LINCOLN JOURNAL STAR

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LOCAL, B1

US Men's World Cup success proves both illusive and elusive.

SPORTS, C1

A trio of pasta recipes for your rotation.

FOOD, D1

Wednesday, July 8, 2026 WHERE **YOUR STORY** LIVES journalstar.com

HARD KNOCKS ON PINEWOOD

KENNETH FERRIERA PHOTOS, JOURNAL STAR

Lydia Robinson, playing Annie, right, performs during a dress rehearsal for "Annie" on Monday at Pinewood Bowl. Pinewood Performing Arts' annual outdoor musical will run from Thursday through Sunday and July 16-18.

Annual outdoor musical run returns this week with 'Annie'

SUSIE BOVAIRD
Lincoln Journal Star

The beloved Broadway classic "Annie" is headlining Pinewood Performing Arts' annual summer musical as the company marks its 76th year.

Directed by J.D. Madsen with musical direction by Alex Wooten and choreography by Isabelle Bertrand, "Annie" will be performed nightly from Thursday through Sunday and July 16-18 at Pinewood Bowl, 3201 S. Coddington Ave.

"It is a fairly unique thing to be able to do a show outside with such

Please see **'ANNIE'**, Page A6

Cora Lakik, playing Molly, top, is lifted up by Marley King, playing Tessie, during a dress rehearsal for "Annie" on Monday at Pinewood Bowl.

Special ed advocates wary of restructuring

Dept. of Education plans to offload oversight responsibilities

LIVIA ZISKEY
Lincoln Journal Star

As the Trump administration plans to offload some of the Education Department's most important responsibilities related to special education, disability advocates in Nebraska say the decision could weaken protections for some of the state's most vulnerable students.

An interagency agreement calls for the federal Department of Health and Human Services to take over much of the work of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. OSERS manages programs that support students with disabilities and ensures states follow the landmark Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division will now be responsible for investigating civil rights complaints referred by the Education Department.

The agreements were announced in June, with Education Secretary Linda McMahon saying the changes will "break down the bureaucratic barriers and strengthen the coordination of resources to improve programs that serve infants, toddlers, children, and adults."

It's not yet clear how exactly the partnerships will work in practice, but advocates say the moves signify another step in a larger plan to crumble civil rights protections for students with disabilities.

"This one decision is in conjunction with many other things that are happening from a federal level," said Lauren Micek Vargas, a former special education teacher and attorney who founded Education Rights Counsel. "A dismantling of educational rights and protections for individuals with disabilities across the nation, but specifically in Nebraska."

Micek Vargas

When she found out about the interagency agreements, Micek Vargas said her immediate concern was the swiftness of federal enforcement and the government's ability to hold educational systems accountable.

Please see **SPECIAL ED**, Page A2

NATO showcases arms deals

Trump declines to rule out more troop withdrawals from Europe

TUVAN GUMRUKCU, HUMEYRA PAMUK AND SABINE SIEBOLD
Reuters

ANKARA — NATO leaders unveiled arms deals worth tens of billions of dollars in Turkey on Tuesday, driving home the message that they are heeding U.S. calls to spend more to defend Europe even as President Donald Trump said he felt let down.

Leaders convened for a summit in the capital Ankara, hoping to project unity after another bruising year in which the Iran war once again exposed cracks in the alliance that has underpinned Western security since the end of World War II.

In a meeting with President Tayyip Erdogan, Trump said he might have boycotted the NATO summit had it not been for his warm relations with the Turkish leader, and did not rule out further troop withdrawals from Europe.

"Well, we're going to see. I was very disappointed with NATO," he said, singling out Britain, France, Germany and Italy for not doing enough to support the U.S. war on Iran.

Trump added that "we weren't treated well" by the allies, even as he reiterated that he did not want or need their help.

"Before I asked, they said they wouldn't be there, and we've invested trillions of dollars in NATO," Trump said.

Trump said he spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy before the summit about ending the war that started in February 2022 when Russia invaded its neighbor.

Please see **NATO**, Page A2

JONATHAN ERNST, REUTERS

U.S. President Donald Trump, right, is greeted by Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday after arriving at Etimesgut Air Base to take part in a NATO summit, in Ankara, Turkey.

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Weather
Warm; a p.m. t-storm
High: 93 **Low:** 71
Forecast: D6

Inside

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NATO

From A1

“I think they both want to make a deal. It’s too bad it took so long … Something’s going to come out,” he said.

While sharply criticizing long-standing U.S. allies, Trump announced Washington would lift sanctions on Turkey that were imposed in 2020 over Ankara’s purchase of Russian air defense missiles. He also expressed a willingness to sell Turkey F-35 fighter jets.

The move would be a major gesture to Erdogan and remove a long-standing irritant in bilateral ties.

Even as Washington and Ankara have enjoyed warmer ties under Trump, Turkey’s 2019 acquisition of the Russian S-400 system has long been a sore point.

In response to that purchase, Washington in 2020 imposed sanctions on a major Turkish defense company and removed Turkey from the F-35 stealth fighter jet program, where Ankara was also a production partner.

Congress passed a law prohibiting any F-35 sales to Turkey as long as Ankara retained the S-400s, saying the Russian system posed a security risk to U.S.-made combat aircraft.

Trump’s visit to Turkey is the first by a U.S. president in 11 years. He was welcomed by Erdogan with a lavish state ceremony and both leaders sang each other’s praises in their public remarks. Under Trump, Turkey’s deteriorating human rights track record has never been a topic of much concern for Washington.

ERIC LEE, REUTERS

A U.S. Marine Corps F-35B performs a flyover Friday during celebrations marking the 250th anniversary of the United States over the World War II Memorial in Washington.

Iran war

Tensions within NATO, already strained over Ukraine and Trump’s desire to wrest Greenland from fellow NATO member Denmark, have deepened since the U.S. attacked Iran in February. Trump has repeatedly criticized NATO members for insufficient support in the conflict, threatening to quit the alliance.

On Tuesday, he renewed his push to wrest Greenland from Denmark.

“That should be controlled by the United States, not by Denmark,” he said. “That’s what hurt my relationship with NATO, because Greenland doesn’t help Denmark. Denmark doesn’t spend money to really help Greenland, but it’s an important part for the United States.”

Speaking at the summit, Denmark’s Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said she expected allies to respect her country’s sovereignty and accept that Greenland is not for sale.

European officials insist they largely honored commitments to let the U.S. use their airspace and bases, despite not having been consulted about a deeply unpopular war that roiled their economies.

The U.S. has also announced troop withdrawals from Europe and launched a six-month review of its military presence there.

European officials had said they were braced for a repeat of some of Trump’s recent criticism and cannot be sure of a positive outcome, in part due to Trump’s volatile relationship with some leaders, most recently seen in a feud with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

NATO members are expected to reaffirm support for Ukraine, with Zelenskyy urgently calling for more air defense supplies.

Underscoring the stakes, Russia hammered the Kyiv region with missiles and drones on Monday, killing at least 28 people and exposing Ukraine’s critical shortage of U.S.-made air-defense interceptors.

Defense industry

NATO members have repeatedly tried to show Trump that they are stepping up to the plate.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said Monday Europeans made “staggering” increases in defense spending.

Before Trump’s arrival, Rutte trumpeted a series of initiatives and deals at a defense industry forum, and called for a defense industry “revolution” across the alliance, warning over Russia’s massive military spending as well as China, North Korea and Iran.

“We don’t have the luxury of time. We need capabilities now to ensure we remain ready. The security situation demands it,” Rutte said. “The hum of machinery must become a roar.”

The deals, estimated to be worth at least $50 billion according to one NATO official, included European countries buying surveillance drones from U.S. company Northrop Grumman, and NATO buying planes from Sweden’s Saab.

Saab shares at one point rose more than 5% as investors bet on the company benefiting from European rearmament. Morgan Stanley upgraded the stock.

Europe’s defense sector has often been criticized as fragmented and saddled with red tape and rivalries between companies and countries. That has left Europe more reliant on purchases of U.S. weapons.

Weak economic growth and the need to maintain generous state welfare provisions have also made defense spending a tougher sell in Europe.

Special ed

From A1

By splitting up duties the Education Department formerly handled alone, Micek Vargas said there could be added confusion for families already navigating a complex system.

“Specifically in the education realm, when a child is only in school for 180 days each year, we really should be making sure that we’re doing things swiftly,” she said.

Jennifer Stuhmer, the executive director of The Arc of Lincoln, said she used to know who to call when her son was experiencing issues with his individualized education plan. Now, as supports become more fragmented, she fears families won’t know where to turn for help.

“It hurts my heart,” she said.

‘Kick us while we’re down’

Maggie Thompson, a Lincoln resident, said the decision by the Education Department worries her. Thompson’s son recently graduated from Lincoln High School and had an individualized education plan. Her daughter will be a senior this fall and has a 504 plan, which provides her with learning accommodations.

Though she’s been impressed with the care her children have received through Lincoln Public Schools, Thompson said a constant shortage of special education staff and resources made it difficult for her children to learn to their full potential.

“I have been so impressed with how much my kids’ special ed teams have always done with the very little that they have,” Thompson said. “So when the rest of this started coming out, it just kind of felt like, what a weird way to kick us while we’re down.”

The Trump administration has vowed to give states more power over education, which could mean Nebraska would be in charge of oversight of special education within the state.

That raises alarm bells for Thompson, who has worked in the state’s child welfare system.

“Speaking of understaffed and under-resourced already, now we’re going to add this additional layer onto an already very fragile and cracking system,” she said. “It seems like a recipe for disaster.”

Oversight changes are ‘frightening’

Tricia Kingsley, a special education advocate who raised two children with autism, said it’s scary to think about the Department of Health and Human Services being in charge of special education oversight.

Kingsley worked for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services from 2012 to 2017. She oversaw education for the department, a position she said was created for her at the time because of her background in special education advocacy. During those five years, Kingsley said she discovered education was not a priority within the department, and she sees that being the same at the federal level.

“There were a lot of unhealthy practices,” Kingsley said. “So the idea that you’re now going to take special education and give it to Health and Human Services is frightening. They’re not prepared.”

Kingsley said she had to advocate heavily for her children to experience an inclusive education within LPS, attending every IEP and 504 plan meeting. Now, with the Department of Education effectively offloading special education oversight, Kingsley said that inclusion will be even harder to come by.

“It’s just another pathway to say our kids are different,” she said. “It’s another way to separate children and put them in a system that’s already trying to cut services.”

Thompson said she envisions a situation in Nebraska where families and children will have to fight harder for their rights. It’s not just the shifts in policy that worry her, she said, but the shifts in how people view and speak about individuals with disabilities.

Her daughter said she’s been hearing ableist slurs more frequently at school. Gov. Jim Pillen was criticized earlier this year for his repeated use of the term “libtards” during a telephone town hall.

“Once you start to change the landscape to where it’s like, ‘OK, it’s really not the federal government’s job to enforce civil rights for our disabled population,’ — that says something,” Thompson said.

Reach the writer at lziskey@journalstar.com.

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Deli fixture
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10 “Cats” poet
11 Trumpet sound
12 Gall
13 Rubber source
14 Ump’s call
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16 Pitcher’s stat
17 Gibbon, for one
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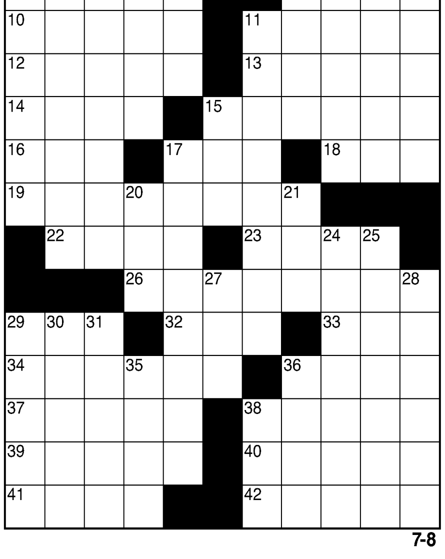
Yesterday’s answer



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Corrections
P.O. Box 81689
Lincoln, NE 68501

Lotteries

Powerball (July 6)
17, 44, 63, 66, 67
PB: 4 PP: 21
Jackpot: $434 million

Mega Millions (July 3)
5, 9, 29, 47, 57
MB: 16
Jackpot: $576 million

Lotto America (July 6)
12, 16, 19, 21, 23
SB: 10 ASB: 3
Jackpot: $32.5 million

Millionaire for Life (July 6)
2, 8, 32, 54, 56
MB: 3

Pick 5 (July 6)
4, 21, 28, 35, 38

Pick 4 (July 6)
9, 6, 2, 8

Pick 3 (July 6)
0, 9, 9

My Day (July 6)
4, 15, 5

2 by 2 (July 6)
Red: 9, 26 White: 8, 17

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