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WATERTOWN PUBLIC OPINION

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Another forecasting tool is thrown out



An aerial view shows flash flood damage along the banks of the Guadalupe River in Kerrville, Texas, on July 11. CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

Experts: Government cuts damage U.S. status as global science leader

Dinah Voyles Pulver
USA TODAY

The heart-wrenching July 4 flooding in Texas served as a stark reminder of the importance of accurate and timely weather forecasts.

As extreme rainfall events grow more intense, such tragedies are expected to increase. Further improvement to forecasts is critical, but meteorologists worry that with the additional cuts planned by the Trump administration, the nation's weather and climate research programs won't be able to keep up.

The latest blow was the announcement by the U.S. Navy that it would no longer transmit data from aging satellites past June 30, roughly 15 months earlier than expected. Later, the department extended the deadline to July 31.

Without those satellite images, hurricane forecast accuracy could be compromised, say current and former scientists with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Polar researchers, who use the images to measure the extent of sea ice, hope to acquire the same data through a Japanese government satellite instead.

In any other year, the satellite snafu might not have gathered much attention. But this summer, it exacerbates mounting concerns about the accuracy of weather prediction amid contract cancellations, staff reductions and other Trump administration efforts to reduce the federal bureaucracy.

"You can't keep taking tools away from people and expect them to get the same result," said Andy Hazelton, a hurricane scientist at the University of Miami. Hazelton had been hired as a NOAA scientist last October and was dismissed in the Trump administration's widespread agency layoffs.

USA TODAY interviewed more than a dozen industry veterans, including a half-dozen former NOAA scientists, as well as independent researchers, who all

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Christian nationalism intensifies culture war

Murray Evans
The Oklahoman | USA TODAY NETWORK

A century after the famed Scopes "Monkey" Trial in Tennessee brought the concept of teaching evolution in public schools into a courtroom, thus testing cultural and religious norms of that era, another state is pushing to put the Bible back into the regular classroom rotation.

Led by firebrand state schools Superintendent Ryan Walters, Oklahoma is forcing courts – as Tennessee did in 1925 – to wrestle with the thorny question of just how much religion is permissible in public schools.

From a U.S. Supreme Court case involving what would have been the first public religious charter school in the nation to a Bible-teaching edict issued for schools by Walters and new social studies academic standards infused with references to Christianity and 2020 election-denial language, Oklahoma is at the center of a national conversation about Christian nationalism being taught to students.

"Christian nationalism, even if people don't recognize it as such, is hugely popular in many circles, and in Oklahoma, I think specifically, for all of the attention that Ryan Walters gets, he is just the most extreme version of that Christian nationalism – maybe the most bombastic of it," said Trey Orndorff, a professor of political science at Oklahoma Christian University near Edmond. "But you take him away, and it's not like Christian nationalism falls apart. ... Those are very popular positions in red states."

"Once upon a time, Christian nationalism was a niche position within Protestant Christianity. In the last few years, it's certainly not a minority position any more. It has a critical mass," Orndorff added.

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A darling of the far-right wing of the Republican Party, Oklahoma schools Superintendent Ryan Walters frequently appears as a guest on opinion shows on national TV networks.

NATHAN J. FISH/THE OKLAHOMAN

ICE says 'MS-13 kingpin' among 2 people arrested

Chris Mueller
Des Moines Register | USA TODAY NETWORK

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrested a man from El Salvador on July 9 in the Omaha area who it said is an "MS-13 kingpin" and one of that country's most wanted fugitives.

The man is wanted in El Salvador for the aggravated homicide of five people, attempted aggravated homicide, deprivation of liberty and terrorist organization affiliation, ICE said in a news release.

A spokesperson for the agency told the Omaha World-Herald that it was not releasing the man's name because his arrest is part of an ongoing investigation. The news release says he is a high-ranking member of the "violent MS-13 gang" and is among El Salvador's top 100 most wanted fugitives.

ICE said it arrested another man, 30-year-old Rene Saul Escobar Ochoa, describing him as a "known MS-13 gang member" who it said was also in the country illegally. He is accused of giving orders to fellow gang members to commit a variety of crimes, including multiple homicides, extortion, imprisonment and drug trafficking, the news release says.

Both men were arrested without incident in what the agency called a "targeted enforcement action."

"These illegal aliens didn't just sneak into our country, they brought with them a legacy of violence, terror and death," Homeland Security Investigations Kansas City Special Agent Mark Zito, whose office oversees Omaha, said in the news release. "They thought they could hide in America's heartland, but they were sadly

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A spokesperson for Immigration and Customs Enforcement said it was not releasing the name of the "MS-13 kingpin" because his arrest is part of an ongoing investigation. PROVIDED BY U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT

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