-ballot races, progressive organizations are working to mobilize voters in opposition through canvassing and voter registration drives.

Living United for Change in Arizona was established in the aftermath of the state's controversial "show me your papers" law — SB 1070 — passed 14 years ago by Republican lawmakers. LUCHA Chief of Staff Abril Gallardo derided this year's Secure the Border Act as the latest iteration of that law.

"Arizonans are sick of Republicans trying to bring back the SB 1070 era of separating families, mass deportations and children in detention centers," she said. "We're here to say, 'Not on our watch.'"

The ballot measure has been widely criticized as greenlighting discrimination. Among other provisions, it would make it a state crime for migrants to cross the southern border anywhere except a legal port of entry and punish first-time offenders with six months in jail. Local police officers would be authorized to carry out arrests based on suspicion of illegal entry, and Arizona judges would be empowered to issue orders of deportation, undermining court rulings that have concluded that enforcing immigration law is the sole purview of the federal government.

Gallardo said that LUCHA is focused on engaging with voters to ensure the proposal fails. The organization is part of a coalition of advocacy groups committed to knocking on more than 3 million doors before November.

"They can try to ignore us, but come Election Day and beyond, they will hear us, they will see us, and they will feel the strength of our movement," she said.

An August UnidosUS and BSP Research survey asked Latino voters in Arizona about their top priorities on several issues related to immigration policy. The results show strong support for protecting longtime residents from deportation and offering them a path to citizenship — along with cracking down on human smugglers and drug traffickers. Policies centered on building a wall or mass deportation ranked near the bottom. In recent years, Latino voters in the state have helped reject virulently anti-immigrant candidates.

## Latino voting strength

In 2020, Latinos made up about 20% of the state's electorate, and they largely favored Biden over Trump. Then, two years later, a record-breaking number of Latinos voted in an election that saw Democrats win statewide offices. Today, 1 in 4 Arizona voters is Latino, and a new poll from Univision estimates that more

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than 600,000 will cast their ballots in the state's November election.

The Grand Canyon State is far from the only swing state with both impactful Latino and new-citizen voting blocs.

Still, campaigns might be ignoring these voters. The UnidosUS poll showed 51% of Latino voters in Georgia hadn't been contacted by either party or any campaign, even though 56% say they're sure they'll vote.

"This is, I think, a wake-up call for both parties to reach out into the Latino community," said BSP senior analyst Stephen Nuño-Perez in a Georgia Recorder story. "There's still not a lot of education out there on why Latinos should be voting for one party or the other."

The numbers hovered right around there in other swing states. In Pennsylvania, that was true for 50% of the people polled. In North Carolina, it was 49%. In Nevada, 53%. In each case, a higher percentage said they plan to vote.

## **Influence grows in dairy country**

The number of Latino voters in Wisconsin is a fraction of the electorate that lives in states closer to the U.S.-Mexico border but no less impactful. There are roughly 180,000 eligible Latino voters who call the Badger State home. Biden carried Wisconsin in 2020 by a margin of just 25,000 votes, less than 1 percentage point.

Christine Neumann-Ortiz is the executive director of Voces de la Frontera, a civil and workers rights organization that advocates on behalf of immigrants. She said that over time, the Latino vote has become increasingly sought after by politicians looking to gain office.

"If you don't get it, you don't win it," she said.

Neumann-Ortiz said that the rise of the Latino electorate has translated into political power. The group has been a longtime backer of driver's licenses for Wisconsin residents without full citizenship status, and occupational licenses for recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, a federal policy that grants temporary work permits and protection from deportation to people who arrived in the country as minors.

Nineteen states and the District of Columbia allow people without citizenship status to obtain driver's licenses. And just 12 give DACA recipients the opportunity to obtain medical or legal licenses.

Legislation in Wisconsin to open up access to either license was blocked by the GOP legislative majority, though the movement behind the proposals drew support from top officials, including Democratic Gov. Tony Evers, who backed driver's licenses for all as a policy priority last year. Influential lobbying organizations, such as the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation and the Dairy Business Association, both of which lean conservative, also threw their weight behind the push for universal driver's licenses.

Neumann-Ortiz attributes that support to the fact that immigrants make up a large part of the state's dairy and agricultural industries. And in rural areas where dairy operations and farms are located, public transportation is sparse. United Migrant Opportunity Services, a Milwaukee-based farmworker advocacy organization, estimates that as much as 40% of the state's dairy workers are immigrants. Other estimates indicate they contribute 80% of the labor on dairy farms.

Despite being over 1,000 miles away from the U.S.-Mexico border, immigration and border security are key issues for Wisconsin residents, and their positions appear mixed. In a September survey from Marquette University's Law School, 49% said they agreed with deporting all immigrants who have lived in the country for years, have jobs and no criminal record, while 51% opposed it.

## **Newly minted citizens stand to break new electoral ground**

Laila Martin Garcia moved to the United States with her husband and infant son eight years ago. November will be the first time she casts her ballot for a U.S. presidential candidate since she became a naturalized citizen two years ago in Pennsylvania, and she's elated.

"The main reason for me to become a citizen was to vote," she said. "You know, this is home. This is where my husband is, where my son is being raised, and I wanted to make sure that I was using my voice in any way possible."

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She's part of another segment of the electorate that will have a chance to respond in the voting booth to the election-year emphasis on immigration: newly naturalized voters. In fiscal year 2023, just over 878,000 immigrants became naturalized U.S. citizens, according to the Migration Policy Institute, a nonpartisan think tank. That number represents a slight decline from the previous fiscal year, when a little more than 969,000 people achieved naturalization — the highest number of new citizens in a decade.

Newly naturalized voters can close the gaps in swing state races, according to Nancy Flores, who serves as the deputy director of the National Partnership for New Americans, a coalition of immigrant and refugee rights organizations.

Every presidential election year, the coalition partners with local organizations to assist eligible immigrants as they embark on the naturalization process and help newly naturalized citizens register to vote. New citizens, Flores said, are a great investment, because once they've made a commitment to vote, they will likely continue to do so. And naturalized voters appear to cast their ballots at higher rates than U.S.-born citizens. In the 2020 election, about 66% of the general electorate turned out to vote, compared with nearly 87% of naturalized voters surveyed by the organization.

This year appears on track to repeat that trend: As many as 97.3% of naturalized voters residing in states polled by the National Partnership for New Americans — including in the swing states of Arizona, Georgia, Michigan and Pennsylvania — reported that they plan to vote this fall.

"For a lot of folks, reaching the point of citizenship is really a lifetime achievement," Flores said. "And we see that folks really don't take that lightly."

And while Flores noted that naturalized citizens don't fit one single voter profile, most of them do share an immigrant background and so are sympathetic on the issue.

"New American voters are not a monolith," she said. "Folks that are naturalized are doctors, professors. We have folks that are naturalized that are picking the fruit that we eat. It really runs the gamut, but the common thread is the immigrant experience."

A poll conducted by the organization found that naturalized voters share many of the same concerns as other U.S. voters, including worries about inflation and the economy. But, Flores added, candidates who are looking to attract naturalized voters are likely to be most successful with the demographic group when they present a positive view of immigration.

"Looking at immigration as an asset to our country, looking at how it can benefit the economy, looking at how we can provide pathways [to citizenship] that are humane — those things resonated with voters," she said.

Similarly, Martin Garcia's experiences as an immigrant have colored her views as a voter. Immigration reform, she said, is at the top of her priorities. Originally from Barcelona, Spain, Martin Garcia arrived in the U.S. in the middle of Trump's first campaign, and she said she saw firsthand what his anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies wrought.

In her work as an advocate, she frequently helped families torn apart by deportations, and in her personal life, while trying to share her language and culture with her son, she dealt with nativist hostility. During one incident at the grocery store, while she was helping her toddler identify items in Spanish, a stranger accosted her.

"I remember he came up to me and said, 'We're in America, speak American,'" she recalled. "Now that I think of that moment, I have so many things to say to that person. But at that moment, I was so scared. I just took my child, left my cart there with half of my groceries, and left the shop."

Today, she recalls that incident, and the rallies and protests during Trump's presidency, as catalysts for her civic engagement. Martin Garcia said she views the 2024 election as an opportunity to look out for the immigrant community's needs.

"We deserve to thrive, and we will be thinking about that," she said. "We have to make sure that our communities have the right to thrive in this election."

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## What's on the table at the federal level?

The failed \$118 billion bipartisan border plan set aside \$20 billion to pay for more border barriers, expanded detention facilities, more officers for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol, and legal counsel for unaccompanied children. The bill also included more than \$80 billion destined for aid and humanitarian assistance overseas.

The deal would also have overhauled the asylum system and eliminated the so-called "catch-and-release" system. It would have narrowed the criteria under which people can apply for asylum, fast-tracked the processing of existing claims and given migrants work authorizations while their claims reached resolution. The president would have been granted the power to shut down asylum claims processing altogether, once a certain number of claims had come through, resulting in more migrants being automatically deported during periods when there are a lot of border crossings.

For Vice President Kamala Harris to be able to sign the deal if she's elected president, it would have to clear both the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate, which appears unlikely unless Democrats win a majority in both chambers in November.

Former President Donald Trump has said that if he's voted back into the White House for a second term, he will oversee mass deportations in the style of President Dwight Eisenhower's "Operation W\*back." The 1954 policy only succeeded in removing about 300,000 people, despite government claims that more than 1 million people were deported. Discriminatory tactics led to an unknown number of U.S. citizens being deported, too.

While it might at first sound feasible and draw support from some voters, adding context quickly turns them away, said Douglas Rivlin, a spokesperson for America's Voice, a national immigration reform advocacy organization.

"You start talking about the number of jobs we're going to lose, and the spike to inflation, and the hit to the U.S. economy contracting that way, and a lot of people turn against mass deportation," he said.

A May 2024 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that immigrants made up 18.6% of the U.S. labor force — about 1 in 5 workers.

Rivlin warned that mass deportation would necessarily result in the breaking up of families, and leave millions of U.S. citizen children in the lurch. As many as 4.4 million children who are citizens in the U.S. live with at least one parent who does not have full citizenship status.

"You can't deport 11 million people and not rip apart families, especially because 4 or 5 million children live in those families," he said. "Are you going to deport them, too? Or are they going into foster care?"

One of the most notorious policies enacted during Trump's presidency was his "zero tolerance" immigration initiative, which separated thousands of migrant children and babies from their parents at the country's southern border. The policy ended after broad public backlash and federal lawsuits. More than 1,000 children remained separated from their families as of this spring, according to the most recent data available from the Department of Homeland Security's task force on reunification.

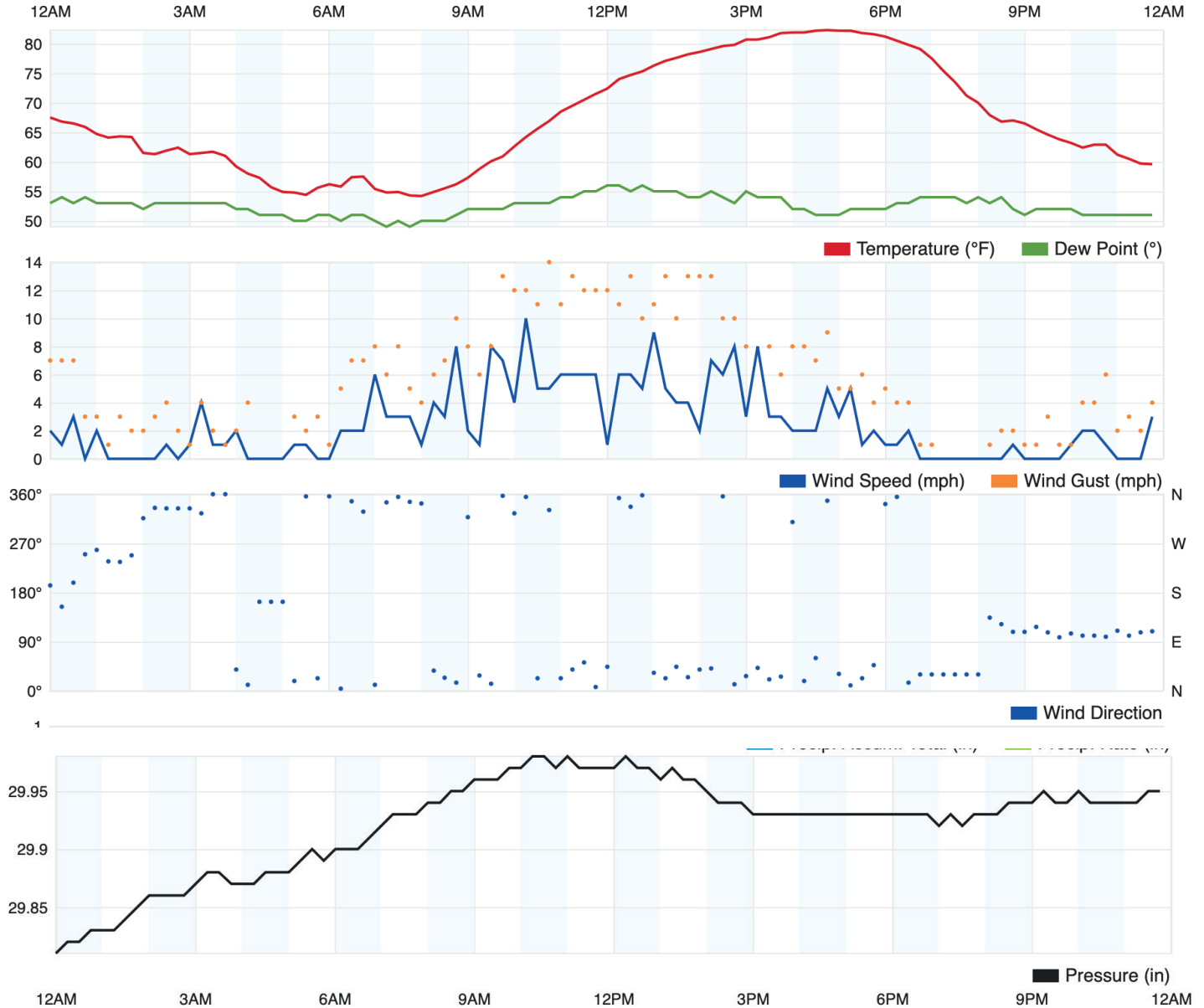
The majority of American voters, Rivlin said, don't want overly punitive immigration policies. Most favor opening up legal pathways to citizenship for the millions of people who've made their home in the U.S. A June Pew Research survey estimated that 59% of American voters believe that undocumented immigrants living in the country should be allowed to remain legally. And while there's been an uptick in voters who oppose offering citizenship to people without legal status, they remain in the minority, with 37% supporting a national deportation effort.

*Gloria Gomez joined the Arizona Mirror in August 2022. She graduated in 2022 with bachelor's degrees in journalism and political science, with a Spanish minor. Arizona Mirror is part of States Newsroom, the nation's largest state-focused nonprofit news organization.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





# Broton Daily Independent

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Today



High: 89 °F

Sunny

Tonight



Low: 51 °F

Mostly Clear

Sunday



High: 90 °F

Sunny then  
Sunny and  
Breezy

Sunday Night



Low: 65 °F

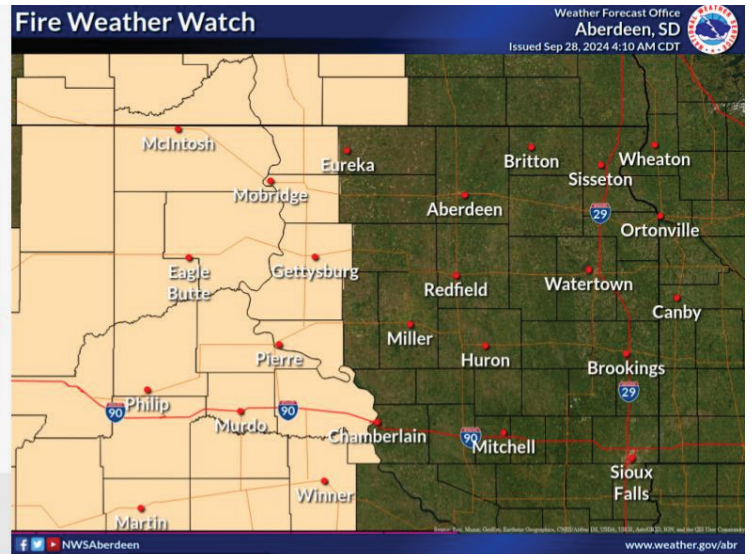
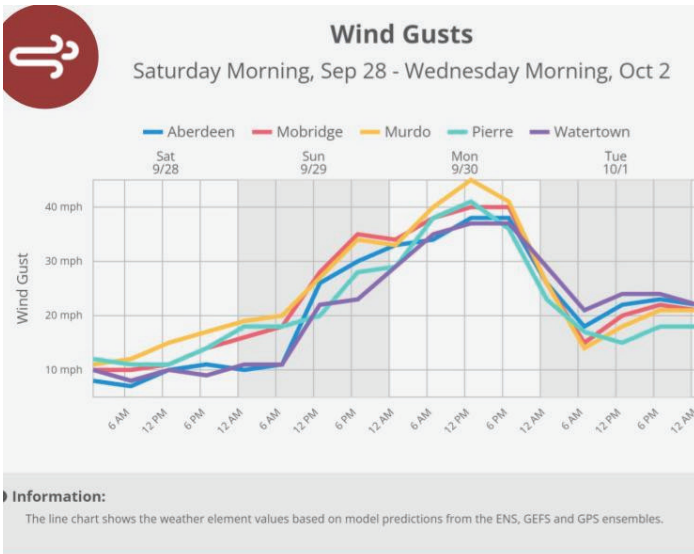
Mostly Clear  
and Breezy

Monday



High: 75 °F

Sunny and  
Breezy



## Increased Fire Danger Sunday and Monday

- Strong winds, low relative humidity values, and warm temperatures are creating an environment primed for critical fire conditions in counties around the Missouri River in northern South Dakota
- If fires are ignited, they will spread rapidly and become difficult to control or suppress
- Avoid activities that can cause flames or sparks
- Follow local regulations, keep updated with the latest information, and if you see a fire, report it quickly

Valid: Sat 01 am CDT - Wed 01 am CDT  
Issued: Sat, Sep 28, 2024, 3 am CDT



Strong wind gusts, low relative humidity values, and high temperatures will be occurring Sunday and Monday creating critical fire conditions. Keep an eye out for updated forecasts as these conditions get closer and avoid activities that can cause flames or sparks.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 88 °F at 3:51 PM

Low Temp: 56 °F at 3:07 AM

Wind: 34 mph at 2:09 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 52 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 94 in 2021

Record Low: 18 in 1951

Average High: 70

Average Low: 42

Average Precip in Sept.: 1.86

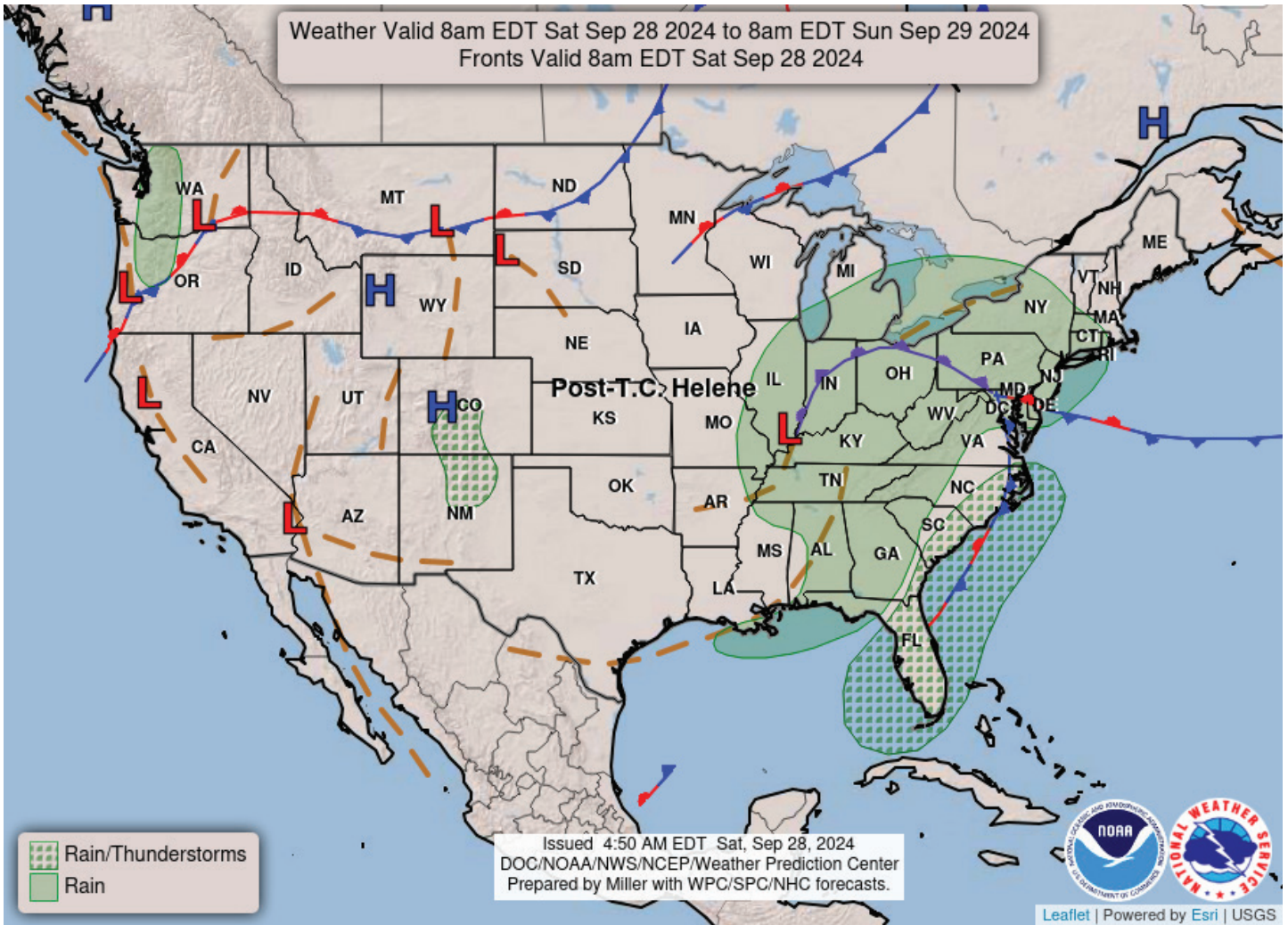
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.33

Average Precip to date: 18.20

Precip Year to Date: 19.75

Sunset Tonight: 7:19:09 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:27:38 am



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## Today in Weather History

September 28, 1951: During the early morning hours, near-record to record cold covered central and northeast South Dakota as well as west-central Minnesota. Temperatures across the area fell into the upper teens and 20s. Aberdeen recorded a record low of 18 degrees; Kennebec dropped to 20 degrees, Pierre fell to 21 degrees while Timber Lake had a record low of 23 degrees. The overnight low in Mobridge was 23 degrees, 24 degrees at Watertown, and 26 degrees at Sisseton.

1836 - The first of three early season snows brought four inches of snow to Hamilton, NY, and two inches to Ashby MA. (David Ludlum)

1837: The first recorded storm to rake the entire Texas coast was Racer's Storm, named for a British sloop of war which encountered the system in the extreme northwestern Caribbean on September 28th. It is remembered as one of the most destructive storms of the nineteenth century due to its extreme duration and 2000 mile path of destruction.

1874: A strong category 1 hurricane went by Charleston and Georgetown, South Carolina. The tide was unprecedented height, inundating the entire riverfront of the city of Charleston. Click [HERE](#) for a tweet by Cary Mock, Professor at the University of South Carolina.

1893 - Albuquerque, NM, was soaked with 2.25 inches of rain, enough to establish a 24 hour record for that city. (The Weather Channel)

1917 - A hurricane hit Pensacola, FL. Winds gusted to 95 mph, and the barometric pressure dipped to 28.50 inches. Winds at Mobile AL gusted to 75 mph. (The Weather Channel)

1929 - A hurricane-spawned tornado hit Fort Lauderdale, Florida. While the path length of this estimated F2 tornado was 0.8 miles, it caused 16 injuries.

1987 - Thunderstorms produced up to ten inches of rain in southern Kansas and north central Oklahoma overnight. The Chikaskia River rose 2.5 feet above flood stage at Blackwell OK during the day causing flooding in Kay and Grant counties of north central Oklahoma. Early morning thunderstorms in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas produced 3.07 inches of rain in six hours at McAllen. Thunderstorms produced up to six inches of rain in southeastern Texas later in the day. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front in the central U.S. produced severe weather from northern Texas to the Lower Missouri Valley during the late afternoon and evening hours. Hail three inches in diameter was reported at Nolan TX, and wind gusts to 80 mph were reported at Lawrence KS. Thunderstorms drenched downtown Kansas City MO with up to four inches of rain, leaving some cars stranded in water six feet deep. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms over northeastern Florida drenched Jacksonville with 4.28 inches of rain between midnight and 6 AM EDT. Unseasonably cool weather prevailed in the northeastern U.S. Five cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Binghamton NY with a reading of 30 degrees. Morning lows were in the 20s in northern New England. Unseasonably mild weather prevailed in the northwestern U.S., with afternoon highs in the upper 70s and 80s. In Oregon, Astoria reported a record high of 83 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1998: On the morning of September 28th, Hurricane George made landfall near Biloxi, Mississippi with maximum winds of 110 mph and a minimum pressure of 964 mb, making it a Category 2 hurricane. After landfall, Georges moved very slowly across southern Mississippi and weakened to a tropical depression by the morning of the 29th when the center was about 30 miles north-northeast of Mobile, Alabama. The storm dissipated near the northeast Florida/southeast Georgia coast by the morning of October 1, 1998.



## A CUP OF WATER

We had been traveling all night by train, moving rapidly toward our destination. Suddenly things turned upside down. Our passenger train was hit head on by a freight train. It was a frightening experience. Wreckage was all around us; people were screaming in pain. The crew was doing all they could to provide comfort until help arrived.

But God was protecting us, and we were uninjured. Fortunately, we were able to help others in their distress by doing whatever we could to assist those who were injured. Shortly after the accident, we discovered a little girl who was crying so we reached out to help her. She was pleading for water. Unfortunately, we had none. Suddenly, a man appeared out of the wreckage with a container of water and offered to share it with her.

As he gave her a cup of water, he said, "I'm sorry I'm not a doctor and cannot bandage your wounds. And, I am sorry there is no medicine available to ease your pain. But, I am thankful that I can give you what I have: water." He gave her what he could, from what he had.

Jesus emphasized the importance of "a cup of water." Read and hear Him say, "If anyone gives a cup of water in the name of the Messiah, that one will be rewarded!"

Our Lord did not ask us to do great things, just simple things. Jesus never left anyone with a need He could meet. He expects the same of us: "Give to others as I have given to you!"

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may our eyes, ears, and hearts be open to see and hear the needs of those around us. May we share Your love by sharing Your gifts. In Your Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: If anyone gives a cup of water in the name of the Messiah, that one will be rewarded. Mark 9:41

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

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
09.27.24

29 46 53 69 70 23

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$93,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
09.25.24

5 10 13 31 52 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$9,930,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 9 Mins 12  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
09.27.24

4 7 9 24 36 1

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 16 Hrs 24 Mins  
DRAW: 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
09.25.24

15 20 24 25 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$42,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 24 Mins  
DRAW: 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
09.25.24

6 32 51 62 69 26

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 53 Mins  
DRAW: 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
09.25.24

2 26 45 46 52 21

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$243,000,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 53 Mins  
DRAW: 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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## Upcoming Groton Events

- 07/04/2024 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/09/2024 FREE SNAP Application Assistance 1-6pm at the Community Center
- 07/14/2024 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 07/17/2024 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm
- 07/17/2024 Pro Am Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/25/2024 Dairy Queen Miracle Treat Day
- 07/25/2024 Summer Downtown Sip & Shop 5-8pm
- 07/25/2024 Treasures Amidst The Trials 6pm at Emmanuel Lutheran Church
- 07/26/2024 Ferney Open Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
- 07/27/2024 1st Annual Celebration in the Park 1-9:30pm
- 08/05/2024 School Supply Drive 4-7pm at the Community Center
- Cancelled:** Wine on 9 at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
- 08/08/2024 Family Fun Fest 5:30-7:30pm
- 08/9-11/2024 Jr. Legion State Baseball Tournament
- 08/12/2024 Vitalant Blood Drive at the Community Center 1:15-7pm
- 09/07/2024 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 09/07-08/2024 Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
- 09/08/2024 Sunflower Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10am
- 10/05/2024 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/11/2024 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
- 10/31/2024 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 10/31/2024 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/16/2024 Groton American Legion "Turkey Raffle" 6:30-11:30pm
- 11/28/2024 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm
- 12/01/2024 Groton Snow Queen Contest, 4:30 p.m.
- 12/07/2024 Olive Grove 8th Annual Holiday Party with Live & Silent Auctions 6pm-close
- 04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp
- 05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm
- 07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary Salad Luncheon
- 07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm

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## News from the **AP** Associated Press

### Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP FOOTBALL=

Aberdeen Central High School 18, Sturgis Brown High School 17

Aberdeen Roncalli 27, Webster 0

Alcester-Hudson 52, Gayville-Volin High School 0

Brandon Valley 49, Rapid City Central 0

Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan 40, Baltic 0

Britton-Hecla 22, Great Plains Lutheran 20

Canistota 50, Sioux Falls Lutheran 14

Castlewood 52, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 0

Centerville 32, Irene-Wakonda 6

Clark-Willow Lake 43, Groton 7

Corsica/Stickney def. Colome, forfeit

Custer 21, Lead-Deadwood 7

DeSmet 64, Florence-Henry 28

Dell Rapids 44, Tri-Valley 6

Dell Rapids St Mary 50, Iroquois-Lake Preston 0

Deubrook 44, Waverly-South Shore 6

Dupree 62, Faith 8

Elk Point-Jefferson 39, Beresford 0

Estelline-Hendricks 30, Colman-Egan 28

Faulkton 28, Sully Buttes 8

Hamlin 59, Redfield 0

Hanson 52, Chester 20

Harding County 44, Timber Lake 12

Harrisburg 49, Rapid City Stevens 0

Hill City 63, Bennett County 44

Hitchcock-Tulare 22, Sunshine Bible Academy 14

Ipswich 58, Herreid-Selby 32

Kadoka 52, New Underwood 20

Lennox 48, Dakota Valley 19

Lower Brule 52, Omaha Nation, Neb. 12

McCook Central-Montrose 24, Parker 20

Mobridge-Pollock 28, Belle Fourche 6

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 53, Chamberlain 14

Parkston 48, Bon Homme 6

Philip 34, Jones County 0

Rapid City Christian 45, Hot Springs 7

Sioux Falls Christian 42, Madison 0

Sioux Falls Jefferson 34, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 14

Sioux Falls Lincoln 47, Sioux Falls Washington 28

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 26, Brookings 21

Sioux Valley 48, Deuel 14

Spearfish 14, Huron 7

St Thomas More 69, Lakota Tech 0



TDAACDC 66, Burke 7  
Tea 54, Mitchell 0  
Vermillion 20, Milbank 0  
Viborg-Hurley 50, Garretson 0  
WWSSC 29, Wagner 13  
Wall 41, Stanley County 6  
Warner 56, Northwestern 6  
Watertown 54, Douglas 0  
Waubay/Summit 52, Wilmot 12  
West Central 48, Canton 14  
Winner 58, Miller 7  
Wolsey-Wessington 52, Gregory 12  
Yankton 35, T F Riggs High School 7

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

## Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah was killed in Beirut strike, Israel's military says

By MELANIE LIDMAN and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel said Saturday that it killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, dealing its most significant blow to the Lebanese militant group after months of fighting. There was no immediate confirmation from Hezbollah.

If the claim is true, Nasrallah is by far the most powerful target to be killed by Israel in weeks of intensified fighting with Hezbollah. The military said it carried out a precise airstrike on Friday while Hezbollah leadership met at their headquarters in Dahiyeh, south of Beirut.

Israel's Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi, said Saturday that the elimination of Nasrallah was "not the end of our toolbox," indicating that more strikes were planned. He said that the strike targeting Hezbollah leadership was the result of a long period of preparation.

The Lebanese Health Ministry said six people were killed and 91 injured in the strikes Friday, which leveled six apartment buildings. Ali Karki, the Commander of Hezbollah's Southern Front, and additional Hezbollah commanders, were also killed in the attack, the Israeli military said.

The Israeli military said it was mobilizing additional reserve soldiers as tensions escalate with Lebanon, activating three battalions of reserve soldiers to serve across the country. The call comes after it sent two brigades to northern Israel earlier in the week to train for a possible ground invasion.

Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani, an army spokesman, said the airstrike was based on years of tracking Nasrallah along with "real time intelligence" that made it viable. He said Nasrallah's death had been confirmed through various types of intelligence, but declined to elaborate.

Shoshani said that Israel has inflicted heavy damage on Hezbollah's capabilities over the past week by targeting a combination of immediate threats and strategic weapons, such as larger, guided missiles. But he said much of Hezbollah's arsenal still remains intact and that Israel would continue to target the group.

"This isn't a threat that has gone away," he said.

Shoshani said it is "safe to assume" that Hezbollah will retaliate and that Israel is on "high readiness."

But he said Israel hopes the blow to Hezbollah will change the course of the war.

"We hope this will change Hezbollah's actions," he said. "We have been looking for solutions, looking for a change in reality that will bring our civilians home," referring to the approximately 60,000 Israelis who have been evacuated from their homes along the Lebanese border for almost a year. Earlier this month, Israel's government said halting Hezbollah's attacks in the country's north to allow residents to return to their homes is an official war goal.

Shoshani declined to say what munitions were used in the strike or provide an estimate on civilian deaths

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in the strike, only saying that Israel takes measures to avoid civilians whenever possible and clears strikes ahead of time with intelligence and legal experts.

If correct, Nasrallah's death is a "historical moment," said Orna Mizrahi, a senior researcher at the Tel Aviv-based think tank Institute for National Security Studies and former intelligence analyst for the Israeli military and prime minister's office. "This doesn't mean that Hezbollah is destroyed, because Hezbollah is made up tens of thousands of people," she said.

Mizrahi noted that Nasrallah was sometimes a "voice of reason," interested in engaging Israel in a war of attrition and holding the militant group back from using the full force of their formidable arsenal against Israel. If Nasrallah has been removed, that could prompt some less senior members of Hezbollah to unleash much stronger weapons than have been used in the nearly yearlong exchange of hostilities between Hezbollah and Lebanon, she said. The biggest question mark right now, though, is how Iran will respond, said Mizrahi.

Mizrahi added that Nasrallah's reported death could provide a window of opportunity, while the organization is significantly weakened, for Lebanon to dilute Hezbollah's far-reaching influence, especially in the south, that threatens to drag Lebanon into a full-scale war with Israel.

On Saturday morning, the Israeli military carried out several strikes in southern Beirut and eastern Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. Hezbollah launched dozens of projectiles across northern and central Israel and deep into the Israel-occupied West Bank.

In Beirut's southern suburbs, smoke rose and the streets were empty after the area was pummeled overnight by heavy Israeli airstrikes. Shelters set up in the city center for displaced people were overflowing. Many families slept in public squares and beaches or in their cars. On the roads leading to the mountains above the capital, hundreds of people could be seen making an exodus on foot, holding infants and whatever belongings they could carry.

At least 720 people have been killed in Lebanon over the past week from Israeli airstrikes, according to the Health Ministry.

## **Dozens dead and millions without power after Helene's deadly march across southeastern US**

By STEPHEN SMITH, KATE PAYNE and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

PERRY, Fla. (AP) — Hurricane Helene caused dozens of deaths and billions of dollars of destruction across a wide swath of the southeastern U.S. as it raced through, and more than 3 million customers went into the weekend without any power and for some a continued threat of floods.

Helene blew ashore in Florida's Big Bend region as a Category 4 hurricane late Thursday packing winds of 140 mph (225 kph) and then quickly moved through Georgia, the Carolinas and Tennessee, uprooting trees, splintering homes and sending creeks and rivers over their banks and straining dams.

Western North Carolina was essentially cut off because of landslides and flooding that forced the closure of Interstate 40 and other roads. There were hundreds of water rescues, none more dramatic than in rural Unicoi County in East Tennessee, where dozens of patients and staff were plucked by helicopter from the roof of a hospital that was surrounded by water from a flooded river.

The storm, now a post-tropical cyclone, was expected to hover over the Tennessee Valley on Saturday and Sunday, the National Hurricane Center said. Several flood and flash flood warnings remained in effect in parts of the southern and central Appalachians, while high wind warnings also covered parts of Tennessee and Ohio.

Among the at least 44 people killed in the storm were three firefighters, a woman and her 1-month-old twins, and an 89-year-old woman whose house was struck by a falling tree. According to an Associated Press tally, the deaths occurred in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia.

In North Carolina, a lake featured in the movie "Dirty Dancing" overtopped a dam and surrounding neighborhoods were evacuated, although there were no immediate concerns it would fail. People also were evacuated from Newport, Tennessee, a city of about 7,000 people, amid concerns about a dam near

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there, although officials later said the structure had not failed.

Tornadoes hit some areas, including one in Nash County, North Carolina, that critically injured four people. Atlanta received a record 11.12 inches (28.24 centimeters) of rain in 48 hours, the most the city has seen in a two-day period since record keeping began in 1878, Georgia's Office of the State Climatologist said on the social platform X. Some neighborhoods were so badly flooded that only car roofs could be seen poking above the water.

Moody's Analytics said it expects \$15 billion to \$26 billion in property damage.

Climate change has exacerbated conditions that allow such storms to thrive, rapidly intensifying in warming waters and turning into powerful cyclones sometimes in a matter of hours.

Florida's Big Bend is a part of the state where salt marshes and pine flatwoods stretch into the horizon, and where the condo developments and strip malls that have carved up so much of the state's coastlines are largely absent.

It's a place where Susan Sauls Hartway and her 4-year-old Chihuahua mix Lucy could afford to live within walking distance of the beach on her salary as a housekeeper.

At least, until her house was carried away by Helene.

Friday afternoon, Hartway wandered around her street near Ezell Beach, searching for where the storm may have deposited her home.

"It's gone. I don't know where it's at. I can't find it," she said of her house.

Born and raised in rural Taylor County, Hartway said there is nowhere in the world she would rather be, even after Helene. But she's watched as wealthier residents from out of state have bought up second homes here. She wonders how many of them will sell out — and what will happen to the locals who have nowhere else to go.

"There's so many people down here, they don't have any place to go now. This was all they had," she said.

The community has taken direct hits from three hurricanes since August 2023.

All five who died in one Florida county were in neighborhoods where residents were told to evacuate, said Bob Gualtieri, the sheriff in Pinellas County in the St. Petersburg area. Some who stayed ended up having to hide in their attics to escape the rising water. He said the death toll could rise as crews go door-to-door in flooded areas.

More deaths were reported in Georgia and the Carolinas, including two South Carolina firefighters and a Georgia firefighter who died when trees struck their trucks. Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin reported at least one death in his state.

When the water hit knee-level in Kera O'Neil's home in Hudson, Florida, she knew it was time to escape.

"There's a moment where you are thinking, 'If this water rises above the level of the stove, we are not going to have not much room to breathe,'" she said, recalling how she and her sister waded through chest-deep water with one cat in a plastic carrier and another in a cardboard box.

President Joe Biden said he was praying for survivors, and the head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency headed to the area. The agency deployed more than 1,500 workers, and they helped with 400 rescues by late Friday morning.

Officials urged people who were trapped to call for rescuers and not tread floodwaters, warning they can be dangerous due to live wires, sewage, sharp objects and other debris.

In Georgia, an electrical utility group warned of "catastrophic" damage to utility infrastructure, with more than 100 high voltage transmission lines damaged. And officials in South Carolina, where more than 40% of customers were without power, said crews had to cut their way through debris just to determine what was still standing in some places.

The hurricane came ashore near the mouth of the Aucilla River, about 20 miles (30 kilometers) northwest of where Hurricane Idalia hit last year at nearly the same ferocity. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said the damage from Helene appears to be greater than the combined effects of Idalia and Hurricane Debby in August.

The destruction extended far beyond Florida.

A mudslide in the Appalachian Mountains washed out part of an interstate highway at the North Carolina-

Tennessee state line.

Another slide hit homes in North Carolina and occupants had to wait more than four hours to be rescued, said Ryan Cole, the emergency services assistant director in Buncombe County. His 911 center received more than 3,300 calls in eight hours Friday.

"This is something that we're going to be dealing with for many days and weeks to come," Cole said.

Forecasters warned of flooding in North Carolina that could be worse than anything seen in the past century. The Connecticut Army National Guard sent a helicopter to help.

Helene was the eighth named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season, which began June 1. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has predicted an above-average season this year because of record-warm ocean temperatures.

## Europeans, Arab and Muslim nations launch a new initiative for an independent Palestinian state

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — European, Arab and Islamic nations have launched an initiative to strengthen support for a Palestinian state and its institutions, and prepare for a future after the war in Gaza and escalating conflict in Lebanon, Norway's foreign minister said Friday.

Espen Barth Eide told The Associated Press that "there is a growing consensus in the international community from Western countries, from Arab countries, from the Global South, that we need to establish a Palestinian Authority, a Palestinian government, a Palestinian state — and the Palestinian state has to be recognized."

Eide said many issues need to be addressed, including the security interests of Israel and the Palestinians, recognition and normalization of relations after decades of conflict and the demobilization of Hamas as a military group.

"These are pieces of a bigger puzzle," Norway's chief diplomat said. "And you can't just come in there with one of these pieces, because it only works if all the pieces are laid in place."

But even if the puzzle is completed, it's unlikely to gain traction with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Still, Eide believes that after decades of failed or stalled negotiations, "we need to take a new approach" to achieving an independent Palestinian state.

To accelerate work on these issues, Eide said almost 90 countries attended a meeting Thursday on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly's current gathering of world leaders. He and Saudi Arabia's foreign minister co-chaired the session to launch "The Global Alliance for the Implementation of a Palestinian State and a Two-State Solution."

"We have to see how we can come out of this deadlock and try to use this deep crisis also as an opportunity to move forward," Eide told a U.N. Security Council meeting on Gaza later Friday.

Norway is the guarantor of the 1993 Oslo Accords, hailed as a breakthrough in the decades-long conflict between Arabs and Jews, which created the Palestinian Authority and set up self-rule areas in the Palestinian Authority. Eide said more than 30 years later, Israel's "occupation" is continuing, and there there are no negotiations leading to a final settlement and an independent Palestinian state — which led to Norway's decision in May to recognize a Palestinian state.

Now, 149 of the U.N.'s 193 member nations have recognized a Palestinian state. Eide urged all countries "to contribute to universal recognition" and strengthen Palestinian institutions so they live up to the expectations of people in the West Bank and are prepared to return to Gaza: "We want one Palestine, not different Palestines," he said.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud told the U.N. Security Council on Friday that his country, the joint Islamic-Arab ministerial committee, Norway and the European Union launched the alliance "because we feel responsible to act to change the reality of the conflict without delay."

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell urged all countries to take practical measures "to bring about the

free Palestine next to a secure Israel.”

Borrell said on X that the first meetings of the alliance would be in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and Brussels.

Borrell asked rhetorically of anyone who opposes a two-state solution: What is the solution, and can it be implemented? He stressed that work on this initiative will move ahead quickly.

Eide said this new effort is built on the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, “but updated to today’s reality.”

The 2002 initiative, endorsed by the Arab League and the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation, offered Israel normalized relations in exchange for a full withdrawal from territories captured in 1967.

He said efforts started long ago to build the institutions of a Palestinian state.

“It’s difficult,” Eide said. “Their hands are tied in many ways. We’re seeing an increasing amount of illegal settlements and settle violence.”

“But still, there is an embryonic institution there that we have to strengthen,” he said.

Eide said he chaired a meeting Thursday of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Building of Palestinian Institutions, with the United States, Canada, the EU and many Mideast and European countries contributing.

“None of these tools will solve the problem on their own, and we never pretended that, but we’re trying to build a body of instruments that will take us forward to a peaceful settlement,” Eide said. “And I am convinced it will happen here.”

## Israel strikes Hezbollah in a huge blast targeting the militant group’s leader

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The Israeli military said it struck Hezbollah’s headquarters in Beirut on Friday in a series of massive explosions that targeted the leader of the militant group and leveled multiple high-rise apartment buildings.

At least six people were killed and 91 were wounded, Lebanon’s health ministry said. It was the biggest blast to hit the Lebanese capital in the past year and appeared likely to push the escalating conflict closer to full-fledged war.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah was the target of the strikes, according to two people familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity, including one United States official. The Israeli army declined to comment on who it was targeting. It was not immediately clear if Nasrallah was at the site, and Hezbollah did not comment on the report.

The death toll is likely to rise significantly as teams comb through the rubble of six buildings. Israel launched a series of strikes on other areas of the southern suburbs following the initial blast.

After the strikes, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu abruptly cut short a visit to the United States to return home. Hours earlier, he addressed the United Nations, vowing that Israel’s intensified campaign against Hezbollah over the past two weeks would continue — further dimming hopes for an internationally backed cease-fire.

News of the blasts came as Netanyahu was briefing reporters after his U.N. address. A military aide whispered into his ear, and Netanyahu quickly ended the briefing.

Israeli army spokesperson Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said the strikes targeted the main Hezbollah headquarters, saying it was located underground beneath residential buildings.

The series of blasts at around nightfall reduced six apartment towers to rubble in Haret Hreik, a densely populated, predominantly Shiite district of Beirut’s Dahiyeh suburbs, according to Lebanon’s national news agency. A wall of billowing black and orange smoke rose into the sky as windows were rattled and houses shaken some 30 kilometers (20 miles) north of Beirut.

Footage showed rescue workers clambering over large slabs of concrete, surrounded by high piles of twisted metal and wreckage. Several craters were visible, one with a car toppled into it. A stream of residents carrying their belongings were seen fleeing along a main road out of the district.

Israel provided no immediate comment about the type of bomb or how many it used, but the resulting explosion levelled an area greater than a city block. The Israeli army has in its arsenal 2,000-pound,

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American-made "Bunker Buster" guided bombs designed specifically for hitting subterranean targets.

Richard Weir, crisis and weapons researcher with Human Rights Watch, said the blasts were consistent with that class of bomb.

Israel's air forces followed with a new set of strikes early Saturday, also in the southern suburbs, shortly after warning residents of three buildings to evacuate. It said they were being used by Hezbollah to hide weapons, including anti-ship missiles.

Israel's military announced additional attacks on Beqaa in eastern Lebanon and Tyre in the south.

To a degree unseen in past conflicts, Israel spent the week pushing to eliminate Hezbollah's senior leadership. But an attempt to assassinate Nasrallah — successful or not — would be a major escalation. The Pentagon said the U.S. had no advance warning of the strikes.

Nasrallah has been in hiding for years, very rarely appearing in public. He regularly gives speeches, but always by video from unknown locations.

The site hit Friday evening had not been publicly known as Hezbollah's main headquarters, though it is located in the group's "security quarters," a heavily guarded part of Haret Hreik where it has offices and runs several nearby hospitals.

Four hours after the strike, Hezbollah had still not issued any statement referring to it. Instead, it announced that it had launched a salvo of rockets at the Israeli city of Safed, which it said was "in defense of Lebanon and its people, and in response to the barbaric Israeli violation of cities, villages and civilians."

The Israeli military said a house and a car in Safed were hit, and officials said a 68-year-old woman sustained mild shrapnel wounds.

Israel dramatically intensified its airstrikes in Lebanon this week, saying it is determined to put an end to more than 11 months of Hezbollah fire into its territory. The escalated campaign has killed more than 720 people in Lebanon, including dozens of women and children, according to Health Ministry statistics. A predawn strike Friday in the mainly Sunni border town of Chebaa killed nine members of the same family, the state news agency said.

The United Nations said the fighting has displaced 211,000 people, including 85,000 now staying in public schools and other shelters. Airstrikes have forced 20 primary health care centers to shut down and disrupted access to clean water for nearly 300,000 people.

The scope of Israel's operation remains unclear, but officials have said a ground invasion to push the militant group away from the border is a possibility. Israel moved thousands of troops toward the border in preparation.

At the U.N., Netanyahu vowed to "continue degrading Hezbollah" until Israel achieves its goals. His comments dampened hopes for a U.S.-backed call for a 21-day truce between Israel and Hezbollah to allow time for a diplomatic solution. Hezbollah has not responded to the proposal.

Iranian-backed Hezbollah, the strongest armed force in Lebanon, began firing rockets into Israel almost immediately after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, saying it was a show of support for the Palestinians. Since then, it and the Israeli military have traded fire almost daily, forcing tens of thousands of people to flee their homes on both sides of the border.

An Israeli security official said he expects the campaign against Hezbollah would not last for as long as the current war in Gaza, because the military's goals are much narrower.

In Gaza, Israel aims to dismantle Hamas' military and political regime, but the goal in Lebanon is to push Hezbollah away from the border — "not a high bar like Gaza" in terms of operational objectives, said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity due to military briefing guidelines.

In the southern Lebanese city of Tyre, civil defense workers pulled the bodies of two women — 35-year-old Hiba Ataya and her mother Sabah Olyan — from the rubble of a building brought down by a strike.

"That's Sabah, these are her clothes, my love," one man cried out as her body emerged.

Israel says its accelerated strikes have already inflicted heavy damage on Hezbollah's weapons capabilities and its fighters. A strike Tuesday in southern Lebanon killed a Hezbollah missile unit commander, Muhammad Ali Ismail, and his deputy, Israel's military said Saturday. There was no immediate confirma-

tion from Hezbollah.

But Hezbollah boasted a large arsenal of rockets and missiles and its remaining capacities are unknown.

Hezbollah officials and their supporters remain defiant. Not long before the explosions Friday evening, thousands gathered in another part of Beirut's suburbs for the funeral of three Hezbollah members killed in earlier strikes, including the head of the group's drone unit, Mohammed Surour.

People in the giant crowd waved their fists in the air and chanted, "We will never accept humiliation," as they marched behind the three coffins, wrapped in the group's yellow flag.

Hussein Fadlallah, Hezbollah's top official in Beirut, said in a speech that no matter how many commanders Israel kills, the group has endless numbers of experienced fighters. He vowed that Hezbollah will keep fighting until Israel stops its offensive in Gaza.

"We will not abandon the support of Palestine, Jerusalem and oppressed Gaza," Fadlallah said. "There is no place for neutrality in this battle."

## **In global game of influence, China turns to a cheap and effective tool: fake news**

By DIDI TANG and DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When veteran U.S. diplomat Kurt Campbell traveled to the Solomon Islands to counter Beijing's influence in the South Pacific country, he quickly saw just how far China would go to spread its message.

The Biden administration's Asia czar woke up one morning in 2022 to a long article in the local press about the U.S. running chemical and biological labs in Ukraine, a claim that Washington calls an outright lie. Started by Russia, the false and incendiary claim was vigorously amplified by China's vast overseas propaganda apparatus.

It was another example of "clearly effective Russian and Chinese disinformation," Campbell told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in July.

Two years later, the claim still reverberates online, demonstrating China's sprawling effort to reshape global perceptions. The campaign, costing many billions per year, is becoming ever more sophisticated thanks to artificial intelligence. China's operations have caught the attention of intelligence analysts and policymakers in Washington, who vow to combat any actions that could influence the November election or undermine American interests.

The key tactic: networks of websites purporting to be legitimate news outlets, delivering pro-China coverage that often parallels official statements and positions from Beijing.

Shannon Van Sant, an adviser to the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation, tracked a network of dozens of sites that posed as news organizations. One site mimicked The New York Times, using a similar font and design in what she called an attempt at legitimacy. The site carried strongly pro-Chinese messages.

When Van Sant researched the site's reporters she found no information. Their names didn't belong to any known journalists working in China, and their photos bore telltale signs of being created with AI.

"Manipulation of the media is ultimately a manipulation of readers and the audience, and this is damaging to democracy and society," Van Sant said.

Liu Pengyu, spokesman for the Chinese Embassy in the U.S., said allegations that China uses news websites and social media to spread pro-Beijing information and influence public opinion in the U.S. "are full of malicious speculations against China, which China firmly opposes."

In addition to its state media, Beijing has turned to foreign players — real or not — to relay messages and lend credibility to narratives favoring the Communist Party, said Xiao Qiang, a research scientist at the School of Information at the University of California, Berkeley. Xiao also is editor-in-chief of China Digital Times, a bilingual news website that aggregates information from and about China.

Beijing's methods are wide-ranging and links to the government are often difficult to prove, Xiao said. But whether it's journalists with American-sounding names or an Indian influencer, the consistently pro-

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Beijing messages give them away.

"The implicit message is the same — that the Chinese Communist Party works for its people," Xiao said.

Analysts at the cybersecurity firm Logically identified 1,200 websites that had carried Russian or Chinese state media stories. The sites often target specific audiences and have names that sound like traditional news organizations or defunct newspapers.

Unlike Russia or Iran, which have displayed clear preferences in the U.S. presidential campaign, Beijing is more cautious and focused on spreading positive content about China.

While the sites aren't owned by China, they run Chinese content. When Logically looked at content specifically about the U.S. election, 20% could be traced back to Chinese or Russian state media.

"There's a decent likelihood that these articles could influence U.S. audiences without them even knowing where it comes from," said Alex Nelson, Logically's senior manager for strategy and analysis.

According to the Gallup World Poll, more countries surveyed view the U.S. positively, but the share of countries where views of both the U.S. and China are negative overall is higher than 15 years ago, signaling the U.S. doesn't appear to be making gains over China.

Some U.S. officials want to increase spending to even the playing field. The House of Representatives this month approved a bill that would authorize \$325 million annually through 2027 to counter China's global influence, including its disinformation campaigns. The measure still needs Senate approval.

"We are in a global competition for influence with China, and if you want to win it, then you cannot do it on a middle-power budget," said Rep. Gregory Meeks, a Democrat from New York.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has demanded a systematic buildup of Chinese narratives that would give his country a global voice "commensurate with" its international stature.

Beijing has invested in state media such as the Xinhua news agency and China Central Television to convey its messages to global audiences in various languages and platforms. Media groups at the local level are creating "international communication centers" to build an overseas presence with websites, news channels and social media accounts.

Beijing also has struck media partnerships worldwide, and the article Campbell read in the Solomon Islands is likely a result of those.

China's outreach is tied to the global race for economic dominance in electric vehicles, computer chips, AI and quantum computing, said Jaret Riddick, a senior fellow at Georgetown University's Center for Security and Emerging Technology.

"The countries that lead on emerging technologies will be the countries that have a great advantage going forward," Riddick said.

To tell its story, Beijing has not shied away from using fake personas. A 2023 State Department report detailed the case of a published writer named Yi Fan, originally described as a Chinese foreign ministry analyst. Yi morphed into a journalist, then became an independent analyst.

Yi's details changed, but the message did not. Through published commentaries and writings, Yi trumpeted close ties between China and Africa, praised Beijing's approach to environmental sustainability and argued that China must counter distorted Western narratives.

Then there was Wilson Edwards, a supposed Swiss virologist quoted in Chinese media as a COVID-19 expert who criticized the U.S. response. But Swiss officials found no evidence he existed.

"If you exist, we would like to meet you!" the Swiss Embassy in Beijing wrote on social media.

## **Jimmy Carter at 100: A century of changes for a president, the US and the world since 1924**

By BILL BARROW ATLANTA

Already the longest-lived of the 45 men to serve as U.S. president, Jimmy Carter is about to reach the century mark.

The 39th president, who remains under home hospice care, will turn 100 on Tuesday, Oct. 1, celebrating



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in the same south Georgia town where he was born in 1924.

Here are some notable markers for Carter, the nation and the world over his long life.

Booms most everywhere — but not Plains

Carter has seen the U.S. population nearly triple. The U.S. has about 330 million residents; there were about 114 million in 1924 and 220 million when Carter was inaugurated in 1977. The global population has more than quadrupled, from 1.9 billion to more than 8.1 billion. It already had more than doubled to 4.36 billion by the time he became president.

That boom has not reached Plains, where Carter has lived more than 80 of his 100 years. His wife Rosalynn, who died in 2023 at age 96, also was born in Plains.

Their town comprised fewer than 500 people in the 1920s and has about 700 today; much of the local economy revolves around its most famous residents.

When James Earl Carter Jr. was born, life expectancy for American males was 58. It's now 75.

TV, radio and presidential maps

NBC first debuted a red-and-blue electoral map in the 1976 election between then-President Gerald Ford, a Republican, and Carter, the Democratic challenger. But NBC's John Chancellor made Carter's states red and Ford's blue. Some other early versions of color electoral maps used yellow and blue because red was associated with Soviet and Chinese communism.

It wasn't until the 1990s that networks settled on blue for Democratic-won states and red for GOP-won states. "Red state" and "blue state" did not become a permanent part of the American political lexicon until after the disputed 2000 election between Al Gore and George W. Bush.

Carter was 14 when Franklin D. Roosevelt made the first presidential television appearance. Warren Harding became the first radio president two years before Carter's birth.

Attention shoppers

There was no Amazon Prime in 1924, but you could order a build-it-yourself house from a catalog. Sears Roebuck Gladstone's three-bedroom model went for \$2,025, which was slightly less than the average worker's annual income.

Walmart didn't exist, but local general stores served the same purpose. Ballpark prices: loaf of bread, 9 cents; gallon of milk, 54 cents; gallon of gas, 11 cents.

Inflation helped drive Carter from office, as it has dogged President Joe Biden. The average gallon in 1980, Carter's last full year in office, was about \$3.25 when adjusted for inflation. That's just 3 cents more than AAA's current national average.

From suffragettes to Kamala Harris

The 19th Amendment that extended voting rights to women — almost exclusively white women at the time — was ratified in 1920, four years before Carter's birth. The Voting Rights Act that widened the franchise to Black Americans passed in 1965 as Carter was preparing his first bid for Georgia governor.

Now, Carter is poised to cast a mail ballot for Vice President Kamala Harris. She would become the first woman, first Black woman and first person of South Asian descent to reach the Oval Office. Grandson Jason Carter said the former president is holding on in part because he is excited about the chance to see Harris make history.

Immigration, isolationism and 'America First'

For all the shifts in U.S. politics, some things stay the same. Or at least come back around.

Carter was born in an era of isolationism, protectionism and white Christian nationalism — all elements of the right in the ongoing Donald Trump era. In 2024, Trump is promising the largest deportation effort in U.S. history, while tightening legal immigration. He has said immigrants are "poisoning the blood of our country."

Five months before Carter was born, President Calvin Coolidge signed the Immigration Act of 1924. The law created the U.S. Border Patrol and sharply curtailed immigration, limiting admission mostly to migrants from western Europe. Asians were banned entirely. Congress described its purpose plainly: "preserve the ideal of U.S. homogeneity." The Ku Klux Klan followed in 1925 and 1926 with marches on Washington promoting white supremacy.

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Trump also has called for sweeping tariffs on foreign imports, part of his "America First" agenda. In 1922, Congress enacted tariffs intended to help U.S. manufacturers. After stock market losses in 1929, lawmakers added the 1930 Smoot-Hawley tariffs, ostensibly to help American farmers. The Great Depression followed anyway. In the 1930s, as Carter became politically aware, the political right that countered FDR was driven in part by a movement that opposed international engagement. Those conservatives' slogan: "America First."

America's and Carter's pastime

Carter is the Atlanta Braves' most famous fan. Jason Carter says the former president still enjoys watching his favorite baseball team.

In the 1990s, when the Braves were annual features in the October playoffs, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter were often spotted in the owner's box with media mogul Ted Turner and Jane Fonda, then Turner's wife. The Braves moved to Atlanta from Milwaukee between Carter's failed run for governor in 1966 and his victory four years later. Then-Gov. Carter was sitting in the first row of Atlanta Fulton-County Stadium on April 9, 1974, when Henry Aaron hit his 715th home run to break Babe Ruth's career record.

When Carter was born, the Braves were still in Boston, their original city. Ruth had just completed his fifth season for the New York Yankees. He had hit 284 home runs to that point (still 430 short of his career total) and the original Yankee Stadium — "The House that Ruth Built" — had been open less than 18 months.

Booze, Billy and Billy Beer

Prohibition had been in effect for four years when Carter was born and wouldn't be lifted until he was 9. The Carters were never prodigious drinkers. They served only wine at state dinners and other White House functions, though it's a common misconception that they did so because of their Baptist mores. It was more because Carter has always been frugal: He didn't want taxpayers or the residence account (his and Rosalynn's personal money) to cover more expensive hard liquor.

Carter's younger brother Billy, who owned a Plains gas station and died in 1988, had different tastes. He marketed his own brand, Billy Beer, once Carter became president. News sources reported that Billy Carter snagged a \$50,000 annual licensing fee from one brewer. That's about \$215,000 today. The president's annual salary at the time was \$200,000 — it's now \$400,000.

The debt: More Carter frugality

The Times Square debt clock didn't debut until Carter was in his early 60s and out of the White House. But for anyone counting the \$35 trillion debt, Carter doesn't merit much mention. The man who would wash Ziploc bags to reuse them added less than \$300 billion to the national debt, which stood below \$1 trillion when he left office.

Other presidents

Carter has lived through 40% of U.S. history since the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and more than a third of all U.S. administrations since George Washington took office in 1789 — nine before Carter was president, his own and seven since.

When Carter took office, just one president, John Adams, had lived to be 90. Since then, Ford, Ronald Reagan, Carter and George H.W. Bush all reached at least 93.

## Trump is set to respond to Harris on immigration during his visit to a small Wisconsin town

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — A day after Vice President Kamala Harris discussed immigration at the U.S.-Mexico border, former President Donald Trump is expected to respond by again linking her to illegal border crossings at an event in a western Wisconsin river town.

Trump heads Saturday to Prairie du Chien, a town of about 5,000 people just across the Mississippi River from Iowa, for a campaign event focused on immigration. He is expected to highlight the local case of a Venezuelan national accused of sexually assaulting a woman and attacking her daughter in an alleged

domestic dispute.

Trump is hoping frustration over illegal immigration will translate to votes in Wisconsin and other crucial swing states. The Republican nominee has denounced people who cross the U.S.-Mexico border as "poisoning the blood of the country" and vowed to stage the largest deportation operation in American history if elected.

Wisconsin Republicans in recent days have held up the story of Alejandro Jose Coronel Zarate's arrest in Prairie du Chien as more evidence that people in the country illegally are committing crimes across the United States, not just in southern border states. Prosecutors charged Coronel Zarate on Sept. 18 with sexual assault, child abuse, strangulation and domestic abuse.

Police Chief Kyle Teynor posted statements on Facebook saying that Coronel Zarate is not a U.S. citizen and that he had two fake immigration documents, including a fake Social Security card. The chief added that Coronel Zarate's tattoos indicate he's affiliated with the Tren de Aragua gang, which started in Venezuelan prisons and is posing a growing threat in the U.S.

Court records show Coronel Zarate was previously charged in Madison, the state capital, in December with strangulation, false imprisonment, battery and disorderly conduct. According to a criminal complaint in that case, Coronel Zarate was driving with a female friend in November and attacked her when she tried to get out of the car. The complaint does not say why. The woman told investigators that they were just acquaintances and Coronel Zarate was homeless.

Police in Madison said that Coronel Zarate allegedly stole a car and fled before he could be questioned. He was arrested in Minneapolis a day after the alleged attack but was released from jail there. Asked why, Hennepin County Sheriff's Office spokesperson Megan Larson told a reporter to file a request for Coronel Zarate's jail records. The Associated Press filed such a request but government agencies typically take months to fulfill them.

Republicans including U.S. Sen. Derrick Van Orden, who is from Prairie du Chien, have criticized authorities in both Minneapolis and Madison for letting Coronel Zarate go, saying they essentially allowed him to attack the woman in Prairie du Chien. They have accused both jurisdictions of being sanctuaries for people in the country illegally.

Michelle Marie Dietrich, a public defender representing Coronel Zarate in the Prairie du Chien case, declined to comment. Charlotte Wynes, another public defender representing him in Prairie du Chien along with Dietrich, didn't respond to a voicemail seeking comment. Michelle Brandemuehl, a public defender representing him in Madison, also didn't respond to a voicemail message seeking comment.

Trump has repeatedly portrayed migrants as criminals and blamed Harris for failing to stem an unprecedented surge in illegal immigration, though border crossings have fallen since President Joe Biden instituted an executive order limiting asylum claims. Democrats, in turn, have blamed Trump for persuading allies in Congress to kill bipartisan legislation that would have funded more border agents and given the Homeland Security secretary authority to prohibit entry for most people over a daily limit.

## **Walz has experience on a debate stage pinning down an abortion opponent's shifting positions**

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Democratic vice presidential candidate Tim Walz knows how to lean into abortion rights on the debate stage. He's done it before.

Just ask his Republican opponent in the 2022 Minnesota governor's race, Dr. Scott Jensen, who was on the receiving end of Walz's attacks — and saw firsthand how effective Walz could be in exposing an opponent's shifting positions on abortion.

Jensen's experience two years ago could provide insight into what to expect Tuesday when Walz debates GOP vice presidential candidate JD Vance on CBS. Jensen said in an interview that Walz would be smart to talk about abortion.

"I think Tim Walz will say that loud and clear, and JD Vance needs to make it very clear that there's not

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going to be a federal ban on abortion," Jensen said. "That's what Trump has said, and they need to make that very clear."

The family practice physician and former state senator originally voiced support for an abortion ban in his 2022 campaign and picked a running mate with a record as an outspoken abortion opponent, former Minnesota Viking Matt Birk. That helped him get the Republican nomination, but it didn't play so well with the broader electorate.

By the time Walz and Jensen met for their second of three debates two years ago, Jensen was trying to play down abortion, insisting it wasn't on the ballot.

To Walz, it most certainly was.

"My entire career I've trusted women to make their health care decisions," Walz said as they met at the studios of KTTC-TV in Rochester in their only televised prime-time debate. "I don't believe anybody who sits in this office should come between them."

Jensen had asserted that state courts had already decided that abortion rights were protected under the Minnesota Constitution and accused Walz of "fearmongering" by claiming they might be in danger. He said he wouldn't ban abortion because he couldn't — that it would take a constitutional amendment.

But Walz pointed out that former President Donald Trump's nominees to the Supreme Court voted to overturn the Roe v. Wade decision after suggesting in their confirmation hearings that it was settled law. In Minnesota, Walz noted, governors appoint state Supreme Court justices.

"I just want to be absolutely clear: This is on the ballot," Walz said. "It will impact generations to come."

Vance and Trump are treading carefully after their previous support for limiting access to abortion, saying they now want to leave it to the states.

Trump repeatedly declined to say during his Sept. 10 debate with Vice President Kamala Harris whether he would veto a national abortion ban, insisting that a ban would not pass Congress anyway. Yet he has often taken credit for appointing the three justices who helped overturn the constitutional right to abortion. He's backed away from statements he'd made as recently as March that he'd support a national ban.

Vance himself had strongly opposed abortion in the runup to his 2022 senatorial election but aligned himself this year with Trump. Harris and Walz have been urging their audiences not to trust Trump and Vance on abortion rights.

Walz's comments on abortion rights from the 2022 debates with Jensen sound like lines he could try again in the clash with Vance, said Kevin Parsneau, a political science professor at Minnesota State University in Mankato. Despite Trump's and Vance's comments that a national ban is off the table and the issue in the hands of the states, he said, Walz could point out that the next president and Congress could override whatever the states do.

Not only were abortion rights a winning issue in 2022 for Walz, who defeated Jensen by nearly 8 percentage points, the issue helped Democrats take control of both chambers of the Minnesota Legislature and the governor's office for the first time in eight years. That "trifecta" let them enact a sweeping progressive agenda in 2023 that included stronger protections for abortion rights — and put Walz on Harris' radar when she needed a running mate.

Both Walz and Jensen were feeling scrappy by their third debate, on Minnesota Public Radio.

Walz basically ignored Jensen's dig about his 1995 drunken driving arrest in Nebraska and Jensen calling him the "godfather of the crime epidemic." Walz did lapse into some rambling answers, prompting Jensen to quip one point, when the moderator offered him a rebuttal, "Thanks, I almost fell asleep."

Walz will make adjustments on the move, Jensen said, so Vance will need to frame his attacks carefully.

"Tim Walz has an affable personality. I worked with him when I was in the Senate," Jensen said. "He's a jovial fellow. If you try to turn Tim Walz into something malignant, I don't think that's going to work. Because Tim Walz is not malignant. He's a skilled politician who's learned on the job."

The Trump-Vance campaign has already criticized Walz's response to the rioting that accompanied protests over the 2020 murder of George Floyd, a Black man who died under the knee of a white Minneapolis police officer, and Vance could raise it again. While Trump praised Walz at the time, Republicans now say

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Walz should have moved faster to use the National Guard. The governor, in the KTTC-TV debate, said he was proud of how he and Minnesota's first responders reacted to the crisis "no matter how much I'm slandered by Scott."

Vance has already previewed attacks on Walz's military record. Walz served in the Army National Guard for 24 years but retired when he first ran for Congress in 2005 before his unit was deployed to Iraq. He has at times called himself a retired command sergeant major and did serve as one for less than a year. But his rank was reduced for benefit purposes to master sergeant because he had not completed the necessary coursework. His careless use of language included what struck some as a claim that he served in combat when he did not.

Vance, who served four years in the Marines, including six months as a military journalist in Iraq, has accused Walz of "stolen valor."

"I am damn proud of my service to this country," Walz responded in a speech to a union convention. "And I firmly believe you should never denigrate another person's service record. To anyone brave enough to put on that uniform for our great country, including my opponent, I just have a few simple words. Thank you for your service and sacrifice."

Vance thanked Walz for his service in a social media post but accused Walz of lying about his record.

"Happy to discuss more in a debate," Vance posted.

An important challenge for Vance, Jensen said, will be making sure Walz answers the questions put to him.

"You don't want to underestimate Tim Walz because he has an ability to speak rapidly and sincerely, and yet, without the audiences realizing it, a lot of times he can go on for a minute or two, and everything sort of checks out OK on the surface, but when you stop and ask, 'Did he answer the question?' he didn't," Jensen said. "Tim Walz will throw a word salad at you and you won't realize it's even happening."

## **Vance exuded calm during a tense debate stage moment. Can he keep it up when he faces Walz?**

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — When two of his Republican rivals for an Ohio Senate seat nearly came to blows on live statewide television two years ago, JD Vance appeared unimpressed.

"Sit down. Come on," said Vance, the youngest and least politically experienced of the remaining candidates sitting in a row on stage. "This is ridiculous."

To many observers, his calm, self-possessed reaction gave Vance an adult-in-the-room authority over his opponents. When Ohio Right to Life endorsed him a couple of weeks later, the group cited his "statesmanship" among the reasons.

Vance's debating skills also caught the eye of Donald Trump, who endorsed him in that winning 2022 Senate bid and chose him to be his running mate in this year's presidential election. His early encounters offer a sense of how the Yale-educated senator could approach Tuesday night's vice-presidential debate, when he meets Kamala Harris' running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz. It is the only time the two are expected to meet during the campaign.

Vance is known for being informed, articulate and unflappable. Even his 2022 Democratic opponent, Tim Ryan, said, "He's a smart guy." He'll bring a style honed through verbal jousting with a gauntlet of television journalists, but not one that looks like Trump's.

Republican political consultant Terry Casey, who has regularly helped with GOP debate prep in Ohio, said Vance and Trump are "night and day" when it comes to debating.

"He's a lawyer who, intellectually, likes to dig into subjects in a different way than Trump does," Casey said. "Trump both missed opportunities and took the bait when he debated Kamala Harris. My guess is, with Vance, he won't fall into those traps or neglect those opportunities."

Vance said on a call with journalists this week that he feels no pressure to do "anything similar" to the extensive debate preparation being done by Walz.

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"I don't think we have to prepare that much" because "we don't have to hide our record from the American people," Vance said.

Still, Vance has spent the last month reviewing debate plans, strategies and potential questions, according to a person familiar with his preparations who requested anonymity to discuss strategy. In addition to online sessions, most of that work has been taking place at his home in Cincinnati — where his wife, Usha, and Trump campaign strategist Jason Miller have joined members of his inner circle to get Vance ready.

Minnesota U.S. Rep. Tom Emmer, the House majority whip, has been helping Vance in the Minnesota governor's "folksy" Midwestern style, as the team pores over Walz's past debate performances, the source said. It's perhaps not as far a stretch for Vance — an Ohio native with Appalachian roots made familiar to many by the "Hillbilly Elegy" book and movie — as it might be for another candidate.

Vance comes into the event with solid debate performances from 2022 behind him.

One such performance, in Cleveland, elevated his profile in Trump world — and helped Vance land the former president's coveted endorsement.

Vance's Democratic rival that fall, the former 10-term congressman Ryan, said the senator's vulnerability Tuesday could be in trying to deliver a performance that pleases Trump.

"He's got an audience of one, for sure, so that can also be his Achilles' heel," Ryan said. "Because Trump will want him to be aggressive, he'll want him to try to portray Walz as super extreme and out of touch, which I think — given Walz's appearance, and demeanor, and sense of humor and everything — will be very difficult."

Ryan said he went into his debates with Vance trying to highlight his past controversial statements, and that can cause Vance to "go off the rails a little bit."

"Walz should be very aggressive in holding his feet to the fire and getting JD to really have to eat his own words," he said.

Casey said the two men's age difference — Walz is 60, Vance 40 — will be apparent onstage, although with that comes a contrast in debate experience. Walz has honed his technique during 12 years in Congress and two runs for governor, while Vance has run in just a single political campaign — albeit a fiercely competitive one.

If history is any indicator, viewers can expect Vance to criticize Tuesday's moderators, CBS' Norah O'Donnell and Margaret Brennan, while the debate is underway. Since becoming Trump's running mate, Vance has been the Trump campaign's highest-profile attack dog and a fixture on weekend news programs — where he often pushes back at hosts and calls them out by name.

In one notable exchange with CNN's Dana Bash, Vance on Sept. 15 signaled his determination to stick by the false story that Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, were stealing and eating people's pets, claims refuted by both local officials and Ohio's Republican governor but amplified by Trump in his Sept. 10 debate with Harris. More than 30 bomb threats following those statements forced the city to evacuate schools and government buildings and some members of the Haitian community, who are in the U.S. legally, have said they feel unsafe.

Vance insisted to Bash that his statements about immigrants eating pets were based on things he'd been told by constituents. He blamed problems involving crowded schools, hospitals and other services in Springfield on "Kamala Harris' open border."

Challenged by Bash about the facts behind his assertions, Vance gave no ground. Instead, he directly questioned Bash's objectivity.

"Dana, would you like to ask me questions and let me answer them, or would you like to debate me on these topics?" he asked.

Vance's forceful pushback seems to delight the Trump base. In an interview this summer, Charlie Kirk, founder of the conservative activist group Turning Point USA, said such settings are Vance's strong suit.

"I say commonly that JD Vance's superpower is his ability to go into adversarial media environments, be calm, cool and collected, and say things that are very persuasive without raising his voice," Kirk said.

Vance also has viewed those media sit-downs as excellent debate practice, the person familiar with his preparations said.

Under ordinary circumstances, it's hard to find evidence that debates matter much, said Kevin Parsneau, a political science professor at Minnesota State University in Mankato. He said even the 1988 vice presidential debate — in which Democratic Sen. Lloyd Bentsen devastatingly told Republican Sen. Dan Quayle, "Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy" — didn't change the outcome. Vice President George H.W. Bush still went on to easily win the presidency.

"But obviously the Biden-Trump debate mattered a lot, and there might be some evidence that the Trump-Harris debate mattered a little," Parsneau said. "Vice presidential debates don't usually matter."

Yet, assuming this is the last debate of the 2024 campaign, "the margins are so razor thin that you don't need to affect a lot," he said.

## **Indicted New York City mayor adopts familiar defense: He was targeted for his politics**

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

For months, New York City Mayor Eric Adams — a former cop — refused to criticize the federal authorities investigating his administration.

Not anymore.

The day news of his indictment on corruption charges broke, Adams defiantly suggested, without providing evidence, that U.S. prosecutors had gone after him because he had criticized President Joe Biden's immigration policies.

"Despite our pleas, when the federal government did nothing as its broken immigration policies overloaded our shelter system with no relief, I put the people of New York before party and politics," he said. "I always knew that if I stood my ground for all of you, that I would be a target — and a target I became."

The accusation from Adams marked a sharp turn for a retired police captain turned politician, whose commitment to law-and-order has been a calling card during his time in office.

The rhetoric was also similar to that of other politicians who have found themselves facing various accusations.

After he was indicted on corruption charges by the same U.S. attorney prosecuting Adams, former U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez blamed his prosecution on "forces behind the scenes" that had "repeatedly attempted to silence my voice."

Former President Donald Trump blamed the lawsuits and criminal charges against him on a political "witch hunt" orchestrated by Democrats.

Adams echoed some of that rhetoric after he was charged with accepting illegal campaign contributions and free travel perks from Turkish officials and businesspeople looking to buy his influence.

He suggested prosecutors had been told to smear him. By who, he didn't say.

"We should ask them, 'Who gave the directive to carry out what we have witnessed over the last 10 months?'" Adams told reporters.

The White House has pushed back on the idea that Adams was targeted because of his complaints about not getting enough help from the federal government dealing with an influx of international migrants. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters the administration had nothing to do with the Department of Justice's decision to bring charges.

"The president was clear, even when he was running in 2020, that he was going to make sure that DOJ is independent and the DOJ is handling this case independently," she said.

Before he was indicted, Adams consistently said he was cooperating with the investigations and stressed that he was following the law. He would laugh off questions from reporters about various aspects of the probes. And he would refuse to criticize the investigators, saying that as a former law enforcement official, he understood they had a job to do.

Richard Briffault, a professor at Columbia Law School in New York with a specialty in government ethics, described Adams' current defensive posture as "a standard technique."

"He's not discussing any of the charges. He's just saying the people who brought the charges don't like

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him," he said. "If the facts are against you, move onto something else. If the facts are against you, try to go after the prosecutors. If the facts are against you, go after your opponent."

Speaking at a news conference announcing the indictment, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, Damian Williams, dismissed the idea that the case was political.

"The Southern District of New York remains committed to rooting out corruption without fear or favor and without regard to partisan politics," Williams said. "We are not focused on the right or the left, we are focused only on right and wrong."

Williams leads a large office of prosecutors so famous for its independence that it has long been nicknamed "The Sovereign District."

Appointed by Biden in 2021, Williams has overseen other several other big, news-making prosecutions. His office won its case against Menendez, who is awaiting sentencing. It recently brought a sex trafficking indictment against Sean "Diddy" Combs, who pleaded innocent and is awaiting trial. It also brought an indictment against cryptocurrency entrepreneur Sam Bankman-Fried, who was convicted of fraud.

The mayor and his lawyer, Alex Spiro, have yet to provide evidence backing the theory that Adams was being persecuted for being a thorn in Biden's side.

Wednesday night, just hours before the first news reports of the indictment, Adams spent part of his evening attending a reception for United Nations General Assembly leaders hosted by Biden and First Lady Jill Biden.

Adams' suggestion that the charges are politically motivated drew comparisons to Trump. The former president, at an unrelated news conference Thursday, told reporters that he wishes Adams luck with the case and said he saw the charges against the mayor coming.

"I watched about a year ago when he talked about how the illegal migrants are hurting our city, and the federal government should pay us, and we shouldn't have to take them," said Trump. "And I said, 'You know what? He'll be indicted within a year.' And I was exactly right."

## 'Saturday Night Live' launches 50th season with Jean Smart, Jelly Roll and maybe Maya as Kamala

NEW YORK (AP) — "Saturday Night Live" is set to set off its 50th season with host Jean Smart and musical guest Jelly Roll.

Smart, the 73-year-old "Hacks" and "Designing Women" star who just won her sixth Emmy, has never hosted the NBC sketch comedy institution before in her more than 40-year career. She said on Instagram that the gig is a "bucket list" achievement for her.

Former cast member Maya Rudolph is reportedly returning to the show this season to play Vice President Kamala Harris, and if recent patterns of opening episodes with politics-of-the-moment are any indication, she could be in the premiere's cold open at the top of the show.

Rudolph has popped up to play Harris before — and won an Emmy for it — but has yet to play the role of presidential candidate.

Lorne Michaels is still at the helm, just as he was for the first episode on Oct. 11, 1975, when George Carlin hosted and the nation got its first dose of the Not Ready for Prime Time Players: Chevy Chase, John Belushi, Gilda Radner, Dan Akroyd, Jane Curtin, Laraine Newman and Garrett Morris.

There were two musical guests — Billy Preston and Janis Ian — playing two songs apiece, the norm in the early days.

The country singer and rapper Jelly Roll has the music role to himself Saturday, and like Smart he's a first-timer.

That debut show is documented and reenacted in the newly released Jason Reitman film "Saturday Night," part of a wave of reflection and celebration the show is getting on the cusp of its 50th anniversary.

Upcoming episodes will feature host Nate Bargatze with musical guest Coldplay, Ariana Grande with Stevie Nicks, Michael Keaton with Billie Eilish, and John Mulaney with Chappell Roan.

Those shows will lead up to a three-hour primetime special on Feb. 16 that will serve as the official 50th



season celebration. It's sure to feature a wide range of the many stars the show has spawned, including Bill Murray, Eddie Murphy, Billy Crystal, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Robert Downey Jr., Mike Myers, Adam Sandler, Chris Rock, Tina Fey, Amy Poehler and Will Ferrell.

## Netanyahu, at UN, vows that Israel will keep 'degrading Hezbollah' until its objectives are met

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu signaled to the world from the United Nations on Friday that the multiple conflicts in the Middle East were far from resolved, and he vowed to continue battling the Lebanese Hezbollah and defeat Hamas in the Gaza Strip until "total victory."

Shortly after the prime minister spoke, blasts rocked the Lebanese capital Beirut and the Israeli military said it had struck Hezbollah's headquarters. The attack appeared to target Hezbollah's leader and prompted Netanyahu to cut short his trip to New York by a day and make unusual travel on the Jewish Sabbath to get home.

"Israel has every right to remove this threat and return our citizens to their home safely. And that's exactly what we're doing," Netanyahu said, eliciting applause from supporters in the gallery of the General Assembly. "We'll continue degrading Hezbollah until all our objectives are met," he said.

When Netanyahu entered the hall and was introduced, boos and raised voices echoed, and many delegates walked out through various exits.

Netanyahu spoke as international mediation efforts were underway to try to rein in the escalating conflict in Lebanon, where Israel has been striking Hezbollah targets intensively for the past week, sending the death toll in Lebanon soaring into the hundreds and raising fears that the conflict could spiral into all-out war.

Late Wednesday, the United States, France and other allies jointly called for an "immediate" 21-day cease-fire to allow for negotiations. Israel said Thursday that discussions were ongoing and Hezbollah hasn't officially responded to the cease-fire proposal, but has said it won't stop firing until the Gaza war ends.

Hezbollah began striking Israel a day after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack in an act of solidarity with the Palestinians. The sides have exchanged relatively low-level fire since then on almost a daily basis, volleys that intensified sharply after a wave of exploding communication devices targeted Hezbollah operatives - an attack widely blamed on Israel. The fighting has displaced tens of thousands on both sides of the border.

Netanyahu defends Israel's responses

Netanyahu has faced increasing pressure from within his own government and from Israelis displaced by the fighting to deal Hezbollah a heavy blow. Recent strikes have targeted the group's senior leadership.

"Just imagine if terrorists turned El Paso and San Diego into ghost towns ... How long would the American government tolerate that?" he said, shaking his fist in emphasis. "Yet Israel has been tolerating this intolerable situation for almost a year. Well, I've come here today to say: Enough is enough."

Netanyahu pointed a finger at Iran for being a destabilizing force in the region, noting its support for both Hamas and Hezbollah. He warned Tehran that "if you strike us, we will strike you." As he spoke, the seats in the Iran delegation sat empty. Outside, protesters against Netanyahu and Israel's policies demonstrated behind police barricades.

Armed with visual aids as he has been in the past, the prime minister defended his nation's response to Hamas' attack on Israel that triggered the war that has devastated the Gaza Strip. He said Israel had destroyed much of Hamas' rocket arsenal, killed or captured half of its fighting force and dismantled many of its underground tunnels. He said Israel was "focused on mopping up Hamas' remaining fighting capabilities."

But the war in Gaza will soon stretch into its second year with still no end in sight. Multiple attempts at bringing about a cease-fire have stalled over Hamas' demand that Israel withdraw all troops and end the war, and over Israel's insistence on maintaining a presence in some areas. All the while, civilians have borne a staggering toll in the continuing violence; roughly 100 hostages remain captive in Gaza.

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Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed more than 41,500 Palestinians and wounded more than 96,000 others, according to the latest figures released Thursday by the Health Ministry. The ministry, part of Gaza's Hamas government, doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants, but more than half the dead have been women and children, including about 1,300 children under the age of 2.

Israel has maintained its military operations are justified and are necessary to defend itself.

"This war can come to an end now. All that has to happen is for Hamas to surrender, lay down its arms and release all the hostages," Netanyahu said. "But if they don't – if they don't – we will fight until we achieve total victory. Total victory. There is no substitute for it."

His speech impacted the rest of the General Assembly

In an address steeped in talk of conflict, Netanyahu also made a lengthy appeal for Israeli relations with Saudi Arabia, echoing the content of his speech last year, when efforts toward that goal were underway. But the U.S.-backed normalization talks were derailed by Hamas' attacks, which refocused a spotlight on Israel's conflict with the Palestinians, casting doubt on Netanyahu's argument that ties with Saudi Arabia are not contingent on Palestinian statehood.

As Netanyahu took the stage Friday morning, there was enough ruckus in the audience that the presiding diplomat had to shout, "Order, please."

The two speakers who preceded Netanyahu on Friday each made a point of calling out Israel for its actions. "Mr. Netanyahu, stop this war now," Slovenian Prime Minister Robert Golob said as he closed his remarks, pounding the podium. And Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, speaking just before the Israeli leader, declared of Gaza: "This is not just a conflict. This is systematic slaughter of innocent people of Palestine." He thumped the rostrum to audible applause.

It wasn't just Friday, either. On Thursday, the leader of the Palestinian Authority and a top Lebanese official both made their cases to fellow leaders — cases that included harsh words for Israel as well. Mahmoud Abbas' first words to the General Assembly were a sentence repeated three times in reference to Gaza: "We will not leave. We will not leave. We will not leave." He accused Israel of destroying Gaza and making it unlivable. And Abdallah Bouhabib, Lebanon's foreign minister, decried Israel's "systematic destruction of Lebanese border villages."

"The crisis in Lebanon threatens the entire Middle East," Bouhabib said. "We wish today to reiterate our call for a cease-fire on all fronts."

At the General Assembly late Friday evening, Iran exercised its "right of reply" at the end of the day's regular speeches and denounced Israel as "the exclusive source of insecurity and instability in the region and beyond."

"What you heard here today from the notorious Israeli prime minister was nothing but an unsuccessful attempt to distract attention from his genocide and brutal war crimes," said an Iranian diplomat whose name was not immediately available. He addressed the General Assembly in English.

## Harris walks fence at US-Mexico border as she works to project tougher stance on migration

By WILL WEISSERT and JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

DOUGLAS, Ariz. (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris walked a scrubby stretch along the U.S.-Mexico border on Friday and called for further tightening of asylum restrictions as she sought to project a tougher stance on illegal migration and address one of her biggest vulnerabilities in the November election.

Harris' push to further restrict asylum claims moves beyond President Joe Biden's policy on an issue where her rival, former President Donald Trump, has an edge with voters. She balanced tough talk on policing the border with calls for a better way to welcome immigrants legally.

"I reject the false choice that suggests we must choose either between securing our border and creating a system that is orderly, safe and humane," Harris said. "We can and we must do both."

In her first trip to the international boundary since becoming the Democratic presidential nominee, Harris chatted with local Border Patrol leaders as they strode along a rust-colored stretch of wall built during

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Barack Obama's presidency. Temperatures in Douglas, Arizona, neared 100 degrees during a conversation that lasted about half an hour.

Later, Harris received a closed-door briefing at the Douglas port of entry on efforts to combat drug trafficking and improve the legal flow of goods and people across the border. Border Patrol agents have "a tough job" and deserve support to do it, she said.

Harris' visit was designed as a rejoinder to Trump and his fellow Republicans, who have pounded her relentlessly over the Biden administration's record on migration and fault the vice president for spending little time visiting the border during her time in the White House.

Immigration and border security are top issues in Arizona, the only battleground state that borders Mexico and one that contended with a record influx of asylum seekers last year. Voters favor Trump on migration, and Harris has gone on offense to improve her standing on the issue and defuse a key line of political attack for her opponent.

She used her remarks to challenge Trump's own record on migration during his presidency, saying he did nothing to fix the legal immigration system or address an outdated asylum system. And she said he failed to solve a shortage of immigration judges and border agents.

Harris recounted how a sweeping bipartisan package aiming to overhaul the federal immigration system collapsed in Congress earlier this year after Trump urged top Republicans to oppose it.

"Donald Trump tanked it," she said, so he could campaign on disorder at the border.

"He prefers to run on a problem instead of fixing a problem," Harris added. "And the American people deserve a president who cares more about border security than playing political games and their personal political future."

After the immigration legislation stalled, the Biden administration announced rules that bar migrants from being granted asylum when U.S. officials deem that the southern border is overwhelmed. Since then, arrests for illegal border crossings have fallen.

Harris' plan to exceed Biden's efforts at the border would include more serious criminal charges for people who repeatedly cross illegally and require asylum claims to be made at ports of entry.

She used her trip to remind voters about her work as attorney general of California in confronting crime along the border. She talked about helping to prosecute drug- and people-smuggling gangs that operated transnationally and at the border.

The vice president's trip to Douglas thrusts the issue of immigration into the brightest spotlight yet less than six weeks before Election Day.

Trump didn't wait for her to arrive there before pushing back. He pointed Friday to purported data about criminals entering the U.S. illegally in a bid to link Harris to violent crimes committed by migrants. In a scathing diatribe, he said "blood is on her hands."

"These are hard, tough, vicious criminals that are free to roam in our country," Trump said at a manufacturing plant in Michigan.

Earlier in the week, he told voters that "when Kamala speaks about the border, her credibility is less than zero."

The Trump campaign has also countered with TV ads deriding the vice president as a failed "border czar."

"Under Harris, over 10 million illegally here," said one spot. However, estimates on how many people have entered the country illegally since the start of the Biden administration in 2021 vary widely.

Harris also never held the position of border czar. Instead, her assignment was to tackle the "root causes" of migration from three Central American nations — El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras — that were responsible for a significant share of border crossers.

As vice president, Harris has taken a long-term approach to an immediate problem, helping persuade multinational corporations and Latin American businesses to invest in the region. That, she argued, would create jobs and give locals more reasons to stay home rather than take the arduous trek north.

Still, Trump has continued to decry an "invasion" of border crossers.

Douglas, where Harris appeared, is an overwhelmingly Democratic border town in GOP-dominated Co-

chise County, where the Republicans on the board of supervisors are facing criminal charges for refusing to certify the 2022 election results. Trump was in the area last month, using a remote stretch of border wall and a pile of steel beams to draw a contrast between himself and Harris on border security.

The town of 16,000 people has strong ties to its much larger neighbor, Agua Prieta, Mexico, and a busy port of entry that's slated for a long-sought upgrade. Many locals are as concerned with making legal border crossings more efficient as they are with combatting illegal ones.

## **Hurricane Helene kills at least 44 and cuts a swath of destruction across the Southeast**

By STEPHEN SMITH, KATE PAYNE and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

PERRY, Fla. (AP) — Hurricane Helene left an enormous path of destruction across Florida and the southeastern U.S. on Friday, killing at least 44 people, snapping towering oaks like twigs and tearing apart homes as rescue crews launched desperate missions to save people from floodwaters.

Among those killed were three firefighters, a woman and her 1-month-old twins, and an 89-year-old woman whose house was struck by a falling tree. According to an Associated Press tally, the deaths occurred in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia.

The Category 4 hurricane knocked out power to some hospitals in southern Georgia, and Gov. Brian Kemp said authorities had to use chainsaws to clear debris and open up roads. The storm had maximum sustained winds of 140 mph (225 kph) when it made landfall late Thursday in a sparsely populated region in Florida's rural Big Bend area, home to fishing villages and vacation hideaways where the state's panhandle and peninsula meet.

Moody's Analytics said it expects \$15 billion to \$26 billion in property damage.

The wreckage extended hundreds of miles northward to northeast Tennessee, where a "dangerous rescue situation" by helicopter unfolded after 54 people were moved to the roof of the Unicoi County Hospital as water rapidly flooded the facility. Everyone was rescued and no one was left at the hospital as of late Friday afternoon, Ballad Health said.

In North Carolina, a lake featured in the movie "Dirty Dancing" overtopped a dam and surrounding neighborhoods were evacuated, although there were no immediate concerns it would fail. People also were evacuated from Newport, Tennessee, a city of about 7,000 people, amid concerns about a dam near there, although officials later said the structure had not failed.

Tornadoes hit some areas, including one in Nash County, North Carolina, that critically injured four people.

Atlanta received a record 11.12 inches (28.24 centimeters) of rain in 48 hours, the most the city has seen in a two-day period since record keeping began in 1878, Georgia's Office of the State Climatologist said on the social platform X. The previous mark of 9.59 inches (24.36 cm) was set in 1886. Some neighborhoods were so badly flooded that only car roofs could be seen poking above the water.

Climate change has exacerbated conditions that allow such storms to thrive, rapidly intensifying in warming waters and turning into powerful cyclones sometimes in a matter of hours.

When Laurie Lilliott pulled onto her street in Dekle Beach, Florida, after Helene plowed through, she couldn't see the roofline of her home beyond the palm trees. It had collapsed, torn apart by the pounding storm surge, one corner still precariously propped up by a piling.

"It took me a long time to breathe," Lilliott said.

As she surveyed the damage, her name and phone number were still inked on her arm in permanent marker, an admonition by Taylor County officials to help identify recovered bodies in the storm's aftermath. The community has taken direct hits from three hurricanes since August 2023.

All five who died in one Florida county were in neighborhoods where residents were told to evacuate, said Bob Gualtieri, the sheriff in Pinellas County in the St. Petersburg area. Some who stayed ended up having to hide in their attics to escape the rising water. He said the death toll could rise as crews go door-to-door in flooded areas.

More deaths were reported in Georgia and the Carolinas, including two South Carolina firefighters and

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a Georgia firefighter who died when trees struck their trucks.

Video on social media showed sheets of rain and siding coming off buildings in Perry, Florida, near where the storm hit land. A news station showed a home that was overturned, and many communities established curfews.

Also in Perry, the hurricane peeled off the new roof of a church that was replaced after Hurricane Idalia last year.

When the water hit knee-level in Kera O'Neil's home in Hudson, Florida, she knew it was time to escape.

"There's a moment where you are thinking, 'If this water rises above the level of the stove, we are not going to have not much room to breathe,'" she said, recalling how she and her sister waded through chest-deep water with one cat in a plastic carrier and another in a cardboard box.

President Joe Biden said he was praying for survivors, and the head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency headed to the area. The agency deployed more than 1,500 workers, and they helped with 400 rescues by late morning.

In Tampa, some areas could be reached only by boat.

Officials urged people who were trapped to call for rescuers and not tread floodwaters, warning they can be dangerous due to live wires, sewage, sharp objects and other debris.

More than 3 million homes and businesses were without power in Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas as of late Friday, according to poweroutage.us. The site also showed outages as far north as Ohio and Indiana due to Helene's rapid northward movement throughout the day.

In Georgia, an electrical utility group warned of "catastrophic" damage to utility infrastructure, with more than 100 high voltage transmission lines damaged. And officials in South Carolina, where more than 40% of customers were without power, said crews had to cut their way through debris just to determine what was still standing in some places.

The hurricane came ashore near the mouth of the Aucilla River, about 20 miles (30 kilometers) northwest of where Idalia hit last year at nearly the same ferocity. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said the damage from Helene appears to be greater than the combined effects of Idalia and Hurricane Debby in August.

"It's tough, and we understand that. We also understand that this is a resilient state," DeSantis said at a news conference in storm-damaged St. Pete Beach.

Soon after it crossed over land, Helene weakened to a tropical storm and later a post-tropical cyclone. Forecasters said it continued to produce catastrophic flooding, and some areas received more than a foot of rain.

A mudslide in the Appalachian Mountains washed out part of an interstate highway at the North Carolina-Tennessee state line.

Another slide hit homes in North Carolina and occupants had to wait more than four hours to be rescued, said Ryan Cole, the emergency services assistant director in Buncombe County. His 911 center received more than 3,300 calls in eight hours Friday.

"This is something that we're going to be dealing with for many days and weeks to come," Cole said.

Forecasters warned of flooding in North Carolina that could be worse than anything seen in the past century. Evacuations were underway and around 300 roads were closed statewide. The Connecticut Army National Guard sent a helicopter to help.

School districts and universities canceled classes. Florida airports that closed due to the storm reopened Friday. Inspectors were examining bridges and causeways along the Gulf Coast, the state's transportation secretary said.

Helene also swamped parts of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, flooding streets and toppling trees as it brushed past the resort city of Cancun this week. It also knocked out power to more than 200,000 homes and businesses in western Cuba.

Helene was the eighth named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season, which began June 1. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has predicted an above-average season this year because of record-warm ocean temperatures.

## Maggie Smith, scene-stealing actor famed for Harry Potter and 'Downton Abbey,' dies at 89

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Maggie Smith, the masterful, scene-stealing actor who won an Oscar for the 1969 film "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie" and gained new fans in the 21st century as the dowager Countess of Grantham in "Downton Abbey" and Professor Minerva McGonagall in the Harry Potter films, died Friday. She was 89.

Smith's sons, Chris Larkin and Toby Stephens, said in a statement that Smith died early Friday in a London hospital.

"She leaves two sons and five loving grandchildren who are devastated by the loss of their extraordinary mother and grandmother," they said in a statement issued through publicist Clair Dobbs.

Smith was frequently rated the preeminent British female performer of a generation that included Vanessa Redgrave and Judi Dench, with two Oscars, a clutch of Academy Award nominations and a shelf full of acting trophies.

She made her film debut in the 1950s, won Oscars for work in the 60s and 70s and had memorable roles in each subsequent decade, including an older Wendy in Peter Pan story "Hook" (1991) and a mother superior of a convent in Whoopi Goldberg's comedy "Sister Act" (1992).

A commanding stage actor, she played Shakespearean tragedy — 1965 adaptation "Othello" — and voiced Shakespeare-inspired animation in "Gnomeo & Juliet" (2011).

She remained in demand even in her later years, despite her lament that "when you get into the granny era, you're lucky to get anything."

Smith drily summarized her later roles as "a gallery of grotesques," including Professor McGonagall. Asked why she took the role, she quipped: "Harry Potter is my pension."

Richard Eyre, who directed Smith in a television production of "Suddenly, Last Summer," said she was "intellectually the smartest actress I've ever worked with. You have to get up very, very early in the morning to outwit Maggie Smith."

"Jean Brodie," in which she played a dangerously charismatic Edinburgh schoolteacher, brought her the Academy Award for best actress, and the British Academy Film Award (BAFTA) as well.

Smith added a supporting actress Oscar for "California Suite" in 1978, Golden Globes for "California Suite" and "A Room with a View," and BAFTAs for lead actress in "A Private Function" in 1984, "A Room with a View" in 1986 and "The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne" in 1988.

She also received Academy Award nominations as a supporting actress in "Othello," "Travels with My Aunt," "A Room with a View" and "Gosford Park," and a BAFTA award for supporting actress in "Tea with Mussolini." On stage, she won a Tony in 1990 for "Letting It Be."

From 2010, she was the acid-tongued Violet Crawley, Dowager Countess of Grantham, in hit TV period drama "Downton Abbey," a role that won her legions of fans, three Emmy Awards, a Golden Globe and a host of other awards nominations.

But she chafed at television fame. When the show's run ended in 2016, Smith said she was relieved. "It's freedom," she told The Associated Press.

"Not until 'Downton Abbey' was I well-known or stopped in the street and asked for one of those terrible photographs," she said.

She continued acting well into her 80s, in films including the big-screen spinoff to "Downton Abbey" in 2019, its 2022 sequel "Downton Abbey: A New Era" and 2023 release "The Miracle Club."

Smith had a reputation for being difficult, and sometimes upstaging others.

Richard Burton remarked that Smith didn't just take over a scene in "The VIPs" with him: "She commits grand larceny." However, the director Peter Hall found that Smith wasn't "remotely difficult unless she's among idiots. She's very hard on herself, and I don't think she sees any reason why she shouldn't be hard on other people, too."

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Smith conceded that she could be impatient at times.

"It's true I don't tolerate fools, but then they don't tolerate me, so I am spiky," Smith said. "Maybe that's why I'm quite good at playing spiky elderly ladies."

Critic Frank Rich, in a New York Times review of "Lettice and Lovage," praised Smith as "the stylized classicist who can italicize a line as prosaic as 'Have you no marmalade?' until it sounds like a freshly minted epigram by Coward or Wilde."

Smith famously drew laughs from a prosaic line — "This haddock is disgusting" — in a 1964 revival of Noel Coward's "Hay Fever."

She repeated the gift for one-liners in "Downton Abbey," when the tradition-bound Violet witheringly asked, "What is a weekend?"

King Charles III and his wife Queen Camilla paid tribute to Smith, who was made a Dame Commander of the British Empire, the equivalent of a knight, by the late Queen Elizabeth II in 1990.

"As the curtain comes down on a national treasure, we join all those around the world in remembering with the fondest admiration and affection her many great performances, and her warmth and wit that shone through both off and on the stage," they said in a statement.

Fellow actors paid tribute to her on Friday. Hugh Bonneville, who played the son of Smith's character in "Downton Abbey," said "anyone who ever shared a scene with Maggie will attest to her sharp eye, sharp wit and formidable talent."

"She was a true legend of her generation and thankfully will live on in so many magnificent screen performances," he said in a statement.

Rob Lowe, who co-starred with her in "Suddenly, Last Summer," said the experience was "unforgettable ... sharing a two-shot was like being paired with a lion."

"She could eat anyone alive, and often did. But funny, and great company. And suffered no fools. We will never see another. God speed, Ms. Smith!" Lowe wrote on X.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer called Smith "a true national treasure whose work will be cherished for generations to come."

Margaret Natalie Smith was born in Ilford, on the eastern edge of London, on Dec. 28, 1934. She summed up her life briefly: "One went to school, one wanted to act, one started to act, one's still acting."

Her father was assigned in 1939 to wartime duty in Oxford, where her theater studies at the Oxford Playhouse School led to a busy apprenticeship.

"I did so many things, you know, round the universities there. ... If you were kind of clever enough and I suppose quick enough, you could almost do weekly rep because all the colleges were doing different productions at different times," she said in a BBC interview.

She took Maggie as her stage name because another Margaret Smith was active in the theater.

Laurence Olivier spotted her talent, invited her to be part of his original National Theatre company and cast her as his co-star in a 1965 film adaptation of "Othello."

Smith said two directors, Ingmar Bergman and William Gaskill, both in National Theatre productions, were important influences.

Alan Bennett, preparing to film the monologue "A Bed Among the Lentils," said he was wary of Smith's reputation for becoming bored. As the actor Jeremy Brett put it, "she starts divinely and then goes off, rather like a cheese."

"So the fact that we only just had enough time to do it was an absolute blessing really because she was so fresh and just so into it," said Bennett. He also wrote a starring role for Smith in "The Lady in the Van," as Miss Shepherd, a redoubtable woman who lived for years in her vehicle on Bennett's London driveway.

However extravagant she may have been on stage or before the cameras, Smith was known to be intensely private.

"She never wanted to talk about acting. Acting was something she was terrified to talk about because if she did, it would disappear," said Simon Callow, who performed with her in "A Room with a View."

Smith married fellow actor Robert Stephens in 1967. They had two sons, Christopher and Toby — who

both grew up to be actors — and divorced in 1975. The same year she married the writer Beverley Cross, who died in 1998.

## Wisconsin Supreme Court says Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s name will remain on swing state's ballot

By SCOTT BAUER and TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — The Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled Friday that Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s name will remain on the state's presidential ballot, upholding a lower court's ruling that candidates can only be removed from the ballot if they die.

The unanimous decision from the liberal-controlled court marks the latest twist in Kennedy's quest to get his name off ballots in key battleground states where the race between Republican Donald Trump and Democratic nominee Kamala Harris is close. Kennedy's attorney in Wisconsin, Joseph Bugni, declined to comment on the ruling.

The decision came after more than 418,000 absentee ballots have already been sent to voters. As of Thursday, nearly 28,000 had been returned, according to the Wisconsin Elections Commission.

Kennedy suspended his campaign in August and endorsed Trump. Earlier this month a divided North Carolina Supreme Court kept him off the ballot there while the Michigan Supreme Court reversed a lower court decision and kept him on.

Kennedy filed a lawsuit in Wisconsin on Sept. 3 seeking a court order removing him from the ballot. He argued that third-party candidates are discriminated against because state law treats them differently than Republicans and Democrats running for president.

He pointed out that Republicans and Democrats have until 5 p.m. on the first Tuesday in September before an election to certify their presidential nominee but that independent candidates like himself can only withdraw before an Aug. 6 deadline for submitting nomination papers.

Dane County Circuit Judge Stephen Ehlke ruled Sept. 16 that Wisconsin law clearly states that once candidates file valid nomination papers, they remain on the ballot unless they die. The judge added that many election clerks had already sent ballots out for printing with Kennedy's name on them.

Bugni had argued that clerks could cover his name with stickers, the standard practice when a candidate dies. Ehlke rejected that idea, saying it would be a logistical nightmare for clerks and that it is not clear whether the stickers would gum up tabulating machines. He also predicted lawsuits if clerks failed to completely cover Kennedy's name or failed to affix a sticker on some number of ballots.

The Supreme Court's four liberal justices along with conservative Justice Brian Hagedorn wrote that Kennedy's arguments weren't developed enough for them to decide whether Ehlke erroneously exercised his discretion in keeping Kennedy on the ballot. They noted that Kennedy didn't argue that Ehlke misinterpreted the law that says only dead candidates can be removed from the ballot.

"We emphasize that we are not making any legal determinations on our own regarding the claims made by Kennedy and we are not agreeing with the circuit court's legal conclusions on those claims. We simply are unable to make such determinations, given the inadequate briefing presented to us," the five justices wrote in six-page opinion.

Conservative Justice Rebecca Bradley wrote in a one-page concurrence that while she doesn't disagree with the five other justices that Kennedy's arguments were underdeveloped, keeping Kennedy on the ballot will confuse voters and could tilt the outcome of the election.

"Voters may cast their ballots in favor of a candidate who withdrew his candidacy, thereby losing their right to cast a meaningful vote," she wrote. "Ballots listing a non-candidate mislead voters and may skew a presidential election. In this case, the damage to voter participation in electoral democracy is real."

The court's third conservative, Annette Ziegler, joined Bradley's concurrence.

The presence of independent and third-party candidates on the ballot could be a key factor in Wisconsin, where four of the past six presidential elections have been decided by between about 5,700 to 23,000 votes.

In 2016, Green Party nominee Jill Stein got just over 31,000 votes in Wisconsin — more than Trump's



winning margin of just under 23,000 votes. Some Democrats blamed her for helping Trump win the state and the presidency that year.

## Wrapping up mission, US troops will leave some longstanding bases in Iraq under new deal

BY QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. announced an agreement with the Iraqi government Friday to wrap up the military mission in Iraq of an American-led coalition fighting the Islamic State group by next year, with U.S. troops departing some bases that they have long occupied during a two-decade-long military presence in the country.

But the Biden administration refused to provide details on how many of the approximately 2,500 U.S. troops still serving in Iraq will remain there or acknowledge it will mark a full withdrawal from the country.

"I think it's fair to say that, you know, our footprint is going to be changing within the country," Pentagon deputy press secretary Sabrina Singh told reporters Friday without providing specifics.

The announcement comes at a particularly contentious time for the Middle East, with escalating conflict between Israel and two Iranian-backed militant groups — Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza — threatening a broader regional war. Bases housing U.S. forces and contractors have been regularly targeted by Iran-backed militias over the last several years, and those attacks intensified late last year and early this spring after the Israel-Hamas war broke out nearly a year ago.

For years, Iraqi officials have periodically called for a withdrawal of coalition forces, and formal talks to wind down the U.S. presence in the country have been going on for months.

U.S. officials who briefed reporters Friday said the agreement will bring about a two-phase transition in the troops assigned to Iraq that began this month. In the first phase, which runs through September 2025, the coalition mission against ISIS will end and forces will leave some longstanding bases.

Following the November election, American forces will start departing from Ain al-Asad airbase in western Iraq and from Baghdad International Airport, according to Iraqi government officials who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity. Those forces will be moved to Hareer base in Erbil, in northern Iraq's Kurdistan region.

In the second phase, the U.S. will continue to operate in some fashion from Iraq through 2026 to support counter-ISIS operations in Syria, a senior Biden administration official and a senior defense official said on the condition of anonymity on a call with reporters to provide details ahead of the announcement.

Ultimately, the U.S. military mission would transition to a bilateral security relationship, the U.S. officials said, but they did not indicate what that might mean for the number of American troops who remain in Iraq in the future.

The Iraqi officials said some American troops may stay at Hareer base after 2026 because the Kurdistan regional government would like them to stay.

"We have taken an important step in resolving the issue of the international coalition to fight ISIS," Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed al-Sudani said in a speech this month. He noted "the government's belief in the capabilities of our security forces that defeated the remnants of ISIS."

The continued presence of U.S. troops has been a political vulnerability for Sudani, whose government is under increased influence from Iran. Iraq has long struggled to balance its ties with the U.S. and Iran, both allies of the Iraqi government but regional archenemies.

"We thank the government for its position to expel the international coalition forces," Qais Khazali, founder of Asaib Ahl al-Haq — an Iran-backed Iraqi Shia militia that has conducted attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq — said last week.

But critics caution that this year's surge of ISIS attacks in Syria across the desert border from Iraq suggest the drawdown in Iraq is a "really significant cause for concern," said Charles Lister, a senior fellow with the Middle East Institute research center in Washington.

The U.S. withdrawal from Iraq isn't because ISIS has disappeared, Lister said. "The withdrawal is because

there's a significant proportion of the policy-making community in Baghdad that doesn't want American troops on Iraqi soil."

The agreement marks the third time in the last two decades that the U.S. has announced a formal transition of the military's role there.

The U.S. invaded Iraq in March 2003 in what it called a massive "shock and awe" bombing campaign that lit up the skies, laid waste to large sections of the country and paved the way for American ground troops to converge on Baghdad. The invasion was based on what turned out to be faulty claims that Saddam Hussein had secretly stashed weapons of mass destruction. Such weapons never materialized.

The U.S. presence grew to more than 170,000 troops at the peak of counterinsurgency operations in 2007. The Obama administration negotiated the drawdown of forces, and in December 2011, the final combat troops departed, leaving only a small number of military personnel behind to staff an office of security assistance and a detachment of Marines to guard the embassy compound.

In 2014, the rise of the Islamic State group and its rapid capture of a wide swath across Iraq and Syria brought U.S. and partner nation forces back at the invitation of the Iraqi government to help rebuild and retrain police and military units that had fallen apart and fled.

After ISIS lost its hold on the territory it once claimed, coalition military operations ended in 2021. An enduring U.S. presence of about 2,500 troops stayed in Iraq to maintain training and conduct partnered counter-ISIS operations with Iraq's military.

In the years since, the U.S. has maintained that presence to pressure Iranian-backed militias active in Iraq and Syria. The presence of American forces in Iraq also makes it more difficult for Iran to move weapons across Iraq and Syria into Lebanon, for use by its proxies, including the Lebanese Hezbollah, against Israel.

## **Iranian operatives charged in the US with hacking Donald Trump's presidential campaign**

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Three Iranian operatives have been charged with hacking Donald Trump's presidential campaign as part of what the Justice Department says was a sweeping effort to undermine the former president and erode confidence in the U.S. electoral system.

The action, coupled with sanctions and rewards for information leading to the accused hackers' capture, is the latest U.S. government effort to call out what's seen as Iran's attempts to interfere in the election by damaging Trump and sowing general chaos. It comes as Iran has also been accused of threatening the lives of Trump and former officials and as US-Iran relations remain especially tense, with Israel fighting Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The three accused hackers were employed by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which the U.S. government has designated as a foreign terrorist organization. Since 2020, their operation has sought to compromise email accounts of a broad swath of targets, which in addition to the Trump campaign also includes a former ambassador to Israel, a former CIA deputy director, officials at the State and Defense departments, a former U.S. homeland security adviser and journalists, according to the indictment.

In May, prosecutors say, the defendants began trying to penetrate the Trump campaign, successfully breaking into the email accounts of campaign officials and other Trump allies. They then sought to "weaponize" the stolen campaign material by spreading it to media organizations and people associated with President Joe Biden's campaign in what's familiarly known as a "hack-and-leak" operation.

"The defendants' own words make clear that they were attempting to undermine former President Trump's campaign in advance of the 2024 U.S. presidential election. We know that Iran is continuing with its brazen efforts to stoke discord, erode confidence in the U.S. electoral process and advance its malign activities," Attorney General Merrick Garland said at a news conference Friday announcing the charges.

U.S. intelligence officials have said Iran opposes Trump's reelection, seeing him as more likely to increase tension between Washington and Tehran. Trump's administration ended a nuclear deal with Iran, reimposed sanctions and ordered the killing of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani, an act that prompted Iran's leaders

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to vow revenge.

Trump's campaign said earlier this week that it had been briefed by U.S. officials on "real and specific" Iranian assassination threats, though one official told The Associated Press that the briefing had been requested by the campaign and did not include any suggestion of a new threat against Trump.

Iran's mission to the United Nations last month denied the hacking allegations as "unsubstantiated and devoid of any standing," saying that Iran had neither the motive nor intention to interfere with the election. It challenged the U.S. to provide evidence and said if the U.S. does so, "we will respond accordingly."

The U.S. government has sought this year across multiple agencies to aggressively call out election interference and foreign influence operations — a stark turnabout from the government's response in 2016, when Obama administration officials were criticized for not being forthcoming about the Russian interference they were seeing on Trump's behalf as he ran against Democrat Hillary Clinton.

The Treasury Department issued sanctions Friday related to the hacking and the State Department offered rewards of up to \$10 million for information leading to the arrests of the defendants, who remain in Iran.

FBI Director Christopher Wray said in a video statement that the FBI has been working to publicly condemn Iran's "aggressive behavior," including a plot to murder a journalist in New York City and a ransomware attack targeting a children's hospital.

Even with the recent focus on Iran, U.S. officials have said Russia remains the primary threat to the elections.

The Justice Department earlier this month charged two employees of RT, the Russian-state media organization, with covertly funding a Tennessee-based content creation company with nearly \$10 million to publish English-language videos on social media platforms favorable to Russia's interests and agenda, and also seized dozens of internet domains that officials said were used to spread propaganda.

The Trump campaign disclosed on Aug. 10 that it had been breached and said Iranian actors had stolen and distributed sensitive internal documents.

Multiple major news organizations that said they were leaked confidential information from inside the Trump campaign, including Politico, The New York Times and The Washington Post, declined to publish it.

U.S. intelligence officials subsequently publicly blamed Iran for that hack and for an attempted breach of the Joe Biden-Kamala Harris campaign.

They have said the hack-and-dump operation was meant to sow discord, exploit divisions within American society and potentially influence the outcome of elections that Iran perceives to be "particularly consequential in terms of the impact they could have on its national security interests."

Among the tactics the accused hackers used, the indictment said, is impersonating U.S. officials and creating fake email personas to try to dupe their victims.

Politico has reported that it began receiving emails on July 22 from an anonymous account. The source — an AOL email account identified only as "Robert" — passed along what appeared to be a research dossier that the campaign had apparently done on the Republican vice presidential nominee, Ohio Sen. JD Vance. The document was dated Feb. 23, almost five months before Trump selected Vance as his running mate.

Last week, officials also revealed that the Iranians in late June and early July sent unsolicited emails containing excerpts of the hacked information to people associated with the Biden campaign. None of the recipients replied. The Harris campaign said the emails resembled spam or a phishing attempt and condemned the outreach by the Iranians as "unwelcome and unacceptable malicious activity."

One of the emails was sent June 27, the date of the Biden-Trump debate, when a halting performance by the president laid the groundwork for his announcement weeks later that he would not seek reelection. An email offering the stolen information, according to the indictment, stated that the debate was likely to be Biden's "last chance" in the race.

The author stated negative feelings for Trump and wrote, "So I'm going to pass some materials along to you that would be useful to defeat him."

**Billie Jean King nets another legacy honor: the Congressional Gold**

## Medal

WASHINGTON (AP) — Billie Jean King is now the first individual female athlete to be awarded the Congressional Gold Medal.

President Joe Biden signed bipartisan legislation Thursday to recognize King for “a remarkable life devoted to championing equal rights for all, in sports and in society.”

The bill to honor King, the tennis Hall of Famer and activist, passed unanimously in the Senate and then in the House of Representatives.

The bill was introduced last September on the 50th anniversary of King’s victory over Bobby Riggs in the “Battle of the Sexes,” still the most-watched tennis match of all-time. The medal, awarded by Congress for distinguished achievements and contributions to society, has previously been given to athletes including baseball players Jackie Robinson and Roberto Clemente, and golfers Jack Nicklaus, Byron Nelson and Arnold Palmer.

King had already been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2009. Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., a co-introducer of the bill, said she has “broken barriers, led uncharted paths, and inspired countless people to stand proudly with courage and conviction in the fight for what is right.”

## New York City Mayor Eric Adams pleads not guilty to taking bribes and illegal campaign contributions

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City Mayor Eric Adams pleaded not guilty Friday to federal bribery charges, firmly rejecting allegations that he accepted overseas travel, campaign cash and other perks from foreign interests seeking to harness his influence.

Adams, a former police captain, entered the plea in a packed courtroom that’s just a short walk from City Hall, which has been roiled in recent weeks by a cascade of investigations, searches and subpoenas. The first-term Democrat maintains he did nothing wrong and has vowed to stay in office, rebuffing growing calls for him to quit.

“I am not guilty, your honor,” Adams said, looking solemnly at the judge.

His appearance before U.S. Magistrate Judge Katharine Parker came a day after prosecutors unsealed an indictment accusing him of taking \$100,000 in flights and stays in opulent hotel suites from people tied to Turkey, and fueling his run for mayor with illegal donations that helped him qualify for more than \$10 million in public campaign funds.

Adams was released on the condition that he not contact any witnesses or people described in the indictment. The mayor is allowed to speak with relatives and staff, but not about anything pertaining to the allegations.

Adams left the courtroom without commenting. He smiled at a court officer but ignored the rows of reporters he passed on his way out. Afterward, he stood silently outside the courthouse while his lawyer, Alex Spiro, railed against the charges to a crowd of cameras while onlookers shouted “Free Eric!” and “Lock him up!”

“This isn’t even a real case. This is the airline upgrade corruption case,” Spiro said. He told the judge would file a motion next week asking for the case to be dismissed.

Yet even as the mayor appeared in court, the investigation into his administration continued.

One of Adams’ closest City Hall advisers, Ingrid Lewis-Martin, was met at the airport Friday by investigators from the U.S. attorney’s office and Manhattan district attorney’s office after she got off flight from Japan. The federal investigators served her with a subpoena. The local prosecutors took her phones and searched her house, according to her lawyer, Arthur Aidala. A TV news crew got footage of investigators carrying out boxes marked “documents” and “electronics.”

“She will cooperate fully with any and all investigations and Ms. Lewis is not the target of any case of which we are aware,” Aidala said.

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Adams, 64, is due back in court Wednesday for a conference before U.S. District Judge Dale E. Ho, who will preside over the case going forward.

In his 18-minute appearance Friday, Adams sat stoically with his hands folded in his lap as the magistrate judge read the charges aloud, her sturdy delivery underscoring the gravity of the case. He was at the courthouse for just under four hours.

The criminal case and tumult in Adams' administration, including the sudden resignation of his police commissioner and retirement of his schools chancellor, have created a political crisis for the mayor.

Adams has so far weathered calls to resign, including from Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, potential Democratic challengers in next June's mayoral primary, and some Republicans. Top Democrats such as Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries have not called on Adams to quit, saying the legal process should be allowed to play out.

Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat who has the power to remove Adams from office, appeared to issue a warning to a mayor she has often portrayed as a close ally, saying in a statement that she was reviewing her "options and obligations" and expects "the mayor to take the next few days to review the situation and find an appropriate path forward to ensure the people of New York City are being well-served by their leaders."

Adams, who soared to office as a law-and-order champion of the middle class, is charged with five counts: wire fraud, bribery, conspiracy and two counts of receiving campaign contributions from a foreign national. If convicted of the most serious charge, wire fraud, he faces up to 20 years in prison, federal prosecutors said.

Among other things, Adams is accused of allowing a senior Turkish diplomat and others to shower him with luxury accommodations to places like France, China, Sri Lanka, India, Hungary, Ghana and Turkey, including valuable business-class upgrades, high-end meals and even a trip to a Turkish bath. Most of the trips took place while Adams was Brooklyn borough president, before he ran for mayor.

Adams is also accused of conspiring to take campaign contributions from foreign sources banned from giving to U.S. campaigns and disguising the payments by routing them through straw donors.

In return, Adams allegedly did favors for his patrons, including helping ensure that Turkey's newly built diplomatic tower in Manhattan wouldn't be subject to a fire inspection that it was certain to fail.

Spiro, whose roster of past and present clients includes Elon Musk, Alec Baldwin and Jay-Z, said it was neither unusual nor improper for an elected official to accept some travel perks. The mayor has denied ever knowingly accepting an illegal campaign contribution and said any help he gave people navigating city bureaucracy was just part of his job.

Adams' indictment is unlikely to be the last word on federal investigations involving city government.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams told reporters Thursday: "This investigation continues. We continue to dig, and we will hold more people accountable, and I encourage anyone with information to come forward and to do so before it is too late."

Federal prosecutors are believed to be leading multiple, separate inquiries involving Adams and his senior aides and relatives of those aides. In early September, federal investigators seized devices from the police commissioner, schools chancellor, two deputy mayors and other trusted Adams confidants.

None of those other officials have been publicly accused of wrongdoing or charged with a crime.

The Lower Manhattan courthouse is less than two blocks from the one where former President Donald Trump was tried and convicted of falsifying business records. Adams' arraignment was in the same courthouse where a jury found Trump civilly liable for sexually assaulting the writer E. Jean Carroll in 1996 and in the very same courtroom where hip-hop mogul Sean "Diddy" Combs was arraigned last week on sex trafficking charges.

## Trump and Zelenskyy meet in New York as election holds high stakes for US support for Ukraine

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

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NEW YORK (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met face-to-face with Donald Trump on Friday with public tensions rising between the two over Ukraine's defense against Russia's invasion and in the midst of the U.S. presidential election.

"We both want to see this end, and we both want to see a fair deal made," Trump told Fox News, referring to the Russia-Ukraine fighting while standing alongside Zelenskyy after meeting for 40 minutes. "The president wants it to end, and he wants it to end as quickly as possible. He wants a fair transaction to take place."

Zelenskyy said the war shouldn't have started and added that there needs to be pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin and peace for the families of those killed.

"We need to do everything to pressure him to stop this war. He is in our territory. That's most important to understand. He is in our territory."

The meeting came at a critical time in the Russia-Ukraine war as Election Day nears in the U.S. Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris, his Democratic opponent, have taken sharply different approaches to Ukraine. Zelenskyy has been eager to keep good relations with the United States, his country's largest provider of arms and money for the war. But the future of that support would be in doubt if Trump were to win the election.

Trump, who has touted his good relationship with Putin and called the Russian leader "pretty smart" for invading Ukraine, has for months criticized U.S. support for Ukraine and derided Zelenskyy as a "salesman" for persuading Washington to provide weapons and funding to his military as it tries to fend off Moscow. On Friday, Trump brought up his first impeachment, which Democrats in Congress pursued after he asked Zelenskyy for a "favor" — that he investigate Joe Biden, now the president, and Biden's son Hunter, who served on the board of a Ukrainian gas company.

At the time Trump asked for the "favor," he was withholding \$400 million in military aid to Ukraine as it fought Russian-backed separatists on its eastern boundary. He was later acquitted of the impeachment charges by a Republican-led Senate.

"He could have grandstanded and played cute," Trump said. "And he didn't do that. He said, 'President Trump did absolutely nothing wrong.' He said it loud and clear."

Zelenskyy told reporters in October 2019, as Congress was launching its impeachment inquiry, that there was "no blackmail" from Trump. He also told reporters, "I don't want to interfere in any way in the elections," trying to publicly and privately distance himself then from U.S. domestic politics.

But The Associated Press reported afterward that, despite Zelenskyy's denials, U.S. officials were aware he was feeling pressure from the Trump administration to investigate Biden even before his phone call with Trump regarding the "favor."

Friday's meeting almost wasn't scheduled despite Zelenskyy's office saying something had been planned during the Ukrainian leader's visit to the U.N. General Assembly, during which he is making his endgame pitch to allies.

In an interview with The New Yorker that was published earlier this week, Zelenskyy implied Trump does not understand and oversimplifies the conflict. The Ukrainian leader said Trump's running mate, Sen. JD Vance of Ohio, was "too radical" and has essentially advocated for Ukraine to "make a sacrifice" by "giving up its territories."

Trump ripped Zelenskyy and Ukraine on two separate occasions this week. Speaking Wednesday in North Carolina, he referred to Ukraine as "demolished" and its people as "dead."

"Any deal — the worst deal — would've been better than what we have now," Trump said. "If they made a bad deal, it would've been much better. They would've given up a little bit and everybody would be living and every building would be built and every tower would be aging for another 2,000 years."

Meanwhile, Harris on Thursday stood alongside Zelenskyy and said Trump's push for Ukraine to quickly cut a deal to end the war was "not proposals for peace," but "proposals for surrender." Trump on Thursday said he was not advocating for a surrender.

As he was preparing to sit down for the Friday meeting, Trump was asked by a reporter if Ukraine could win the war and he replied, "Sure. They could."

He said of Zelenskyy: "We have a very good relationship. And I also have a very good relationship, as you know, with President Putin. And if we win, I think we're going to get it resolved very quickly."

Zelenskyy cut into Trump's remarks with, "I hope we have more good relations between us." Before moving on to another question, Trump interjected to say "but, you know, it takes two to tango."

## **Fed's favored inflation gauge shows cooling price pressures, clearing way for more rate cuts**

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve's preferred inflation measure on Friday provided the latest sign that price pressures are easing, a trend that is expected to fuel further Fed interest rate cuts this year and next.

Prices rose just 0.1% from July to August, the Commerce Department said, down from the previous month's 0.2% increase. Compared with a year earlier, inflation fell to 2.2%, down from 2.5% in July and barely above the Fed's 2% inflation target.

The cooling of inflation might be eroding former President Donald Trump's polling advantage on the economy. In a survey last week by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, respondents were nearly equally split on whether Trump or Vice President Kamala Harris would do a better job on the economy. That is a significant shift from when President Joe Biden was still in the race, when about six in 10 Americans disapproved of his handling of the economy. The shift suggests that Harris could be shedding some of Biden's baggage on the economy as sentiment among consumers begins to brighten.

Grocery costs barely rose last month, according to Friday's report, and energy costs dropped 0.8%, led by cheaper gasoline.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, so-called core prices rose just 0.1% from July to August, also down from the previous month's 0.2% increase. It was the fourth straight time that monthly price increases have fallen below an annual rate of 2%, the Fed's target. Compared with 12 months earlier, core prices rose 2.7% in August, slightly higher than in July.

"Sticky inflation is yesterday's problem," Samuel Tombs, chief U.S. economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, said in a research note.

With inflation having tumbled from its 2022 peak to barely above the Fed's 2% target, the central bank last week cut its benchmark interest rate by an unusually large half-point, a dramatic shift after more than two years of high rates. The policymakers also signaled that they expect to reduce their key rate by an additional half-point in November and in December. And they envision four more rate cuts in 2025 and two in 2026.

The ongoing decline in inflation makes it even more likely that the Fed will cut its key benchmark rate further in the coming months.

On Thursday, Tom Barkin, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, expressed support for a cautious approach to rate cuts. In an interview with The Associated Press, he said he favors reducing the Fed's key rate "somewhat." But Barkin said he wants to ensure that inflation keeps cooling before cutting the benchmark rate to a level that would no longer restrain the economy.

Friday's report also showed that Americans' incomes and spending ticked up only slightly last month, with both rising just 0.2%. Still, those tepid increases coincide with upward revisions this week for income and spending figures from last year. Those revisions showed that consumers were in better financial shape, on average, than had been previously reported.

Americans also saved more of their incomes in recent months, according to the revisions, leaving the savings rate at 4.8% in September, after previous figures had shown it falling below 3%.

The government reported Thursday that the economy expanded at a healthy 3% annual pace in the April-June quarter. And it said economic growth was higher than it had previously estimated for most of the 2018-through-2023 period.

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The Fed tends to favor the inflation gauge that the government issued Friday — the personal consumption expenditures price index — over the better-known consumer price index. The PCE index tries to account for changes in how people shop when inflation jumps. It can capture, for example, when consumers switch from pricier national brands to cheaper store brands.

In general, the PCE index tends to show a lower inflation rate than CPI. In part, that's because rents, which have been high, carry double the weight in the CPI that they do in the index released Friday.

Recent reports suggest that the economy is still expanding at a healthy pace. On Thursday, the government confirmed its previous estimate that the U.S. economy grew at a healthy 3% annual pace from April through June, boosted by strong consumer spending and business investment.

Several individual barometers of the economy have been reassuring as well. Last week, the number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits fell to its lowest level in four months.

And last month, Americans increased their spending at retailers, suggesting that consumers are still able and willing to spend more despite the cumulative impact of three years of excess inflation and high borrowing rates.

The nation's industrial production rebounded, too. The pace of single-family-home construction rose sharply from the pace a year earlier. And this month, consumer sentiment rose for a third straight month, according to preliminary figures from the University of Michigan. The brighter outlook was driven by "more favorable prices as perceived by consumers" for cars, appliances, furniture and other long-lasting goods.

## University of Wisconsin fires former porn-making chancellor who wanted to stay on as a professor

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — The Universities of Wisconsin Board of Regents voted unanimously Friday to fire a communications professor who was seeking to retain tenure after his dismissal as chancellor of one of the system's campuses for making pornographic films.

Joe Gow, who had served as chancellor of UW-La Crosse for nearly 17 years, argued last week that he should be allowed to retain a teaching position on campus. But university attorneys argued he was unethical, violated terms of his employment contract, damaged the reputation of the university and interfered with its mission.

The regents met in closed session Friday morning before voting in public to fire Gow. There was no discussion in open session before the board voted.

Gow has been on paid leave from his back-up faculty position since the regents fired him as chancellor in 2023, shortly after university leaders became aware of the videos, which were posted on pornographic websites. The case has garnered national attention both for the salaciousness of a high-profile university official making pornographic movies and publicly talking about it, and the questions it raises about free speech rights.

Gow argued that his videos and two e-books he and his wife, Carmen, have published about their experiences in adult films are protected by the First Amendment. The university's attorney countered that Gow's videos themselves are legal but they are not protected speech under his employment contract.

Gow said Friday that he plans to file a lawsuit against the university and accused the regents of stifling his free speech rights. He insisted in a statement that he produced the pornography on his own time without referencing the university system and questioned the system's commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression.

"The people who fired me today aren't a 'Board of Regents,' they're a 'Board of Hypocrites,'" Gow said in the statement. "They have zero credibility on free speech and expression."

Zach Greenberg, an attorney with free speech advocacy group Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, called the regents' decision "a major blow to academic freedom and free speech rights."

"FIRE has said time and time again: public universities cannot sacrifice the First Amendment to protect



their reputations," Greenberg said. "We're disappointed UW caved to donors and politicians by throwing a tenured professor under the bus."

Universities of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman has been working since he took the job in 2022 to navigate thorny relationships with Republican legislators who view the system as a liberal incubator. Last year, the GOP forced the system to scale back its diversity initiatives.

Rothman has been careful to avoid alienating conservatives any further as he seeks support for an \$855 million increase for the system in the next state budget. Earlier this month his administration ordered university leaders to maintain neutral viewpoints in their public statements. Retaining Gow in any capacity could open up the system to more Republican criticism and torpedo any chance of securing the additional funding.

Gow was criticized in 2018 for inviting porn actor Nina Hartley to speak on campus. She was paid \$5,000 out of student fees to appear. He developed the idea of bringing her to campus after shooting a pornographic video with her, the university said.

Gow and his wife's e-books were written under pseudonyms: "Monogamy with Benefits: How Porn Enriches Our Relationship" and "Married with Benefits — Our Real-Life Adult Industry Adventures." But they also star in a YouTube channel called "Sexy Healthy Cooking," in which the couple cooks meals with porn actors.

Gow holds a bachelor's degree in journalism and a master's degree in communications. He served as director of the communication studies program at Alfred University in New York state in the 1990s, earning the school's Excellence in Teaching Award three times.

But the chair of the UW-La Crosse communications department, Linda Dickmeyer, opposed Gow's return to the classroom. She said that because Gow has not taught for 20 years, he would be assigned general education courses, but she opposes letting him teach in any role.

## Takeaways on AP's story about challenges to forest recovery and replanting after wildfires

By TAMMY WEBBER, BRITTANY PETERSON and CAMILLE FASSET Associated Press

The U.S. is struggling to replant forests destroyed by increasingly intense wildfires, with many areas unlikely to recover on their own.

Researchers are studying which species are likely to survive — and where — as climate change makes it difficult or impossible for many forests to regrow. But they say the U.S. also lacks enough seed collection, seedling production and workers trained to replant trees on a scale needed to offset accelerating losses.

The Forest Service says the biggest roadblock is the yearslong task of completing environmental and cultural assessments and preparing severely burned land for replanting.

Here's what to know:

### Climate impact

Larger and more intense fires stoked by climate change destroy seed trees that normally allow regeneration or leave burn scars too large for trees to naturally bridge the gap.

Climate has changed so markedly trees often can't regrow. Even when seedlings take hold, drought and repeat fires often kill them.

Especially hot fires also can harden the ground and leave barren slopes susceptible to washing away in rainstorms, polluting waterways. Researchers say some once-forested areas in the Southwest and West may never recover and instead will convert to grassland or shrubland.

### Reforestation gap

Nineteen of the 20 largest wildfires ever recorded in the contiguous U.S. have occurred in Western states since 2000, according to Sean Parks, a Forest Service research ecologist. That's when the region slipped into an ongoing megadrought.

The U.S. once was able to reliably replant burned forests. But now the gap between areas that need replanting and the ability to do so has grown to at least 3.8 million acres (1.5 million hectares) — and

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that could triple by 2050, said Solomon Z. Dobrowski, a University of Montana forest management expert. Researchers say the odds of forests growing back will worsen regardless of fire intensity because of hotter, drier weather.

## Targeted tree planting

Researchers are trying to find which seedling species survive and where. Survival generally is worse at lower elevations, where it's hotter, drier and more open — so replanting the same trees in the same areas is likely to fail.

Scientists are replanting at higher elevations and also studying whether seedlings survive better when planted in clusters or near trees that might provide shade and aid water uptake. Some researchers are even asking whether different species should replace trees wiped out by fire.

University of New Mexico forest ecologist Matthew Hurteau said the 2011 Los Conchas fire decimated a huge swath of Ponderosa pine forest, and most replanting efforts failed.

So he planted seedlings of different species at various elevations and on slopes facing different directions, then monitored soil moisture, temperature and humidity. A resulting computer model can predict the probability a seedling will survive in a particular spot with about 63% accuracy, and will be used for planting this fall.

"Let's not do the old plant-and-pray" method, said Hurteau. "Let's plant where we know that their chance of survival is quite high."

Forest Service rules generally require planting the same species at the same elevations as before a fire, but the agency will "need to be flexible moving forward," said Jason Sieg, acting supervisor of the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests & Pawnee National Grassland.

For now, that might mean replanting at different elevations or collecting seeds from another location. Eventually, researchers say it could require planting species not found in an area originally — an option many have resisted.

"I've seen people go from saying, 'Absolutely, we cannot move trees around' to, 'Well, maybe let's try it at least, and do a few experiments to see if this will work,'" said Camille Stevens-Rumann, interim director at the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute.

"We need to start being creative if we want trees on our landscapes," she said. "We're in a place of such drastic climate change that we are not talking about whether or not some of these places will be a different kind of forest, but whether or not they will be forests at all."

## Restoration challenges

Hurteau, the University of New Mexico researcher, said ecologists and the state realized there would not be enough seedlings to reforest millions of acres burned in wildfires.

So several New Mexico universities and the state's forestry division started the New Mexico Reforestation Center to build a nursery that could produce 5 million seedlings per year for government, tribal and private lands. The first seedlings will be planted this year.

The number of Forest Service nurseries — once financed by deposits on timber sales — dropped from 14 to six in the 1990s as timber harvests declined and habitat protections were enacted, according to a Forest Service report on the nurseries' history.

Most Western seedling production is private and occurs in Oregon, California and Washington, said Solomon Dobrowski, a University of Montana forest management expert.

In places like New Mexico and the Rocky Mountains, "we don't really have a base of facilities to support widespread reforestation," Dobrowski said. "We're (asking) 'What's going to fill the gap?'"

The Forest Service is modernizing nurseries and seeking ways to expand internal capacity and work with private industry, states and groups like the New Mexico Reforestation Center. But officials say the biggest challenge is that the number of intense wildfires is outpacing the ability to prepare sites for replanting.

Experts say more seed collection and trained workers are needed to make even modest progress in closing the reforestation gap. And they say public and private cooperation is essential.

Seed collection is expensive and labor-intensive. It takes a few years for a typical Western conifer to

develop cones before contractors harvest them. Growing, planting and monitoring seedlings amid frequent droughts adds uncertainty, time and money.

Experts say there will be areas where trees never return but it's critical that the U.S. does as much possible in a thoughtful way.

"Trees live for hundreds of years so we need to be thinking about what's right as we plant trees today," Hurteau said. "Are we putting the right species and densities on the landscape given what the next 100, 200 and 300 years will look like?"

## **Jews and Catholics warn against Trump's latest loyalty test for religious voters**

By DAVID CRARY and HOLLY MEYER Associated Press

Former President Donald Trump recently reissued his loyalty test to religious Americans, declaring that he can best protect their freedoms while preemptively blaming members of certain faiths should he lose the presidential election in November.

Jews and Catholics can vote for him and ace the test, but those who don't, he says, "need their head examined." If he loses, Trump added, "Jewish people would have a lot to do with the loss."

Among the Jewish leaders appalled at Trump's remarks was Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism — an umbrella group for more than 800 Reform synagogues in North America.

"Your words preemptively blaming Jews for your potential election loss is of a piece with millennia of antisemitic lies about Jewish power," Jacobs said in a social media post. "It puts a target on American Jews. And it makes you an ally not to our vulnerable community but to those who wish us harm. Stop."

Trump's speeches for years have hewed to divisive "us" versus "them" messaging, but tying those themes to specific religious Americans who oppose him is out of line and even dangerous, according to rhetoric experts, religious leaders and academics.

"Non-Jews shouldn't express public opinions about what is or isn't good Judaism and non-Catholics shouldn't express public opinions about what is or isn't good Catholicism," said Steven Millies, a public theology professor at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

"Not only is it bad form, but it's also an ignorant waste of oxygen."

Asked to respond to criticism from Jewish leaders, Trump campaign press secretary Karoline Leavitt sent statements from herself and several of Trump's Jewish supporters. The statements didn't directly address the potential blaming of Jews for a Trump defeat; rather, they depicted Trump as a stronger supporter of Israel than President Joe Biden and Trump's Democratic opponent, Vice President Kamala Harris.

"Jewish Americans and Jewish leaders around the world recognize that President Trump did more for them and the State of Israel than any President in history," Leavitt said via email. "The bottom line is that Kamala Harris and Joe Biden cave to Far-Left extremists and terrorists while President Trump will protect Jewish Americans and put American citizens first."

Trump's latest provocative comments came in a span of four days. His warnings about Jewish voters were in Sept. 19 speeches to Jewish donors and the Israeli-American Council in Washington. His remarks about Catholics came on Sept. 22 in a post on Truth Social.

Matthew Boedy, who studies religious rhetoric as a professor at the University of North Georgia, said Trump has adopted spiritual warfare rhetoric, which is commonplace in certain Christian circles.

"Those who gave him that rhetoric saw Satan or evil as the enemy. Now that enemy is anyone — Jew, Christian, Muslim — who stands in his way," Boedy said via email, calling it dangerous to democracy and religion.

"Trump always makes his religious followers — especially Christians — choose. They have to choose him over pluralism, over morality, over evangelism," said Boedy, a Protestant.

"If God is already on your side theologically, it's not a far leap to say he should be on your side politically. That isn't new to American politics," Boedy said. "Trump is only making that divide advantageous to him. He's furthering that which was there, but he is also adding his own weight to it. Making it worse."

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David Gibson, director of the Center on Religion and Culture at Jesuit-run Fordham University, said that in past elections, "for a non-Catholic like Trump to be setting himself up as the savior of Catholics, or Jews for that matter, would have been political insanity."

"But it's Trump, and conservatives who would attack a Democrat for such language are cheering for the Republican nominee," Gibson added in an email. "There are many reasons, the most obvious is that they like Trump more than they heed their own church."

Gibson also suggested that Trump's tough stance on immigration, which includes calls for mass deportations, is at odds with Catholic teaching.

"Catholics listening to the increasingly Nativist rhetoric on immigration from Trump and even his running mate, JD Vance, who converted to Catholicism in 2019, ought to have their hearts examined if they support that," Gibson said.

Professor Jennifer Mercieca, a historian of American political rhetoric at Texas A&M University, said typical politicians seek to connect to voters based on shared policy beliefs, not by demanding religious loyalty.

"But Trump isn't a typical politician, and he's very concerned about loyalty," she said. "He divides the world up into 'us' versus 'them' and tries to use those divisions to gain power."

"It's especially dangerous to attempt to divide people based upon religious identity," said Mercieca, author of "Demagogue for President: The Rhetorical Genius of Donald Trump." "The kind of language Trump is using here is more like that used by an authoritarian personality cult leader."

Trump's recent comment about blaming Jews if he loses came at an event that also featured Jewish megadonor Miriam Adelson, widow of the late casino magnate Sheldon Adelson. She introduced Trump as "a true friend of the Jewish people."

Among the pro-Trump statements provided to The Associated Press by Leavitt was one from Ellie Cohan, who served during the Trump administration as deputy special envoy for combating antisemitism.

Trump "is absolutely correct in challenging our assumptions about voting on auto-pilot and failing to comprehend that the Democrat Party, which has been hijacked by its far-left base, is no longer a home for the Jewish people," Cohan's statement said.

Adelson and Cohan represent the portion of U.S. Jews that strongly supports Trump. In 2020, he received about 30% of Jewish Americans' votes compared to 70% for Biden, according to AP VoteCast.

The criticism of Trump's recent remarks came from the center as well as the left of the national Jewish community.

The American Jewish Committee — a prominent advocacy group that strives to broadly represent Jews in the U.S. and abroad — issued a sharply critical statement. It took issue with Trump's suggestion that if 40% of the U.S. Jewish electorate voted for him, "That means 60% are voting for the enemy."

"Setting up anyone to say 'we lost because of the Jews' is outrageous and dangerous," the AJC said. "Thousands of years of history have shown that scapegoating Jews can lead to antisemitic hate and violence."

"Some Jews will vote for President Trump and some will vote for Vice President Harris," the AJC added. "None of us, by supporting the candidate we choose, is voting for the enemy."

To the left of center, a harsh denunciation of Trump came from Lauren Maunus, political director of IfNotNow — an organization of U.S. Jews that has accused the Israeli government of oppressive policies toward Palestinians and protested Israel's military offensive in Gaza.

"Trump doubled down on his longstanding pattern of scapegoating Jews," Maunus said. "Make no mistake: This is a clear and flagrant instruction to his fanatical base of extremists to target Jews with retributive violence if he should lose."

Some Jews found a positive twist to Trump's remarks, as Betsy Frank of Mattituck, New York, conveyed in a letter published Sept. 23 in The New York Times.

"As a proud Jewish woman who believes in Israel's right to defend itself but supports the United States and everything it stands for even more, I would not vote for Donald Trump for any office," she wrote. "If he loses the election, I will gladly take the blame."

## As many forests fail to recover from wildfires, replanting efforts face huge odds -- and obstacles

By TAMMY WEBBER, BRITTANY PETERSON and CAMILLE FASSETT Associated Press  
BELLVUE, Colo. (AP) — Camille Stevens-Rumann crouched in the dirt and leaned over evergreen seedlings, measuring how much each had grown in seven months.

"That's two to three inches of growth on the spruce," said Stevens-Rumann, interim director at the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute.

Her research team is monitoring several species planted two years ago on a slope burned during the devastating 2020 Cameron Peak fire, which charred 326 square miles (844 square kilometers) in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado.

They want to determine which species are likely to survive at various elevations, because climate change makes it difficult or impossible for many forests to regrow even decades after wildfires.

As the gap between burned areas and replanting widens year after year, scientists see big challenges beyond where to put seedlings.

The U.S. currently lacks the ability to collect enough seeds from living trees and the nursery capacity to grow seedlings for replanting on a scale anywhere close to stemming accelerating losses, researchers say. It also doesn't have enough trained workers to plant and monitor trees.

The Forest Service said the biggest roadblock to replanting on public land is completing environmental and cultural assessments and preparing severely burned areas so they're safe to plant. That can take years — while more forests are lost to fire.

"If we have the seedlings but we don't have the sites prepped ... we can't put the seedlings out there," said Stephanie Miller, assistant director of a reforestation program.

Scientists, private industry and environmental agencies are acutely aware of the challenges as they consider how to restore forested landscapes in an increasingly arid region.

"We need to start being creative if we want trees on our landscapes," Stevens-Rumann said. "We're in a place of such drastic climate change that we are not talking about whether or not some of these places will be a different kind of forest, but whether or not they will be forests at all."

### Reforestation gap

Four years after the Cameron Peak fire — the largest in recorded Colorado history — a smattering of wild raspberry bushes and seedlings has taken root. But the mountainside mostly is dotted with charred trees.

In burn scars across the West and Southwest, areas of forests may never grow back on their own.

Larger and more intense fires destroy trees that normally provide seeds for regeneration or leave burn scars so large trees can't naturally bridge the gap. The climate also has changed so markedly that many forests can't regrow in the same places. Even when seedlings take hold, drought and new fires often kill them.

Nineteen of the 20 largest wildfires ever recorded in the contiguous U.S. have occurred in Western states since 2000, according to Sean Parks, a Forest Service research ecologist. That's when the region slipped into an ongoing megadrought.

The U.S. once was able to reliably replant burned forests. But now the gap between areas in the West that need replanting after fire and the ability to do so has grown to at least 3.8 million acres (1.5 million hectares) — and that could triple by 2050, said Solomon Z. Dobrowski, a University of Montana forest management expert and a study lead author.

Forests are burning more often and especially intense and hot, which can destroy seeds that normally survive fire, harden the ground like concrete and leave barren slopes susceptible to washing away in rainstorms, polluting waterways.

In 22 years since the Hayman fire on Colorado's front range burned 182 square miles (471 square kilometers) of forest, there has been almost no tree regeneration in the most severely burned areas, researchers and the Forest Service said.

In California's Sierra Nevada, where up to 20% of the world's mature giant sequoias and their seeds

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have been killed by fire in recent years, there are massive openings without seedlings. A U.S. Geological Survey study concluded some groves will never recover without replanting.

But researchers say the odds of forests growing back will worsen regardless of fire intensity because of more heat and drought.

That means burned forest could convert to shrubland and grassland, leading to loss of snowpack that provides drinking water and helps irrigate crops.

"Over 70% of our water in the western U.S. comes from our forested ecosystems and our mountains," Stevens-Rumann said. "And for that water to come the way we want it ... at the right time throughout the year, we need to have forests, not just grasslands."

Targeted tree planting

When forest ecologist Matthew Hurteau joined the University of New Mexico nine years ago, he took in the aftermath of the 2011 Los Conchas fire that decimated a huge swath of Ponderosa pine forest.

Though the area had been replanted several times, most seedlings died, Hurteau said. While the average survival in the Southwest is about 25%, he said only about 13% of trees planted most recently in the Los Conchas burn scar have survived.

So he planted seedlings of different species at various elevations and on slopes facing different directions, then monitored the soil moisture, temperature and humidity.

A resulting computer model can predict the probability a seedling will survive in a particular spot with about 63% accuracy. It will be used to inform planting this fall.

"Let's not do the old plant-and-pray" method, said Hurteau. "Let's plant where we know that their chance of survival is quite high, and in places where the chance ... is quite low, let's just forego planting there."

Researchers say seedling survival is worst at lower elevations, where it's hotter, drier and more open — so replanting the same trees in the same areas is likely to fail.

They're experimenting with planting near surviving trees that might provide shade for seedlings and aid water uptake and with planting in clusters that leave gaps in the landscape. Some are even asking whether different species should replace trees wiped out by fire.

Environmental groups working on private land burned by the Cameron Peak fire are replanting Ponderosa pines 500 feet (152 meters) higher because of climate change and near fallen trees that can provide shade, said Megan Maiolo-Heath, spokeswoman for the Coalition for the Poudre River Watershed.

So far, 84% of trees planted last year remain alive, though long-term survival is uncertain. "Any work in the environmental world at this point can feel daunting and overwhelming," Maiolo-Heath said. "So I think just taking small bites ... and trying not to get too overwhelmed is the way to go about it."

Forest Service rules generally require planting the same species at the same elevations as before a fire, but it's increasingly clear the agency will "need to be flexible moving forward," said Jason Sieg, acting supervisor of the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests & Pawnee National Grassland.

Relying on research data, Sieg said, "We'll be able to plan a strategy around how we set this landscape up for the greatest chance of success ... long term."

For now, that might mean replanting at different elevations or collecting seeds from another location. Eventually, researchers say it could require the controversial option of planting trees not found in an area originally.

Additional research and caution are necessary, researchers and the Forest Service said. But more people are warming up to the idea.

"I've seen people go from saying, 'Absolutely, we cannot move trees around' to, 'Well, let's maybe let's try it at least, and do a few experiments to see if this will work,'" said Stevens-Rumann, the Colorado scientist.

Restoration challenges

Four years ago, researchers and New Mexico's state forester wrote a reforestation plan for the state, where 4,500 square miles (11,655 square kilometers) of forest were charred between 2011 and 2021, leaving up to 2.6 million acres (1.5 million hectares) in need of replanting.

That was before the 2022 Calf Canyon-Hermits Peak Fire — the most destructive in state history — burned another 534 square miles (1,383 square kilometers).

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They soon discovered a big problem.

"We realized that we were never going to have enough seedlings to meet the objectives," said Hurteau, the University of New Mexico researcher.

The number of Forest Service nurseries — once financed by deposits on timber sales — dropped from 14 to six in the 1990s as timber harvests declined and habitat protections were enacted, according to a Forest Service report on the nurseries' history.

Most Western seedling production is private and occurs in Oregon, California and Washington, Dobrowski said.

In places like New Mexico and the Rocky Mountains, "we don't really have a base of facilities to support widespread reforestation," the researcher said. "We're (asking) 'What's going to fill the gap?'"

In New Mexico, several universities and the state's forestry division started the New Mexico Reforestation Center with a goal of building a nursery that can produce 5 million seedlings per year for government, tribal and private lands. The first seedlings will be planted this year.

But experts say much more nursery capacity, seed collection and trained workers are needed to make even modest progress in closing the reforestation gap. And they say public and private sector cooperation will be essential.

"There's all these bottlenecks," Hurteau said. "We've just underinvested in reforestation for decades in the U.S. There's a lot of investment in human capital that's going to have to happen."

Seed collection, for example, requires the right weather and is expensive and labor-intensive. It takes a few years for a typical Western conifer to develop cones. Then contractors must harvest them, typically by climbing trees. Growing, planting and monitoring seedlings amid more frequent droughts adds to the uncertainty, time and money.

The Forest Service said its biggest challenge is simply that the number of intense wildfires is outpacing the ability to prepare sites for replanting.

But the agency is also modernizing nurseries and seeking ways to either expand internal capacity or work with private industry, states and groups like the New Mexico Reforestation Center.

"This is an all-hands-on effort," said Miller, from the reforestation program.

Researchers say the challenges complicate a Biden administration goal to plant a billion trees over 10 years in national forests, where it identified a nearly 4 million-acre (1.6 million-hectare) backlog.

But money provided for reforestation in the 2021 infrastructure bill enabled the agency to clear 15% of the backlog, Miller said. "If we can get more site preparation done, that would be excellent so that we can move forward a little bit faster."

Experts say there clearly will be areas where trees never return but it's critical that the U.S. does as much possible in a thoughtful way.

"Trees live for hundreds of years so we need to be thinking about what's right as we plant trees today," Hurteau said. "Are we putting the right species and densities on the landscape given what the next 100, 200 and 300 years will look like?"

## Today in History: September 28, Alexander Fleming discovers penicillin

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, Sept. 28, the 272nd day of 2024. There are 94 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Sept. 28, 1928, Scottish medical researcher Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin, the first effective antibiotic.

Also on this date:

In 1781, American forces in the Revolutionary War, backed by a French fleet, began their successful siege of Yorktown, Virginia.

In 1924, three U.S. Army planes landed in Seattle, having completed the first round-the-world trip by

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air in 175 days.

In 1941, Ted Williams became the most recent American League baseball player to hit over .400 for a season, batting .406 for the Boston Red Sox.

In 1962, a federal appeals court found Mississippi Gov. Ross Barnett in civil contempt for blocking the admission of James Meredith, a Black student, to the University of Mississippi.

In 1995, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat signed an accord at the White House ending Israel's military occupation of West Bank cities and laying the foundation for a Palestinian state.

In 2000, capping a 12-year battle, the U.S. government approved use of the abortion pill RU-486.

In 2020, the worldwide death toll from the coronavirus pandemic reached 1 million, according to a count by Johns Hopkins University.

In 2022, Hurricane Ian barreled ashore in southwestern Florida as a massive Category 4 storm. About 2.5 million people were ordered to evacuate before the storm hit the coast with maximum sustained winds of 150 mph (241 kph).

Today's Birthdays: Actor Brigitte Bardot is 90. Filmmaker John Sayles is 74. Football Hall of Famer Steve Largent is 70. Zydeco musician C.J. Chenier (sheh-NEER') is 67. Hockey Hall of Famer Grant Fuhr is 62. Actor-comedian Janeane Garofalo (juh-NEEN' guh-RAH'-fuh-loh) is 60. Actor Maria Canals-Barrera is 58. Actor Mira Sorvino is 57. Actor Naomi Watts is 56. Olympic gold medal swimmer Lenny Krayzelburg is 49. Rapper Jeezy is 47. Golf Hall of Famer Se Ri Pak is 47. Pop-rock singer St. Vincent is 42. Actor Hilary Duff is 37. Boxer Terence "Bud" Crawford is 37. Tennis player Marin Čilić is 36. Actor Keir Gilchrist is 32.