

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Tuesday, March 18

Senior Menu: Parmesan chicken breast, wild rice, italian blend, cinnamon apple sauce, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Scones.

School Lunch: Pasta with meat sauce.

Middle School Talent Show, 7 p.m., GHS Gym

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.



## Wednesday, March 19

Senior Menu: Hot pork sandwich, sweet potato, green beans, pears.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal.

School Lunch: Cheese stuffed breadstick, Marinara sauce.

Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Lenten Supper, 6 p.m. (Host - Sarah Circle), worship 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Lenten Service, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.

## Thursday, March 20

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, corn, apple crisp, garlic toast.

State A Boys Basketball Tournament, Sioux Falls: Groton Area vs. Sioux Falls Christian at noon.

Spring Break - No School

Emmanuel Lutheran: WELCA, 1:30 p.m. (Program - Nigeria, Host-Sarah)

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

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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.**

## Trump-Putin Call

President Donald Trump is set to speak with Russian President Vladimir Putin today about a potential ceasefire in Ukraine and a framework for a peace deal aimed at resolving the three-year conflict. The talks are expected to cover territorial concessions and control of key assets, including power plants and infrastructure. Ukraine accepted the 30-day ceasefire proposal last week, while Russia has expressed concerns about Ukraine's military activities during the truce.

Russia has illegally annexed four Ukrainian regions since 2022 but doesn't fully control any of them. However, in the occupied part of the Zaporizhzhia region, Russia controls Europe's largest nuclear power plant. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has maintained that his country's sovereignty is nonnegotiable, while Moscow has demanded that Ukraine abandon its NATO aspirations.

Separately, the UK and France have pledged to lead a multinational peacekeeping force, with more than 30 countries expected to send troops or logistical support, as part of a broader effort to secure Ukraine and enforce the ceasefire.

## Harvard Expands Free Tuition

Harvard University announced yesterday it would make tuition free for all students from households making up to \$200K, and cover the full cost of attendance—including room, board, and associated expenses—for students from households earning under \$100K. The move makes the school the latest to try to expand access to middle- and lower-income candidates, following MIT, the University of Pennsylvania, and others.

School officials estimate that more than 85% of families in the US will receive some form of assistance, with support tapering off as household income reaches \$400K. Support is likely to be drawn from the university's endowment—the world's largest at around \$50B. Admission still remains intensely competitive at the school, with an acceptance rate near 3.5% in 2024.

Dig into 1440's overview of the twin issues of student debt and college tuition.

## Laser-Based Internet

Google parent Alphabet will spin off its laser-based internet startup into an independent company, according to reports yesterday. Known as Taara, the firm is anticipated to compete directly with SpaceX's Starlink as a means of providing high-quality internet access to hard-to-reach locations.

Starlink, which currently serves an estimated 5 million users across 100 nations and territories, uses a network of thousands of satellites to connect users to high-speed broadband. Taara's approach relies on a land-based system of lasers beaming information back and forth to each other. While each approach has pros and cons—laser networks don't need to be launched into space but can be blocked if an object gets in the way—company engineers say they can transmit 20 gigabytes of information per second across more than 10 miles.

Alphabet says the company will begin by focusing on helping established telecom firms extend existing networks.

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## **Sports, Entertainment, & Culture**

Conan O'Brien tapped to host next year's Academy Awards; O'Brien returns after hosting this year's Oscars, which hauled in the show's highest ratings in five years.

Émilie Dequenne, Belgian actress best known for "Rosetta," dies at age 43.

Universal Music Group files motion to dismiss Drake's defamation lawsuit, which alleged Universal damaged Drake's reputation by promoting Kendrick Lamar's diss track "Not Like Us".

Chicago Cubs and Los Angeles Dodgers kick off the MLB regular season from Tokyo this morning (6 am ET, FOX); regular season begins in earnest on Opening Day, March 27.

## **Science & Technology**

Google's Gemini 2.0 is highly effective at removing watermarks from copyrighted images, users report.

New study finds gorillas have self-awareness comparable to chimpanzees; results suggest efforts should go beyond the "mirror test"—an evaluation of whether animals can recognize themselves in the mirror.

Engineers develop artificial muscles capable of flexing in multiple directions; advance has applications in soft, form-shifting robots.

## **Business & Markets**

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.6%, Dow +0.9%, Nasdaq +0.3%), posting back-to-back gains.

Trading platform Robinhood launches predictions market, allowing users to bet and trade on current events.

HR software firm Rippling sues rival Deel, alleging the company planted a mole who rose to Rippling's executive ranks to carry out corporate espionage.

Pepsi acquires Poppi, maker of lower-calorie prebiotic pop, for \$1.7B.

Fashion retailer Forever 21 files for bankruptcy, citing continued drop in mall and brick-and-mortar shopping, will wind down its US business.

## **Politics & World Affairs**

Legal showdown begins between federal judge, Trump administration over use of Alien Enemies Act to carry out deportations of nearly 300 alleged Venezuelan gang members; see timeline here.

Texas midwife accused of providing an abortion, the first to be charged under state's near-total ban on the procedure.

President Donald Trump expected to release around 80,000 pages of previously classified documents relating to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy today.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) postpones book tour over Democratic backlash to passage of recent funding bill.

US court orders British Prince Harry's immigration records be released by end of day today; Harry, who moved to California in 2020, is accused of lying about past drug use on visa application.

## Reporting on Noem credit card spending demonstrates why access to government records are important



By David Bordewyk  
South Dakota NewsMedia Association

An amazing thing happened in South Dakota recently. Citizens were able to see the detailed expenditures of a government official and the sky didn't fall.

Of course, I'm talking about recent news reporting about credit card expenses from former Gov. Kristi Noem's time in office and the last year of former Gov. Dennis Daugaard's tenure.

The Dakota Scout initially requested the credit card records in May 2024. That request was denied by state Auditor Rich Sattgast in June. The Scout filed a suit in September in response to the denial. Earlier this year, Sattgast and The Scout reached a settlement that led to the release of about 4,000 pages of redacted credit card bills, state vouchers and submitted receipts from Noem's tenure as governor.

In recent weeks, The Scout and other news outlets in the state have reported on details of the \$750,000 billed to Noem's two state-issued credit cards during her six years in office. Many expenses routine and mundane: lunch at Culver's and coffee at Starbucks. Other details rather extraordinary, such as lodging at the Venetian, a luxury resort in Las Vegas. The Scout and Sioux Falls Live teamed up to create a searchable online database of the credit card records.

Back to the sky not falling.

A chief reason given for denying The Scout's request was that it could jeopardize the governor's safety and security because the documents included detailed information about the security provided to the governor. Certainly, a legitimate concern.

Similar concerns were raised in 2021 when legislators introduced bills attempting to seek disclosure of taxpayer money used to provide security for the governor and other public officials.

As the excellent reporting by The Scout and others has demonstrated these past few weeks, it is indeed possible to provide citizens with essential information about the use of taxpayer money without jeopardizing the safety and security of our public officials. It's that simple. It can be done.

Time and again when attempts are made to strengthen public access to government records and meetings in South Dakota, we are met by a tidal wave of reasons and excuses why it can't be done. Some of them legitimate and much of them simply a smokescreen and a bluff.

Fortunately, The Scout called the bluff and doggedly pursued what should be basic taxpayer-rights information and – by the way – is a no-brainer public record in most any other state.

Which brings me to the rest of the story. Since The Scout broke the news about Noem's credit cards, the newspaper and its staffers have become the targets of intimidation and legal threats brought by Noem and allies.



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It's similar to what we've seen elsewhere – attack, intimidate and even sue the press into submission.

On March 7, Noem's personal lawyer threatened to sue The Scout over its reporting, claiming "false, misleading and inaccurate statements" about the credit cards. Washington, D.C., attorney Trevor Stanley demanded the newspaper cease and desist its reporting. "Otherwise, we will consider all legal remedies, including a lawsuit seeking maximum compensatory and punitive damages, that we estimate at millions of dollars," Stanley wrote in an email to The Scout.

Scout co-founders Jonathan Ellis and Joe Sneve responded, in part saying: "We stand by our reporting and consider it an honor to bring the truth about government spending to South Dakotans. And we're always willing to defend it in a court of law, too."

Within hours of the cease-and-desist letter being delivered to The Scout, Fox News published a story about the Noem team demanding an end to the "fake news." This past week, Sioux Falls Live reported about a political action committee with ties to Noem running paid social media posts trying to discredit The Scout and its coverage of Noem.

Sadly, it all sounds rather familiar, don't you think? Thank goodness for a free and independent press protected by the First Amendment in our United States Constitution.

And by the way, federal law also makes it a crime to conspire to threaten or intimidate any person who is exercising their rights and privileges guaranteed in the Constitution. (See 18 U.S.C. §241)

Why does any of this matter to you?

This is not simply a skirmish between a public official and a newspaper. It's about accountability in government and your right as a citizen to know how your tax dollars are being spent.

The week of March 16-22 is Sunshine Week. It's the annual observance of why open government is essential to good government.

Here is my wish list for Sunshine Week: The day comes soon when public access to basic government information – such as the expenditure of taxpayer dollars – is the norm and not the exception in our state.

In the meantime, the work to protect and enhance the public's right to know goes on. Even in South Dakota.

*David Bordewyk is executive director at South Dakota NewsMedia Association, which represents the state's newspapers and digital news outlets.*

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**Tina's Baskets - for Easter**  
**605-397-7285**

**Cow basket - \$20**



Includes - green drink cup, light up football, play dough, dinosaur bubble, bubbles, and 4 filled eggs

**Paw patrol basket -\$25**



Includes- two bubbles, 7 filled eggs, a chase car, mini figures, a mystery toy, two characters clips, and a paw patrol movie



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Rainbow basket - \$25



Teenager or adult Easter basket - \$25



Includes- cross word, sudoku book, word find, color pencils, three color books, pack of pens, Reese's pieces candy, solid chocolate bunny, neapolitan flavored Lindt candy, and Dunkin chocolate brownie batter crème filled eggs

Includes- two color books 7 filled eggs, pink drink cup crayons, Reese's candy, egg chalk, playdough, bubbles fan bubbles and a rabbit bubble



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Blue basket - \$20

Pink basket - \$20



Blue bunny includes bubble machine, bluey and his friend bingo, small Pail for the sand , bubbles, 6 filled eggs

Includes a pink bear with hugs in it , bubble machine, bubbles, side chalk bunny book, 6 eggs filled Reeses pieces candy

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## **Groton City Council Meeting Agenda**

March 18, 2025 – 7:00pm  
City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1  
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Increased Police Presence at Groton School
4. Utility Metering Solutions
5. Open Sealed Bids for 2025 Street Resurfacing
6. Open 2025 Gravel Quotes
7. Park Saferoom Update/Discussion
8. February Finance Report
9. Minutes
10. Bills
11. Second Reading of Ordinance No. 787 – Amending Rates for Groton Municipal Electric Customers
12. Reminder: Applications are Open for Summer Recreational Positions:
  - Baseball Coordinator
  - Softball Coordinator
  - Girls' Softball Coaches (U8/U12/U14)
  - Day Baseball/Softball Coach
  - Concessions Manager
  - Public Works Laborer/Park Caretaker
  - Cemetery Caretaker
  - Swimming Pool Lifeguards
  - Baseball Groundskeepers
  - Baseball Gatekeepers
13. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
14. Hire Summer Recreational Employees
15. Adjournment

Equalization Meeting to Follow at Approximately 8:00pm.



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## SDHSAA Statement on the Class A Girls Championship Game.

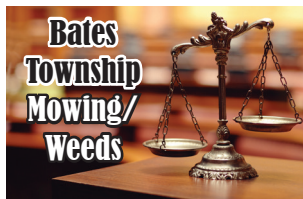
At the end of the SF Christian/Mahpiya Luta Class A Girls Championship game, a shot was completed at the buzzer by SFC, putting them ahead by one point. Following review, the call of the shot being released before time expired was upheld.

After the buzzer, students from SFC ran onto the court. A photo going around social media indicates that storming the court is a technical foul per SDHSAA rules. This appears to be a search engine/AI generated response and is incorrect. There is no NFHS or SDHSAA rule indicating a technical foul for court storming.

The SDHSAA does have a policy stating that if fans come onto the court following a game, the medals and trophy are supposed to be given to a team representative after the ceremony rather than giving them out during the awards ceremony. The team and players still get the awards, but it is done after the ceremony by school administration. This policy was not followed at the championship game. I was the SDHSAA administrator at the game. I take responsibility for that and apologize for it.

We strive to make every event the best possible experience for players and fans. I regret that the story of an incredible contest between two excellent teams has been sidelined by my policy mistake, and I apologize to the teams, coaches, and fans for that.

-Dan Swartos, SDHSAA Executive Director



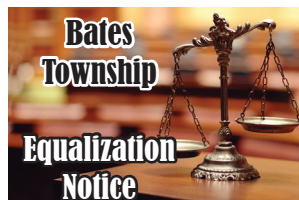
Bates Township Board of Supervisors reminds all landowners and tenants that the road right-of-way extends 33 feet from the center of the township road. This ditch is to be maintained and mowed. Any crops planted in the road right-of-way will be mowed and expenses charged to the landowner.

Landowner is responsible for spraying all noxious weeds.

Bates Township Board of Supervisors

Betty Geist  
Township Clerk

Published March 5 and 12, 2025 at the total approximate cost of \$11.59 and may be viewed free of charge at [www.sdpublicnotices.com](http://www.sdpublicnotices.com). 25322



Bates Township Equalization Meeting Notice:

The Bates Township Board of Equalization will meet at the Clerk's home on Tuesday, March 18th, 2025 at 6:30 pm.

All persons disputing their assessments are requested to notify the clerk prior to the meeting.

Betty Geist  
Bates Township Clerk  
14523 409th Ave  
Conde, SD 57434

Published March 5 and 12, 2025 at the total approximate cost of \$10.49 and may be viewed free of charge at [www.sdpublicnotices.com](http://www.sdpublicnotices.com). 25321



Groton Township will be having its equalization meeting on March 19, 2025 at 7 p.m. at Love to Travel, 8 E. US Hwy 12, Groton. Prior notification required.

Layne Howard, Clerk

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## **Groton School on lockdown Monday**

Superintendent Joe Schwan issued the following letter to parents on Monday after an angry parent was on the way to the high school:

Dear Parents,

This afternoon at about 1:18 PM, the Groton Area School District went into a "stay-put" lockdown on the advice of the Groton Police Department out of an abundance of caution and having received a report of an upset parent on their way to the high school.

We remained in a "stay-put" lockdown until approximately 1:49 PM when law enforcement made contact with the individual. Law enforcement remained at the school until the situation was resolved. To be clear, the individual did not come to the school today.

The District uses stay-put lockdown for a variety of situations and issues. During this protocol, students and staff "stay put" wherever they are. Teacher continue teaching and classes proceed as normal, and the buildings are secured (all interior and exterior doors are locked).

We are grateful for the cooperation and support of local law enforcement, the Groton Police Department, and the Brown County Sheriffs' office.

Respectfully,

Joe Schwan  
Superintendent

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## Groton Area places four on All Northeast Conference Teams



**Jerica Locke**  
**Second Team**



**Ryder Johnson**  
**First Team**



**Keegen Tracy**  
**Second Team**



**Kennedy Hansen**  
**Third Team**

The Northeast All-Conference Teams have been announced.

On the girls first team are Krista Langager, senior, Sisseton; Addison Neuendorf, junior, Hamlin; Ava Hanson, senior, Roncalli; Isabella Anderson, senior, Milbank; and Addie Steffensen, senior, Hamlin. On the second team are Tyra Berry, senior, Milbank; Brynn Roehrich, sophomore, Clark/Willow Lake; Maddie Huber, senior, Roncalli; Jerica Locke, junior, Groton Area; and Issie Steffensen, sophomore, Hamlin. Third team members are Erin Sannes, senior, Webster Area; Tehya Vig, senior, Clark/Willow Lake; Jo Steffensen, senior, Hamlin; Kennedy Hansen, senior, Groton Area; and Rylee Voeller, junior, Roncalli. The NEC Player of the Year is Krista Langager of Sisseton.

On the boys first team are Easton Neuendorf, senior Hamlin; Ryder Johnson, junior, Groton Area; Evan Stormo, senior, Hamlin; Sullivan Felberg, freshman, Clark/Willow Lake; and Gabe Sather, senior, Deuel. Second team members are Emmerson Larson, junior, Clark/Willow Lake; Jackson Wadsworth, junior, Hamlin; Sam Rick, sophomore, Milbank; Zac VanMeeteren, senior, Hamlin; and Keegen Tracy, junior, Groton Area. Third team members are Aiden Fisher, senior, Roncalli; Ian Lesnar, senior, Webster Area; Troy Jenson, junior, Deuel; Chris Bevers, sophomore, Clark/Willow Lake; and Bo Begeman, sophomore, Clark/Willow Lake. The NEC Player of the Year is Easton Neuendorf of Hamlin.

## Youth AAU Region 2 placers moving on to State in Rapid City

Hayden Perkins 1st, 40 lbs, 6U  
Landry Johnson 2nd, 53lbs, 8U  
Kroy Kahli 2nd, 89lbs, 10U  
Samuel Fliehs 1st, 96lbs, 10U  
Keenan Moody 2nd, 127lbs, 12U  
Huntly Overacker 3rd, 100lbs, 12U  
Grayson Warrington 2nd, HWT, 12U

Preston Hinkleman 2nd, 95lbs 14U  
Taya Morris 1st, 37lbs, 6U  
Veda Stieglemeier 2nd, 76lbs, 8U  
Miakoda Neigel 2nd, 55 lbs, 10U  
Elsy Hagen 3rd, 84lbs, 10U  
Roselyn Block 2nd, 100lbs, 12U



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Legislature approves several new restrictions on citizen ballot measures

**One proposal is headed to voters in 2026; others await the governor's consideration**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 17, 2025 6:11 PM**

Proposals to restrict citizen-initiated ballot measures have cleared the South Dakota Legislature, and some are awaiting the governor's consideration.

The measures — carried by Republican lawmakers — would shorten petition signature collection periods, require signatures from specific geographic areas and increase the voter approval threshold for constitutional amendments. Opponents argue the changes would hinder South Dakotans' ability to bring issues to the ballot.

The state has three types of statewide ballot measures: constitutional amendments, initiated measures and referendums.

To be placed on the ballot, citizen-backed constitutional amendments need petition signatures from registered voters equal to 10% of the votes cast in the last election for governor. The current signature requirement is 35,017. The Legislature can also send its own constitutional amendments to the ballot.

Initiated measures propose a law, and referendums send a law passed by legislators to the ballot, with each requiring signatures equal to 5% of the votes cast in the last governor's race. That threshold is 17,508 signatures.

South Dakota was the first state in the U.S. to allow an initiative and referendum process in 1898. In 1972, the state constitution was amended to allow constitutional changes by initiative. In 1988, the state's voters changed the constitution to eliminate a requirement that an amendment be submitted to the Legislature for approval before placement on the ballot.

#### Shortening the signature window

One bill would move the deadline for submitting petition signatures from May to February in the year of a general election. Supporters said the change is necessary to ensure adequate time for signature verification and legal challenges before the election.

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, helped lead a legal challenge against last November's constitutional amendment that would have placed abortion rights in the state constitution.

The bill's opponents, including voting-rights advocates and some Democrats, argued that reducing the signature collection window by three months will make it harder for grassroots campaigns to qualify for the ballot. They contended that South Dakota already has a restrictive petitioning process, and the change would disproportionately favor well-funded groups that can afford to hire professional signature collectors.

#### Signatures from every district

Another bill would require petition signatures for constitutional amendments to be gathered from each of the 35 state senatorial districts in the state.

The bill requires that a petition gain signatures from a number of registered voters in each district equal to 5% of the total votes cast for governor in that district during the last general election. The bill also retains the requirement that the total number of signatures on the petition must equal at least 10% of the votes cast statewide for governor in the last general election.



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Supporters said the bill would ensure amendments have broad, statewide support before they reach the ballot. They said the current system encourages petitioners to focus on Minnehaha and Pennington counties, where most registered voters live.

Opponents said voters across the state already have a say when they cast their ballots, making an additional hurdle unnecessary.

Joe Kirby, of Sioux Falls, helped lead an effort during the last election that would have instituted an open primary election system in the state. He called the bill "effectively the death of constitutional initiatives."

"This gives any one county veto power over whether an initiative gets on the ballot, no matter how many people want it on the ballot," Kirby said.

## **Raising the threshold for constitutional changes**

The bills addressing the signature window and geographic requirements are on the governor's desk, for his decision to sign them into law or veto them.

A resolution passed by the Legislature that does not require the governor's signature will ask voters to increase the approval threshold for constitutional amendments from a simple majority to 60%. The measure will appear on the general election ballot in November 2026. Ironically, the measure will need only a simple majority for approval.

Supporters said the change is necessary to protect the state's constitution from being amended by outside interests and prevent policy from being inserted into a document that's intended only to stipulate the structure and powers of the government.

Rep. John Hughes, R-Sioux Falls, sponsored the resolution.

"Our constitution is more than a statute," Hughes said in a statement. "It is a contract between the state itself and the people that assures us that if we live here, raise our families here, worship here, and conduct our vacations here, we can count on certain core values remaining constant."

Opponents said initiated constitutional amendments are necessary because lawmakers sometimes refuse to adopt a popular policy, and because lawmakers can repeal or amend a regular initiative on their own but can't change the constitution without public approval. They said raising the threshold would make it significantly harder for South Dakotans to amend their constitution.

Opponents also alleged that the measure is an attempt to stifle citizen-driven initiatives and would ensure that only proposals with backing from powerful political and financial groups can succeed.

## **Other legislation**

Other bills approved by the Legislature that would impact the ballot measure process include legislation that would require petition signers to list the address and county where they are registered to vote, rather than merely the address where they reside, and prevent the Secretary of State's Office from counting signatures without the information; change how petitions for ballot initiatives must be formatted, including stipulations about minimum font sizes; allow fiscal estimates for ballot measures to be updated closer to elections (that bill has been signed by the governor); and require the secretary of state to review ballot initiatives for compliance with the state's single-subject rule, which is already required for constitutional amendments.

Some other bills addressing ballot measures failed.

One failed resolution would have required ballot measures rejected by voters to wait a full election cycle before being resubmitted. Another failed bill would have banned paid petition circulators and imposed felony penalties for violations.

*Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.*



## Greenpeace case in hands of jury as Energy Transfer makes case for \$800 million in damages

BY: MARY STEURER - MARCH 17, 2025 6:20 PM

MANDAN, N.D. — Greenpeace and the developer of the Dakota Access Pipeline on Monday had their final showdown in the three-week trial over whether the environmental group engaged in a destructive and defamatory campaign against the pipeline that resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars in damages.

Energy Transfer accuses three Greenpeace entities — Greenpeace USA, Greenpeace International and Greenpeace Fund — of colluding to promote acts including trespassing, violence and vandalism by anti-pipeline protesters in 2016 and 2017. The company also alleges Greenpeace published defamatory statements about the pipeline to hurt the company's reputation and get banks to pull their financial support for the project.

Greenpeace denies the allegations and maintains that Energy Transfer filed the lawsuit to harm the environmental movement.

Free speech advocates and environmentalists have raised concerns that a verdict against Greenpeace could have a chilling effect on activist groups.

The jury began its deliberations at about 2:45 p.m. and planned to adjourn for the day at 5 p.m.

The protests were started by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and drew thousands of people to rural North Dakota. The tribe views the pipeline as a threat to its water and sovereignty, since it passes through unceded Sioux Nation land. Indigenous groups and others who protested in solidarity with the tribe camped for months near where the pipeline was set to cross underneath the Missouri River.

In his closing statements, Trey Cox, the lead attorney representing Energy Transfer, accused Greenpeace of using a "vulnerable population" to further its anti-fossil fuel agenda.

"They took the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and they exploited the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe," he said.

Cox attributed between \$265 million and \$340 million in damages to Greenpeace. He said the jury should not only hold Greenpeace accountable for this sum, but also hand down more than double that in punitive damages. If the jury grants Energy Transfer's request, Greenpeace could be on the hook for between \$800 million and \$1 billion.

Cox argued punitive damages would dissuade Greenpeace and other organizations from acting similarly in the future.

"This is your responsibility to tell them, 'You can't do these things,'" he said.

Cox said all three Greenpeace defendants worked in concert to send supplies to the protests, share intel with protesters and pay Native activists to conduct trainings in the camps that encouraged demonstrators to break the law.

He showed the jury photos of construction equipment with broken windows, anti-pipeline messages written in graffiti and gas tanks filled with sand. He also displayed photos of vehicles on fire.

Everett Jack, the lead attorney representing Greenpeace's U.S. affiliate in the case, said Energy Transfer provided no evidence that Greenpeace was the reason for any violent or destructive acts alleged by the plaintiffs.

"This lack of evidence is fatal to the claims they bring," he said.

Current and former Greenpeace employees told the jury previously that Greenpeace USA did provide support to the demonstrations, but that it is committed to nonviolence and never endorsed or encouraged destructive behavior by protesters. Some of the activists who provided training to demonstrators at the camps similarly testified that the tactics they taught were nonviolent.

Greenpeace USA says that the support it offered to the Indigenous-led protests was minimal, and that it was one of many organizations present at the camps. Several who testified said that Greenpeace only provided help because it was asked.

Greenpeace International and Greenpeace Fund, meanwhile, say they never sent anyone to the dem-

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onstrations or provided any funding or resources to support the cause.

Cox also told jurors that Greenpeace maliciously circulated nine defamatory statements to harm the company. The organization successfully persuaded some banks to withdraw their financial support for the project, he said.

"I call them malicious because they are strategic, they are dangerous and they are manipulative," Cox said.

The nine statements include claims that the Dakota Access Pipeline crosses through tribal land, that Energy Transfer deliberately destroyed sacred cultural sites during its construction and that Energy Transfer's private security contractors and law enforcement used violence against protesters.

Cox said that Greenpeace witnesses admitted to publishing these claims without asking for Energy Transfer or law enforcement's side of the story. Greenpeace made these claims in order to turn the public against the company, he added.

"She knows exactly where to stick the knife in," Cox said of one statement he attributed to Annie Leonard, former Greenpeace executive director.

Cox pointed to previous testimony by Ashton Hayes, a high-ranking finance administrator for Energy Transfer. Hayes said he believed Greenpeace's actions negatively impacted the company's rapport with banks, Cox said.

Speaking on behalf of Greenpeace, Jack told the jury Cox was trying to "gaslight" them.

Energy Transfer is using "boogeyman terms designed to get you worked up," he said.

Dozens of media outlets and other groups circulated the claims before Greenpeace, he said. Some of the statements were made in open letters to banks that Greenpeace co-signed with hundreds of other organizations, according to records shown during the trial.

Greenpeace's statements also relied largely on first-hand accounts from Standing Rock leaders as well as people who attended the protests, witnesses said.

Current and former Greenpeace employees also testified that they believed the statements to be true at the time they made them, with some saying they still stand by the veracity of the claims.

Greenpeace International was not involved in seven of the nine alleged defamatory statements. Greenpeace Fund says it did not make any of them.

Jack also disputed Cox's claims that Greenpeace's actions caused a five-month construction delay for the pipeline, and led Energy Transfer to delay refinancing its loan and incur unanticipated financing costs.

Expert testimony and records previously presented in court indicate that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' decision to delay granting an easement to allow the pipeline to be built underneath the Missouri River pushed back completion of the pipeline, Jack said.

He said Energy Transfer board minutes suggest that the company delayed refinancing its loan because of an ongoing lawsuit by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and the Army Corps, which created greater uncertainty about the future of the project.

Jack also argued that neither law enforcement nor multiple Native activists asked to testify in the case believed that Greenpeace was a major presence at the demonstrations.

One Lakota organizer, Nick Tilsen, testified earlier in the trial that he considered the idea that Greenpeace organized the protests "paternalistic."

The lawsuit was first filed in 2019 and has thousands of docket entries. During his closing speech, Jack said that the case has about 900,000 documents.

*Mary Steurer is a reporter based in Bismarck for the North Dakota Monitor. A native of St. Louis, Steurer previously worked as the local government reporter for the Casper Star-Tribune newspaper in Wyoming.*

## Trump order would gut agency that gives library grants to SD

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - MARCH 17, 2025 3:26 PM

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's move late Friday to dismantle the agency that serves as the primary federal funding source for libraries and museums nationwide prompted questions over the weekend about how the agency can continue to carry out its core work.

After Trump signed an executive order Friday that called for severe reductions in seven federal agencies, including the Institute of Museum and Library Services that provided \$266.7 million in grants and other awards last year, groups representing museums and libraries across the country called on Trump to reconsider the move and asked Congress to intervene on their behalf.

"By eliminating the only federal agency dedicated to funding library services, the Trump administration's executive order is cutting off at the knees the most beloved and trusted of American institutions and the staff and services they offer," the American Library Association, the oldest and largest library association in the country, said in a statement over the weekend.

The Friday order, titled "continuing the reduction of the federal bureaucracy," called for eliminating "to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law" listed agencies' functions that aren't statutorily mandated. It also called for reducing the "performance" of agencies' mandated functions and "associated personnel" to the legal minimum.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services, which Congress established in 1996, has a mission to "advance, support, and empower America's museums, libraries, and related organizations through grant-making, research, and policy development."

The states that received the highest total awards from the agency in 2024 were California at \$26.4 million, New York at nearly \$20 million, Texas at \$15.7 million, Florida at \$11.4 million and Illinois at \$11.3 million, according to data from the agency.

The order to downsize the agency is part of Trump and billionaire White House adviser Elon Musk's U.S. DOGE Service's initiative to slash federal government spending and go after what they deem unnecessary.

"The American people elected President Trump to drain the swamp and end ineffective government programs that empower government without achieving measurable results," a White House fact sheet accompanying the order read.

The other agencies affected are the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, the U.S. Agency for Global Media, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in the Smithsonian Institution, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund and the Minority Business Development Agency.

### Library, museum organizations react

The American Library Association said the order would decimate services such as early literacy development and reading programs, high-speed internet access, employment assistance, homework and research resources and accessible reading materials.

The organization called on Trump to reconsider his "short-sighted" decision and encouraged lawmakers to "visit the libraries that serve their constituents and urge the White House to spare the modest federal funding for America's libraries."

EveryLibrary, an organization dedicated to building support for libraries, said in a Saturday statement the group is "extremely concerned" the wording in Trump's executive order "could result in cuts to the core functions" of the agency.

The organization said the agency's "statutory obligations to state libraries include federal funding through the Grants to States program, the National Leadership Grant program, and all current contracts, grants, and awards" and that "this core work cannot be disrupted or dismantled by DOGE."

In a statement shared with States Newsroom on Monday, the American Alliance of Museums, which includes 35,000 museums and museum professionals, said Trump's effort "threatens the critical roles museums and museum workers play in American society, and puts jobs, education, conservation, and vital

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community programs at risk.”

“Museums are vital community anchors, serving all Americans including youth, seniors, people with disabilities, and veterans,” the statement read. “Museums are not only centers for education and inspiration but also economic engines — creating jobs, driving tourism, and strengthening local economies.”

Neither the Institute of Museum and Library Services nor the White House responded to a request for comment Monday.

*Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom’s Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.*

## **South Dakota’s poet laureate honored with Western Heritage Award**

**BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MARCH 17, 2025 11:02 AM**

Bruce Roseland, South Dakota’s poet laureate, is the winner of a 2025 Western Heritage Award from the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, with other honorees including the country music duo Brooks & Dunn and the streaming show “Yellowstone.”

Each winner receives a Wrangler Award, a bronze statue of a cowboy on horseback. The awards will be presented April 12 in Oklahoma City.

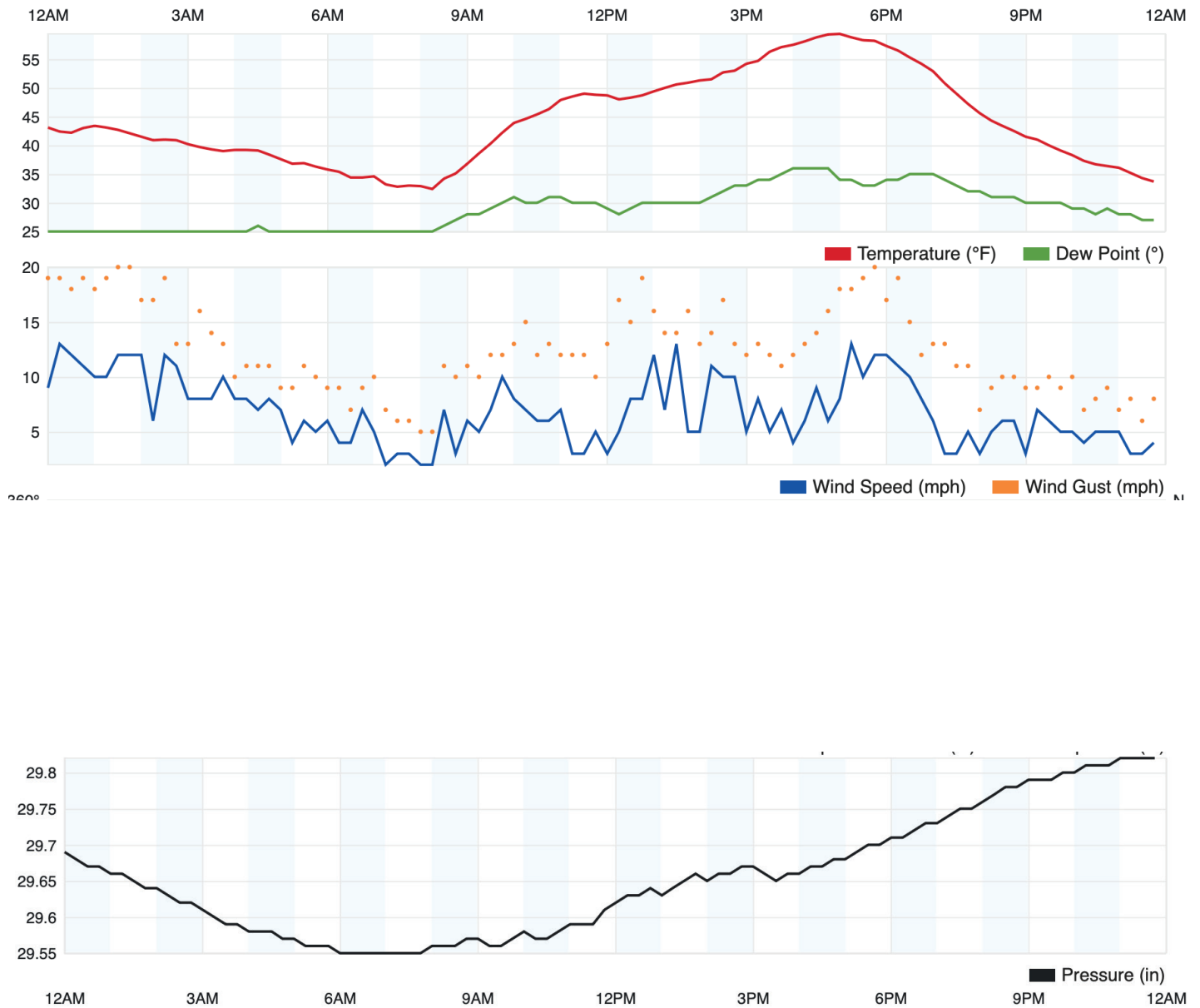
Roseland is the winner in the Poetry Book category for “Earl’s Own Dakota Odyssey,” a 2024 epic poem about the adventures of a modern-day western South Dakota ranch hand.

Roseland is a fourth-generation cattleman who ranches near Seneca. Then-Gov. Kristi Noem named him the eighth poet laureate of South Dakota in 2023. He has published eight books of poetry and won four national awards.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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**Tuesday**



**High: 39 °F**

Chance Snow  
and Breezy

**Tuesday Night**



**Low: 23 °F**

Blustery.  
Snow Likely  
then Chance  
Snow

**Wednesday**



**High: 41 °F**

Decreasing  
Clouds and  
Breezy

**Wednesday  
Night**



**Low: 19 °F**

Mostly Clear

**Thursday**



**High: 56 °F**

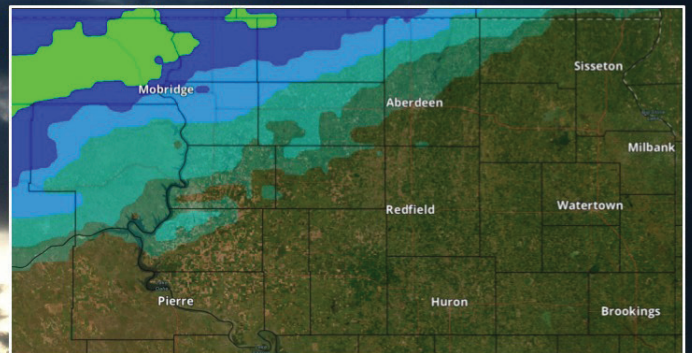
Sunny

Radar as of 4:26 AM



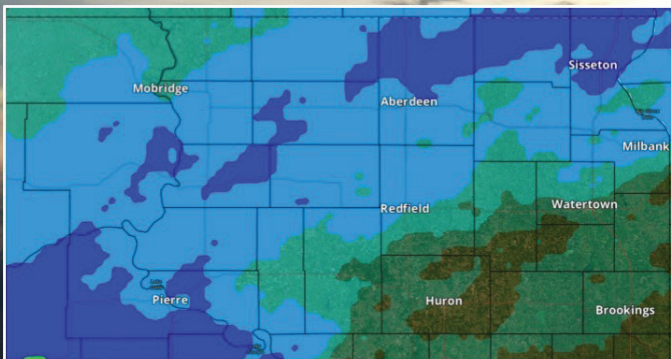
**This Afternoon:**

Precipitation stays mostly over north central South Dakota.



**This Evening:**

Precipitation moves into northeastern and central South Dakota.



Dry air is keeping precipitation from reaching the surface for now, but snow will begin around daybreak today. Slow progression of the system means that precipitation won't move into northeastern and central South Dakota until later this evening. Less than an inch of snowfall accumulation is expected over the area, except parts of north central South Dakota, which may see up to 2 inches.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 60 °F at 4:48 PM**

**Low Temp: 32 °F at 8:09 AM**

**Wind: 23 mph at 4:58 PM**

**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 12 hours, 7 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 85 in 2012

Record Low: -15 in 1923

Average High: 43

Average Low: 21

Average Precip in March.: 0.46

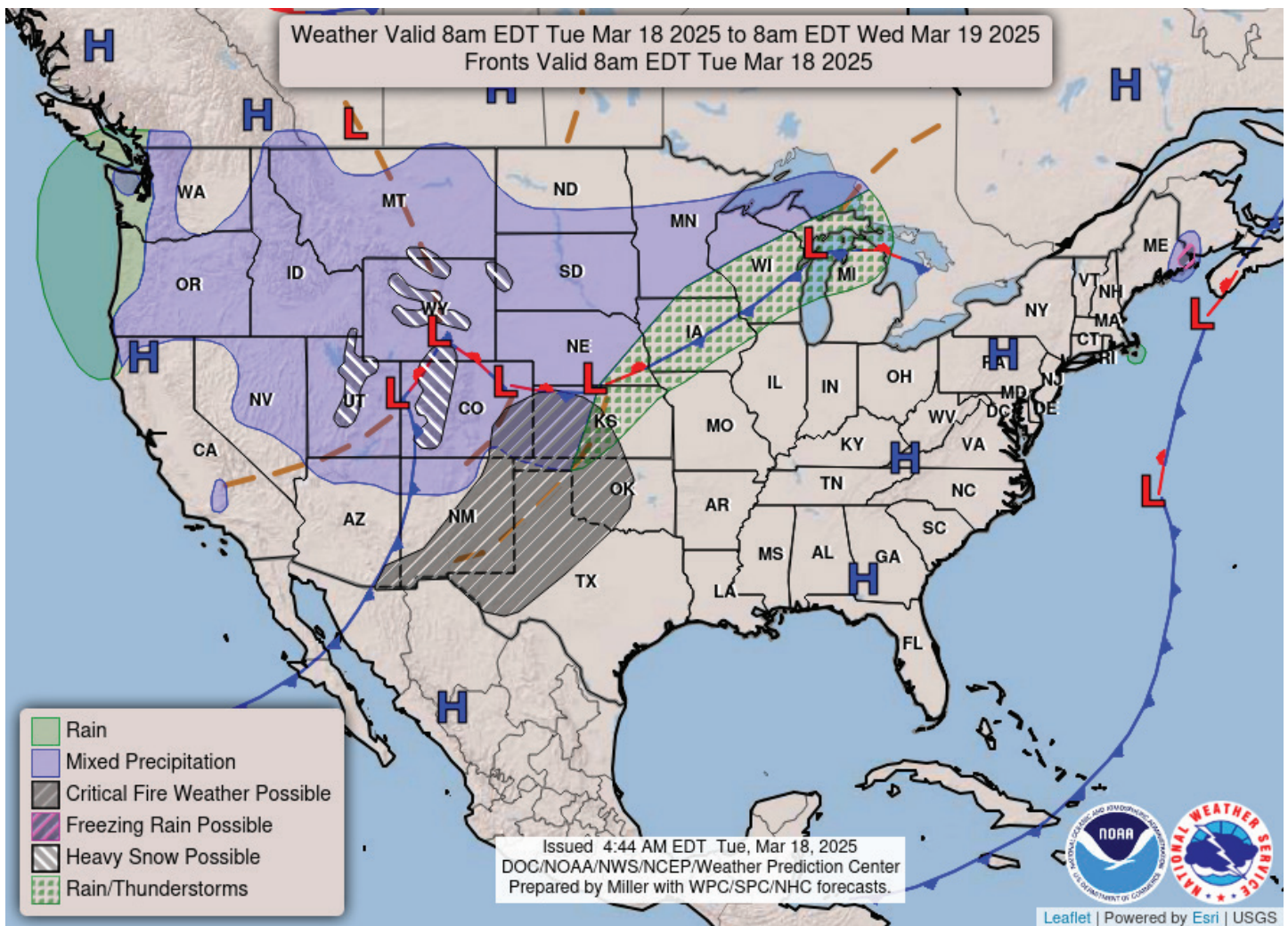
Precip to date in March.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.63

Precip Year to Date: 0.45

Sunset Tonight: 7:44:00 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:34:39 am





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## Today in Weather History

March 18, 1982: Northern Lawrence and Southwest Butte Counties experienced strong winds during the afternoon of March 18, 1982. Winds gusting to 70mph in Spearfish and Belle Fourche areas overturned a trailer house near Belle Fourche. No injuries were reported.

March 18, 2013: An area of low pressure moving across the region brought widespread accumulating snowfall along with powerful northwest winds to northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts from 1 to 4 inches along with sustained winds of 25 to 35 mph with gusts up to near 60 mph caused widespread blizzard conditions. Travel was disrupted or halted. Some businesses and schools were also closed. Some snowfall amounts included; 1 inch at Sisseton; 2 inches south of Bristol and at Bowdle; 3 inches near Big Stone City; and 4 inches at Summit. The highest wind gust was 58 mph at Aberdeen and near Summit. The snowfall began between 5 and 7 pm on the 17th and ended between 5 and 9 pm on the 18th.

March 18, 2014: A low-pressure surface area moving off to the east brought some heavy snow into far eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. A narrow band of heavy snow set up across this area bringing from 6 to 11 inches of snow.

1925: The great "Tri-State Tornado" occurred, the deadliest tornado in U.S. history. The storm claimed 695 lives (including 234 at Murphysboro, IL, and 148 at West Frankfort, IL), and caused seventeen million dollars property damage. It cut a swath of destruction 219 miles long and as much as a mile wide from east-central Missouri to southern Indiana between 1 PM and 4 PM. The tornado leveled a school in West Frankfort, Illinois, and picked up sixteen students setting them down unharmed 150 yards away. Seven other tornadoes claimed an additional 97 lives that day.

1952: 151.73 inches of rain fell at Cilaos, La Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean over five days (13th-18th) to set the world rainfall record. This record was broken on February 24th-28th, 2007, when Commerce La Reunion Island picked up 196.06 inches.

1971 - High winds accompanied a low pressure system from the Rocky Mountains to the Great Lakes. Winds gusted to 100 mph at Hastings NE, and reached 115 mph at Hays KS. High winds caused two million dollars damage in Kansas. Fire burned 50,000 forest acres in eastern Oklahoma. (17th-19th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A storm in the central U.S. produced up to 10 inches of snow in western Nebraska, and up to six inches of rain in eastern sections of the state. The heavy rains pushed the Elkhorn River out of its banks, submerging the streets of Inman under three feet of water. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Light rain and snow prevailed east of the Mississippi River. Fair weather prevailed west of the Mississippi. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A storm in the western U.S. produced heavy rain in California, with heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada Range. Venado CA was drenched with 5.40 inches of rain in 24 hours. A dozen cities in the eastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date, including Baltimore MD with a reading of 82 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Heavy rain caused extensive flooding of rivers and streams in Georgia, with total damage running well into the millions. Flooding also claimed six lives. Nearly seven inches of rain caused 2.5 million dollars damage around Columbus, and up to nine inches of rain was reported over the northern Kinchafoonee Basin in Georgia. (Storm Data)

1990: An intense hailstorm struck the Sydney region in Australia, producing strong winds and torrential rains in a swath from Camden to Narrabeen, causing extensive damage. Hailstones were measured up to 3 inches in diameter. The total insured cost was estimated at \$319 million, the third-largest loss event in Australian insurance history.

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## LOVE AT WORK

The family completed reading their evening devotional together and knelt to pray. Mary Jane, the youngest of the children, always prayed first. After a moment's hesitation she said, "You know God, there are only four people in our family, and there are some days, like today, that I don't love any of them. How can You love everybody all of the time?"

Fortunately, God loves us no matter how we act or who we are. And we see His love revealed in the life of Jesus.

Recall His patience with His disciples. In spite of their faults, unfaithfulness and ignorance, He never gave up on them. He was able to overlook their past lives and their present limitations and see the role they would fulfill in establishing His Kingdom on earth.

Remember His kindness, His compassionate gentleness and His thoughtfulness when he took a few loaves and some fish and fed the hungry multitude. He did not say, "I'll feed you if you listen carefully to what I have to say." Nor did He satisfy Himself and His disciples first while others waited to get the leftovers. No, He extended His love to those in need because He wanted them to understand a love that put others first.

Jesus took every opportunity to reach out to anyone and everyone and set the example of what true love is. He is indeed the essence of love – God's love - a love that is gentle, patient, kind, thoughtful and constant.

Prayer: Fill our hearts, Heavenly Father, with a love that has no limits, is unconditional, patient in times of stress and expects nothing in return for being helpful. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. 1 John 3:16

*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: 03.14.25

3 17 39 42 70 1

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$301,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 15 Mins 33 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.17.25

11 12 20 29 33 8

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$26,770,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 30 Mins 33 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.17.25

6 12 25 29 32 15

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 45 Mins 33 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.15.25

4 5 15 29 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$67,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 45 Mins 33 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.17.25

4 19 21 38 64 26

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 14 Mins 33 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.17.25

11 18 23 38 60 9

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$416,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 14 Mins 33 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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## **Upcoming Groton Events**

03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym 10am-2pm  
04/05/2025 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39, 6-11:30pm  
04/06/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center  
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  
05/12/2025 High School Girls Golf Meet at Olive Grove  
05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm  
06/07/2025 Day of Play  
06/13/2025 SDSU 4 Person Scramble at Olive Grove  
06/21/2025 Groton Triathlon  
06/23/2025 Ladies 2 Person Scramble at Olive Grove  
07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm  
07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm  
07/16/2025 Men's Pro Am Golf at Olive Grove  
07/25/2025 Ferney Open Scramble Golf at Olive Grove  
08/01/2025 Wine on Nine Fundraiser at Olive Grove  
08/09/2025 2nd Annual Celebration in the Park/Rib Cook-Off 1-9:30pm  
08/23/2025 Glacial Tournament at Olive Grove  
09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
09/07/2025 Sunflower Classic Couples Scramble at Olive Grove  
10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm  
11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1:30pm  
12/06/2025 Olive Grove Holiday Party and Silent Live Auction Fundraiser

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

### **Airman charged in killing of Native American woman who went missing 7 months ago in South Dakota**

By SARAH RAZA Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A 24-year-old airman has been charged with killing a Native American woman who went missing in South Dakota about seven months ago.

Quinterius Chappelle, 24, made his first court appearance Monday on one count of second-degree murder in the killing of Sahela Sangrait, 21. The court documents in the case are sealed, but authorities said Sangrait was killed in August on the Ellsworth Air Force Base in western South Dakota, where Chappelle was stationed as an active-duty airman.

Chappelle is being prosecuted in federal court, and court records show he is being represented by the federal defender's office. A woman who answered the phone at that office declined to comment on his behalf. He is being held at the Pennington County Jail.

The U.S. Attorney's Office said he pleaded not guilty. If convicted, he could face life in prison.

Chappelle is an aircraft inspection journeyman assigned to the 28th Maintenance Squadron at the Ellsworth base, according to a statement from the base. He began serving in April 2019.

"First and foremost, our thoughts and prayers are with the friends and family of Sahela," Col. Derek Oakley, 28th Bomb Wing commander, said in a statement. "We hold Airmen accountable for their actions, and if service members are found in violation of military or civilian law, they will be punished."

A hiker discovered Sangrait's body on March 4 near the Pennington County and Custer County lines, according to a Facebook post from the Pennington County Sheriff's Office. Sangrait was reported missing on Aug. 10, and her remains were badly decomposed, authorities said. Her cause of death was not made public.

Sangrait was from Box Elder, South Dakota, where the Ellsworth base is located. Officials did not share whether Sangrait knew Chappelle.

According to a missing person poster shared on Facebook, Sangrait was staying with a friend in Eagle Butte and was going to return to Box Elder to gather some of her things before heading to California. It is unknown whether she ever reached Box Elder.

Sangrait was Native American, according to the poster. There are 59 cases of missing Native Americans in South Dakota and more than half of them are women, according to the attorney general's missing persons database. Federal and state task forces were created to investigate cases of missing and murdered indigenous people across the country.

### **Paige Meyer's leadership and experience make No. 24 South Dakota State a March Madness threat**

By STEVE MEGARGEE AP Sports Writer

South Dakota State's Paige Meyer already knows she can thrive in March Madness because she's done it before.

Meyer is making her third consecutive trip to the NCAA Tournament. She scored 16 points in a first-round victory over Southern California two seasons ago and has averaged 13.3 points in three tournament games.

That experience gives Meyer and the 24th-ranked Jackrabbits more reason for confidence than other mid-major programs. They know they can succeed at this level. South Dakota State (29-3) faces Oklahoma State (25-6) on Saturday in Storrs, Connecticut.

"It's fun to kind of be put on that big stage and just kind of know what SDSU can do," Meyer said. "It's been really special each year to do it with the different teams here."

Meyer, a 5-foot-6 senior guard, led South Dakota State to a third straight NCAA berth by collecting 26

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points and nine assists in a 84-68 Summit League Tournament championship game victory over Oral Roberts.

That represented one of Meyer's more memorable performances in a career full of them. She has posted a double-figure scoring average each of her four seasons at South Dakota State and has 12 points, 3.1 rebounds and 5.3 assists per game this year.

Her scoring has stepped up lately. She has collected at least 23 points four times this season, all over South Dakota State's last nine games.

"Through the whole year we've kind of had a lot of different weapons on the court," Meyer said. "That kind of opened up my scoring opportunities, too."

Meyer and teammate Brooklyn Meyer – the two aren't related – both earned first-team all-Summit League honors for a second straight season.

They've helped make South Dakota State one of the nation's hottest teams entering this tournament. The Jackrabbits have won 19 consecutive games, with their last loss coming Dec. 22 against Texas.

Meyer is just one of several players from one-bid leagues who could make a major impact in this NCAA Tournament. Here's a look at some others:

Ally Becki, G, Ball State

First-round game: Friday vs. Mississippi at Waco, Texas

Notes: Becki had a triple-double in her third game of the season and has maintained that momentum ever since. The Mid-American Conference player of the year is tied for fifth in Division I in assists per game (6.3) and averages 13.9 points and 5.5 rebounds. This 5-8 senior has averaged at least 11 points and 4.8 assists each of her four seasons at Ball State (27-7).

Emani Jefferson, G, Florida Gulf Coast

First-round game: Saturday at Oklahoma.

Jefferson had 22 points, 12 rebounds and four assists last year in a 73-70 first-round loss to Oklahoma. Now she's back to face Oklahoma in the NCAA Tournament again as the Atlantic Sun player of the year. Since losing its first two games, FGCU has gone 30-1. Jefferson has averaged 14.4 points, 5.8 rebounds and 3.4 assists this season. She spent one season at Wright State and two at Memphis before coming to FGCU in 2023.

Diamond Johnson, G, Norfolk State

First-round game: Saturday at Maryland.

Notes: The Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference player of the year is averaging 19.1 points, 6.1 rebounds, 4.1 assists and 3.6 steals while helping Norfolk State (30-4) win 19 straight. She ranks fifth in Division I in steals per game. Johnson showed her ability to produce against major-conference teams by scoring 17 points each in wins over Auburn and Missouri. The 5-5 senior also had 11 rebounds against Auburn. Johnson played one year at Rutgers and two at N.C. State before spending the last two seasons at Norfolk State.

Natalie McNeal, G, Green Bay

First-round game: Saturday vs Alabama at College Park, Maryland.

Notes: McNeal earned first-team all-Horizon League honors for a second straight season while helping Green Bay (29-5) win 22 straight games. McNeal has been the Horizon League Tournament most valuable player in back-to-back years and scored 26 points as Green Bay beat Purdue Fort Wayne 76-63 in this year's championship game. The 5-8 senior is averaging 14.9 points, 7.3 rebounds and 2.1 steals.

Trinity San Antonio, G, Grand Canyon

First-round game: Friday at Baylor.

Notes: After a summer in which she played for Puerto Rico at the Olympics, San Antonio earned Western Athletic Conference player of the year honors while leading Grand Canyon (32-2) on a Division I-leading, 30-game win streak. The 5-10 guard averages 15.7 points, 5.5 assists, 4.1 rebounds and 2.7 steals. She had 26 points and 12 rebounds in an early-season victory over Arizona.

Katelyn Young, F, Murray State

First-round game: Saturday vs. Iowa at Norman, Oklahoma.

Notes: Young has been so productive that Murray State (25-7) already has retired the fifth-year senior's jersey. Young has averaged at least 19.5 points each of her last four seasons while totaling 3,023 career

points. She has 22.2 points, 3.3 assists and 6.4 rebounds per game this season. Young scored 34 points in a Missouri Valley Conference Tournament championship game victory over Belmont after getting 30 in a semifinal win over Drake.

## Israeli strikes across Gaza kill at least 326 Palestinians and shatter ceasefire with Hamas

By WAFSA SHURAF, JOSEF FEDERMAN and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel launched airstrikes across the Gaza Strip early Tuesday, killing at least 326 Palestinians, including women and children, according to hospital officials. The surprise bombardment shattered a ceasefire in place since January and threatened to fully reignite the 17-month-old war.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the strikes after Hamas refused Israeli demands to change the ceasefire agreement. Officials said the operation was open-ended and was expected to expand. The White House said it had been consulted and voiced support for Israel's actions.

The Israeli military ordered people to evacuate eastern Gaza, including much of the northern town of Beit Hanoun and other communities further south, and head toward the center of the territory, indicating that Israel could soon launch renewed ground operations.

"Israel will, from now on, act against Hamas with increasing military strength," Netanyahu's office said.

The attack during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan could resume a war that has already killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and caused widespread destruction across Gaza. It also raised questions about the fate of the roughly two dozen Israeli hostages held by Hamas who are believed to still be alive.

A senior Hamas official said Netanyahu's decision to return to war amounts to a "death sentence" for the remaining hostages. Izzat al-Risheq accused Netanyahu of launching the strikes to try and save his far-right governing coalition and called on mediators to "reveal facts" on who broke the truce.

There were no reports of any attacks by Hamas several hours after the bombardment, indicating it still hoped to restore the truce.

The strikes came as Netanyahu comes under mounting domestic pressure, with mass protests planned over his handling of the hostage crisis and his decision to fire the head of Israel's internal security agency. His latest testimony in a long-running corruption trial was canceled after the strikes.

The main group representing families of the captives accused the government of backing out of the ceasefire, saying it "chose to give up on the hostages."

"We are shocked, angry and terrified by the deliberate dismantling of the process to return our loved ones from the terrible captivity of Hamas," the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said in a statement.

Wounded stream into Gaza hospitals

A strike on a home in the southern city of Rafah killed 17 members of one family, including at least 12 women and children, according to the European Hospital, which received the bodies. The dead included five children, their parents, and another father and his three children.

In the southern city of Khan Younis, Associated Press reporters saw explosions and plumes of smoke. Ambulances brought wounded people to Nasser Hospital, where patients lay on the floor, some screaming. A young girl cried as her bloody arm was bandaged.

Many Palestinians said they had expected a return to war when talks over the second phase of the ceasefire did not begin as scheduled in early February. Israel instead embraced an alternative proposal and cut off all shipments of food, fuel and other aid to the territory's 2 million Palestinians to try to pressure Hamas to accept it.

"Nobody wants to fight," Palestinian resident Nidal Alzaanin told the AP by phone from Gaza City. "Everyone is still suffering from the previous months," he said.

Gaza's Health Ministry said at least 326 people were killed in the strikes and hundreds more wounded. Rescuers were still searching the rubble for dead and wounded as the strikes continued. It was among the deadliest days of the war.

U.S. backs Israel and blames Hamas



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The White House sought to blame Hamas for the renewed fighting. National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes said the militant group "could have released hostages to extend the ceasefire but instead chose refusal and war."

An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the unfolding operation, said Israel was striking Hamas' military, leaders and infrastructure and planned to expand the operation beyond air attacks. The official accused Hamas of attempting to rebuild and plan new attacks. Hamas militants and security forces quickly returned to the streets in recent weeks after the ceasefire went into effect.

A second Israeli official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a closed-door meeting, said Netanyahu would meet with top security officials to discuss next steps in the war.

Talks on a second phase of the ceasefire had stalled

The strikes came two months after a ceasefire was reached to pause the war. Over six weeks, Hamas released 25 Israeli hostages and the bodies of eight more in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners in a first phase of the ceasefire.

But since that ceasefire ended two weeks ago, the sides have not been able to agree on a way forward with a second phase aimed at releasing the 59 remaining hostages, 35 of whom are believed to be dead, and ending the war altogether.

Hamas has demanded an end to the war and full withdrawal of Israeli troops in exchange for the release of the remaining hostages. Israel says it will not end the war until it destroys Hamas' governing and military capabilities and frees all hostages — two goals that could be incompatible.

Netanyahu's office on Tuesday said Hamas had "repeatedly refused to release our hostages and rejected all offers it received from the U.S. presidential envoy, Steve Witkoff, and from the mediators."

Israel wants Hamas to release half of the remaining hostages in return for a promise to negotiate a lasting truce. Hamas instead wants to follow the ceasefire deal reached by the two sides, which calls for negotiations to begin on the ceasefire's more difficult second phase, in which the remaining hostages would be released and Israeli forces would withdraw from Gaza.

A return to war would allow Netanyahu to avoid the tough trade-offs called for in the second phase of the agreement and the thorny question of who would govern Gaza. It would also shore up his coalition, which depends on far-right lawmakers who want to depopulate Gaza and re-build Jewish settlements there.

Gaza already was in a humanitarian crisis

The war erupted when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking 251 hostages. Most have been released in ceasefires or other deals, with Israeli forces rescuing only eight and recovering dozens of bodies.

Israel responded with a military offensive that killed over 48,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and displaced an estimated 90% of Gaza's population. The territory's Health Ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and militants, but says over half of the dead have been women and children.

The ceasefire had brought some relief to Gaza and allowed hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians to resume to what remained of their homes.

Netanyahu faces mounting criticism

The released hostages, some of whom were emaciated, have repeatedly implored the government to press ahead with the ceasefire to return all remaining captives. Tens of thousands of Israelis have taken part in mass demonstrations calling for a ceasefire and return of all hostages.

Mass demonstrations are planned later Tuesday and Wednesday following Netanyahu's announcement this week that he wants to fire the head of Israel's Shin Bet internal security agency. Critics have lambasted the move as an attempt by Netanyahu to divert blame for his government's failures in the Oct. 7 attack and handling of the war.

Since the ceasefire in Gaza began in mid-January, Israeli forces have killed dozens of Palestinians who the military says approached its troops or entered unauthorized areas.

Still, the deal has tenuously held without an outbreak of wide violence. Egypt, Qatar and the United States have been trying to mediate the next steps in the ceasefire.

## Middle East latest: More than 320 killed as Israel launches airstrikes across Gaza

By The Associated Press undefined

Israel launched a wave of airstrikes across the Gaza Strip early Tuesday, saying it was hitting Hamas targets in its heaviest assault in the territory since a ceasefire took effect in January.

The strikes killed more than 320 people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he ordered the strikes because of a lack of progress in talks to extend the ceasefire. Officials said the operation was open-ended and was expected to expand. The White House said it had been consulted and voiced support for Israel's actions.

Hamas warned that Israel's new airstrikes breached their ceasefire and put the fate of hostages in jeopardy.

The surprise attack shattered a period of relative calm during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and raised the prospect of a full return to fighting in a 17-month war that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and caused widespread destruction across Gaza.

Here's the latest:

Egypt lashes out at Israel over new attacks in Gaza

Egypt, a key mediator in Gaza ceasefire talks, lashed out at Israel, calling its new offensive on Gaza a "flagrant violation of the ceasefire deal."

The Egyptian Foreign Ministry said in a statement that it rejects "all Israeli attacks which aim to ... make ongoing efforts to de-escalate and regain stability fail."

It called for the international community to "to immediately intervene to stop the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip."

It also urged the parties to "exercise restraint" and give mediators a space to "complete their efforts to reach a permanent ceasefire."

UN human rights chief 'horrified' by Gaza strikes

The U.N. human rights chief says he's "horrified" by Israel airstrikes in Gaza overnight that have killed hundreds, according to health authorities in the territory.

Volker Türk says the last 18 months of fighting between Palestinian armed groups, including Hamas, and Israeli forces have shown that "the only way forward is a political settlement" and a "military path" offers no way out of the crisis.

The rights chief reiterated his calls for hostages held by Hamas and people held arbitrarily to be released "immediately and unconditionally."

"This nightmare must end immediately," he added in a statement.

Families of hostages call for a protest outside Israel's parliament

The families of hostages held by Hamas are calling on supporters to protest with them outside Israel's parliament, saying the resumption of fighting in Gaza puts their loved ones at risk.

"With each passing day, the danger to the hostages grows. Military pressure could further endanger their lives," the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, the main group representing the families, said in a statement announcing the protest.

Netanyahu set to meet top security officials on the next step

An Israeli official says Netanyahu is to meet with top security officials in the coming half-hour to discuss next steps in the war.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a closed-door meeting.

— By Josef Federman in Jerusalem

UN secretary-general says he is 'shocked' by Israeli strikes in Gaza

The United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres says he is "shocked" by the Israeli airstrikes in

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Gaza and has called for the ceasefire in Gaza to be respected.

Guterres, in a statement, called for humanitarian aid to resume for people in Gaza and for the hostages held by Hamas to be released unconditionally.

Freed British-Israeli hostage says she is 'crushed' by resumption of fighting

Freed British-Israeli hostage Emily Damari says her "heart is broken, crushed and disappointed" by the resumption of fighting in Gaza. In a story on Instagram shared by Israeli media, she said she would keep fighting for the remaining hostages.

Israeli strikes kill at least 326 people

Gaza's Health Ministry says Israeli strikes across the territory have killed at least 326 people. The wave of strikes that began early Tuesday is among the deadliest since the start of the 17-month war.

Australian prime minister calls for ceasefire to be maintained in Gaza

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese called for the ceasefire to be maintained following Israel's attack on Gaza.

"There's already been enormous suffering there, which is why we're calling upon all parties to respect the ceasefire and hostage deal that was put in place," Albanese told reporters.

"We'll continue to make representations. Australia will continue to stand up for peace and security in the region," he added.

Israeli airstrike flattens prison, killing dozens of prisoners and police officers

An Israeli airstrike flattened a prison run by the Hamas-led government in Gaza Strip, killing dozens of prisoners and policemen, according to hospital records.

The prison was located in the urban Shati refugee camp in Gaza City. Associated Press footage showed a collapsed building and people trying to reach bodies buried under the rubble.

The bodies of more than three dozen prisoners and guards were taken to the nearby Shifa hospital.

The Hamas-run government operates a police force that numbered in the tens of thousands before the war and quickly returned to the streets after a ceasefire took hold in January.

Israel's military orders people to evacuate eastern Gaza after wave of strikes

The Israeli military ordered people to evacuate eastern Gaza and move toward the center of the territory after Israel carried out a wave of airstrikes across the territory.

The orders issued Tuesday indicate Israel could launch renewed ground operations.

Classes suspended in dozens of Gaza schools after airstrikes

The Hamas-run Education Ministry in the Gaza Strip says classes have been suspended in dozens of schools that had recently reopened.

The decision came after Israel launched a wave of heavy airstrikes across Gaza early Tuesday, shattering a nearly two-month ceasefire.

Schools shut down across Gaza after Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack ignited the war, and most were converted to shelters for displaced people.

The ministry said it had resumed classes in around 70 schools in recent weeks.

A UNICEF staffer describes a harrowing night in Gaza

A United Nations staffer in the Gaza Strip described a "very tough night" as Israel resumed heavy strikes across the territory after a nearly two-month ceasefire.

Rosalia Bollen, a communications specialist with the U.N. children's agency, said she woke up around 2 a.m. on Tuesday to "very loud explosions."

She said the UNICEF base near the southern city of Rafah "was shaking very heavily." When the strikes subsided, she heard "people yelling, people screaming and ambulances."

"The bombardments have continued throughout the night," though at a lower intensity than the initial barrage, she said. "The whole night, there's been just the constant buzzing of drones and planes flying over."

She said the strikes hit tents and structures housing displaced families. "We're seeing, as of this morning, at least several dozen children killed," she said.

Families of hostages held in Gaza say they are terrified by the resumed airstrikes

The main group representing the families of hostages held in Gaza has slammed the decision to return

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to fighting, saying the move shows the government "chose to give up on the hostages."

The Hostages Families Forum said "military pressure endangers hostages." It asked the government in a post on X why it "backed out of the agreement" with Hamas that set out a release of all the living hostages in exchange for an end to the war.

"We are shocked, angry, and terrified by the deliberate dismantling of the process to return our loved ones from the terrible captivity of Hamas," the group said.

Netanyahu's hard-line ally welcomes return to fighting in Gaza

A key governing partner of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed the return to fighting in Gaza.

Bezael Smotrich had threatened to leave the government if fighting did not resume, which would imperil Netanyahu's rule. Critics said those political considerations were influencing Netanyahu's wartime decision-making.

"We remained in the government for this moment despite our opposition to the (ceasefire) deal, and we are more determined than ever to complete the task and destroy Hamas," Smotrich posted on X.

Israeli strikes have killed at least 235 people in the Gaza Strip

Israeli strikes across the Gaza Strip have killed at least 235 people, according to local hospitals.

The toll from the strikes overnight and into Tuesday is based on records from seven hospitals and does not include bodies brought to other, smaller health centers.

Rescuers are still searching for dead and wounded.

North Korea criticizes US over airstrikes targeting Yemen's Houthi rebels

North Korea has criticized the United States over its new campaign of airstrikes targeting Yemen's Houthi rebels.

The state-run KCNA news agency on Tuesday quoted Ma Tong Hui, North Korea's ambassador to Egypt and concurrently to Yemen, as describing the attacks as a "wanton violation of all international laws including the U.N. Charter and it is an open encroachment upon the sovereignty of other nation that can never be justified."

He also criticized "U.S. hooliganism."

Trump during his first term held summits with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, but the diplomacy collapsed over disagreements on US sanctions.

Senior Hamas official says Gaza strikes amount to 'death sentence' for remaining hostages

A senior Hamas official says Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to launch widespread strikes on the Gaza Strip amounts to a "death sentence" for the remaining hostages held there.

In a statement early Tuesday, Izzat al-Risheq, a member of Hamas' political bureau, accused Netanyahu of resuming the war to try and save his far-right governing coalition.

"Netanyahu's decision to return to war is a decision to sacrifice the (Israeli) occupation's captives and a death sentence against them," he said.

He said Israel didn't respect its commitments in the ceasefire deal reached in January and urged mediators to "reveal facts" on which side broke the agreement.

US security official blames Hamas for renewed fighting

National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes said the militant group "could have released hostages to extend the ceasefire but instead chose refusal and war."

U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff, who has been leading mediation efforts along with Egypt and Qatar, had earlier warned that Hamas must release living hostages immediately "or pay a severe price."

Israel expects further military action

Israeli officials said the latest operation was open-ended and was expected to expand.

"Israel will, from now on, act against Hamas with increasing military strength," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said.

White House says it was consulted by Israelis before resuming attacks against Hamas

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt says the "Trump administration and the White House were



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consulted by the Israelis on their attacks in Gaza tonight.”

“As President Trump has made it clear, Hamas, the Houthis, Iran — all those who seek to terrorize not just Israel, but also the United States of America — will see a price to pay: All hell will break loose,” Leavitt continued, speaking to Fox News on Monday evening.

Leavitt is one of three administration officials who face a lawsuit from The Associated Press on First- and Fifth-Amendment grounds. The AP says the three are punishing the news agency for editorial decisions they oppose. The White House says the AP is not following an executive order to refer to the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America.

## **What to know about why Israel launched dozens of attacks across Gaza, raising fears of all-out war**

By DAVID RISING and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — The relative calm of a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas came to an abrupt end on Tuesday, when Israel launched dozens of attacks on targets across the Gaza Strip. Palestinian hospital officials say more than 320 people have been killed, including women and children. Israel says the operation is open-ended and expected to expand, raising fears of the 17-month-old war fully reigniting.

Here’s what to know about how the strikes came about and what might come next.

What happened to the ceasefire?

The ceasefire agreed to in mid-January was a three-phase plan, the first of which actually ended two weeks ago. Israel balked at entering substantive negotiations over the second phase, which were meant to lead to a long-term ceasefire, a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the return of all hostages taken by Hamas in its Oct. 7, 2023 attack on Israel that started the war.

The ceasefire was supposed to continue as long as talks over the second phase went on, according to the agreement reached after more than a year of negotiations mediated by the United States, Egypt and Qatar.

During the first phase, Hamas returned 25 living hostages and the remains of eight others in exchange for the release of nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Israeli forces also withdrew to buffer zones inside Gaza, and hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians returned to northern Gaza. No further hostage releases were called for under the agreement until the second phase.

Hundreds of aid trucks had been entering daily. But two weeks ago, Israel cut off all food, medicine, fuel, electricity and other supplies to the territory’s around 2 million people to pressure Hamas to accept a new proposal.

The new plan would require Hamas to release half its remaining hostages — the militant group’s main bargaining chip — in exchange for a ceasefire extension and a promise to negotiate a lasting truce. Israel made no mention of releasing more Palestinian prisoners — a key component of the first phase.

Hamas refused the new proposal, accusing Israel of trying to sabotage the existing agreement.

Is the ceasefire over?

Unless mediators step in, Israel’s surprise attack could mean a full return to fighting in a 17-month war that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and caused widespread destruction across Gaza.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has repeatedly threatened to resume the war, said he ordered the strikes because of Hamas’ rejection of the new proposal. He said Israel “will, from now on, act against Hamas with increasing military strength.”

The White House said it had been consulted and voiced support for Israel’s actions.

Hamas accused Netanyahu of upending the ceasefire agreement and exposing the remaining hostages “to an unknown fate.” In a statement, it called on mediators to hold Israel “fully responsible for violating and overturning the agreement.”

The attack came during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. No major fighting has occurred in Gaza since the ceasefire took hold on Jan. 19, but Israeli strikes have killed dozens of Palestinians who the military said had entered unauthorized areas, engaged in militant activities or otherwise violated the truce.



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What is Netanyahu's situation?

Netanyahu has come under mounting domestic pressure, with mass protests planned over his handling of the hostage crisis and his decision to fire the head of Israel's internal security agency.

Families of hostages still held in Gaza expressed concern Tuesday over their loved ones. "We are shocked, angry, and terrified by the deliberate dismantling of the process to return our loved ones from the terrible captivity of Hamas," the Hostages Families Forum said.

But Netanyahu has also faced demands from his hard-line allies not to allow any deal in Gaza that falls short of Hamas' destruction. Negotiations with Hamas over a second phase could have brought pressure for compromises over how Gaza will be ruled in the future.

Netanyahu needs to meet an end-of-the-month deadline for passing a budget or his government will collapse and the country would be forced into early elections. He has struggled to reach an agreement with coalition partners. Resuming the war could lure back former Cabinet minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, and give the prime minister added support for what is expected to be a tight vote.

Netanyahu's critics have also alleged his firing of the security agency chief and a string of other dismissals are part of a broader campaign aimed at undermining independent government institutions.

They say he's doing this to maintain power while on trial for alleged corruption and facing public pressure to accept his own responsibility for policy failures in the lead-up to Hamas' surprise attack on Oct. 7, 2023.

What else is happening?

A resumption of fighting in Gaza could have repercussions around the region.

Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels denounced the Israeli strikes, saying "the Palestinian people will not be left alone in this battle" — indicating a possible resumption of the Houthis' strikes on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

The United States launched a new airstrikes over the weekend targeting the Houthis in Yemen in retaliation for its attacks on shipping. At least 53 people were reported killed.

U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday warned Iran would "suffer the consequences" for any further Houthi attacks, threatening to widen the conflict further.

New Gaza violence could also shake the ceasefire that Israel reached with Hezbollah in November, which stopped months of deadly exchanges of fire over the Israeli-Lebanon border.

## **Hong Kong's leader swipes at Trump but avoids criticism of tycoon's deal to sell Panama Port assets**

By KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong's leader has waded into a controversy over a prominent conglomerate's decision to sell its Panama Canal port assets to a consortium including American investment bank BlackRock Inc., a deal that has angered Beijing and highlights how escalating tensions between Beijing and Washington can leave the Chinese financial center's business leaders trapped in the middle.

Chief Executive John Lee told reporters at a weekly news briefing that CK Hutchison Holdings' in-principle agreement to sell its controlling stake in a company operating ports at both ends of the Panama Canal was being discussed extensively and concerns raised about the deal deserve serious attention. He did not specify what the concerns were.

"(The) government urges foreign governments to provide a fair and just environment for enterprises," he said. "We oppose the abusive use of coercion or bullying tactics in international economic and trade relations."

Lee avoided a direct mention of U.S. President Donald Trump and also stopped short of criticizing CK Hutchison or tycoon Li Ka-shing's family, which owns a controlling stake in the conglomerate.

His comments followed a somewhat veiled backlash from Beijing.

Since last Thursday, Beijing's offices handling Hong Kong affairs have reposted two commentaries by a Beijing-backed local newspaper that blasted the deal. That has raised questions over the sale.

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One of the newspaper commentaries suggested the deal is a betrayal to all Chinese and disregards national interests. The other described great entrepreneurs as patriots, but suggested that businesspeople who "dance with" predatory American politicians to reap quick profits were doomed to infamy.

The articles signaled Beijing's disapproval of the deal, though its actual impact remains unclear.

Posting of the articles has been seen as an indirect attack on the conglomerate by Chinese leaders. Trump, who has alleged Chinese interference with the operations of the critical shipping lane, hailed the deal, saying his administration would "reclaim" the Panama Canal. Panama President José Raúl Mulino accused him of lying.

Lee said any business transaction must comply with Hong Kong's laws. The city will handle it according to the law, he said without elaborating.

Increasing influence from Beijing is adding to pressure on business leaders in the former British colony, that was returned to Chinese rule in 1997.

CK Hutchison did not comment on Lee's remarks or the articles. It was due to report its 2024 financial results on Thursday, but said it did not plan a news conference.

In Beijing, when asked about reports that China authorities are investigating the potential sale, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said reporters should ask other Chinese authorities.

"I would like to stress that in principle, China has been firmly opposing infringing on or undermining other countries' legitimate rights and interests with economic coercion and bullying," she said.

The company surprised market watchers when it announced March 4 that it would sell all shares in Hutchison Port Holdings and in Hutchison Port Group Holdings to the consortium in a deal valued at nearly \$23 billion, including \$5 billion in debt. Hutchison said the transaction was purely commercial and unrelated to other developments surrounding the Panama Ports.

The deal, if approved, will give the BlackRock consortium control over 43 ports in 23 countries, including the ports of Balboa and Cristobal, located at either end of the Panama Canal. Other ports are in Mexico, the Netherlands, Egypt, Australia, Pakistan and elsewhere.

The transaction requires approval by Panama's government. It does not affect a trust that operates ports in Hong Kong or any other ports in mainland China.

Panama says it has full control over the shipping lane and Hutchison's operation of the ports does not amount to Chinese control over the canal. Selling it to a U.S.-based company does not represent any U.S. "reclaiming" of the canal, it says.

The United States built the canal in the early 1900s, seeking a faster way for commercial and military vessels to travel between its coasts. Washington relinquished control of the waterway to Panama on Dec. 31, 1999, under a treaty signed in 1977 by then-President Jimmy Carter. Trump has claimed that Carter "foolishly" gave the canal away.

Some 70% of the sea traffic that crosses the Panama Canal leaves or goes to U.S. ports.

## **Peru declares an emergency and deploys the army as violence surges in the capital**

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Peru's president declared a state of emergency in the capital Monday and ordered the deployment of soldiers to help police address a surge of violence, amid widespread outcry a day after the killing of a popular singer.

President Dina Boluarte's government published a decree saying that the state of emergency will last 30 days, and authorities will restrict some rights, including the freedom of assembly and movement. That means the police and the army would be able to detain people without a judicial order.

Peru has seen an increase of killings, violent extortion and attacks on public places in recent months. Police reported 459 killings from Jan. 1 to March 16, and 1,909 extortion reports in January alone. But outrage crested after the killing Sunday of Paul Flores, the 39-year-old lead singer of the cumbia band Armonia 10.

In Congress, opposition lawmakers requested a vote of no confidence against Interior Minister Juan

José Santiváñez for what they say is a lack of a plan to fight rising violence. The vote is expected to be discussed in the Congress' plenary later this week.

Flores was shot to death early Sunday when assailants attacked the bus he and bandmates were traveling after a concert in Lima. Cumbia is a Latin music style that people dance to the rhythm of drums, maracas and other instruments.

The attack against the popular singer was not the only violent event over the weekend. On Saturday, an object exploded at a restaurant in the capital, injuring at least 11 people.

Boluarte's government previously decreed a state of emergency in an attempt to stem the violence between September and December.

## **Trump and Putin to hold call on ceasefire, but Zelenskyy is skeptical that Russia is ready for peace**

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is set to hold talks on Tuesday with Russian President Vladimir Putin as he looks to get buy-in on a U.S. ceasefire proposal that he hopes can create a pathway to ending Russia's devastating war on Ukraine.

The White House is optimistic that peace is within reach even as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy remains skeptical that Putin is doing much beyond paying lip service to Trump as Russian forces continue to pound his country.

The engagement is just the latest turn in dramatically shifting U.S.-Russia relations as Trump has made quickly ending the conflict a top priority, even at the expense of straining ties with longtime American allies who want Putin to pay a price for the invasion.

"It's a bad situation in Russia, and it's a bad situation in Ukraine," Trump told reporters on Monday. "What's happening in Ukraine is not good, but we're going to see if we can work a peace agreement, a ceasefire and peace. And I think we'll be able to do it."

In preparation for the Trump-Putin call, White House special envoy Steve Witkoff met last week with Putin in Moscow to discuss the proposal. Secretary of State Marco Rubio had persuaded senior Ukrainian officials during talks in Saudi Arabia to agree to the ceasefire framework.

The U.S. president said Washington and Moscow have already begun discussing "dividing up certain assets" between Ukraine and Russia as part of a deal to end the conflict.

Trump, who during his campaign pledged to quickly end the war, has at moments boasted of his relationship with Putin and blamed Ukraine for Russia's unprovoked invasion, all while accusing Zelenskyy of unnecessarily prolonging the biggest land war in Europe since World War II.

Trump has said that swaps of land and power plants will be part of the conversation with Putin.

Witkoff and White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt suggested that U.S. and Russian officials have discussed the fate of the Zaporizhzhia power plant in southern Ukraine.

The power plant has been caught in the crossfire since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in 2022 and seized the facility shortly after. The U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency has repeatedly expressed alarm about the nuclear power plant, Europe's largest, fueling fears of a potential nuclear catastrophe.

The nuclear power plant is a significant asset, producing nearly a quarter of Ukraine's electricity in the year before the war.

"I can say we are on the 10th yard line of peace," Leavitt said. "And we've never been closer to a peace deal than we are in this moment. And the president, as you know, is determined to get one done."

But Bradley Bowman, senior director of the Center on Military and Political Power at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, questioned whether Putin is ready to end the war or will hold out for potential further concessions as Trump grows impatient.

After a disastrous Feb. 28 White House meeting with Zelenskyy, Trump temporarily cut off some military intelligence-sharing and aid to Ukraine. It was restored after the Ukrainians last week signed off on the

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Trump administration's 30-day ceasefire proposal.

"The U.S. has been consistently offering in some form preemptive concessions that have been weakening the American and Ukrainian negotiating position," Bowman said. "I think there's a real danger here that the administration's approach is boiling down to sticks for Ukraine and carrots for Putin."

Zelensky in his nightly video address on Monday made clear he remains doubtful that Putin is ready for peace.

"Now, almost a week later, it's clear to everyone in the world — even to those who refused to acknowledge the truth for the past three years — that it is Putin who continues to drag out this war," Zelenskyy said.

In his dealings with Zelenskyy and Putin, Trump has frequently focused on who has the leverage. Putin has "the cards" and Zelenskyy does not, Trump has said repeatedly.

Trump, who has long shown admiration for Putin, has also made clear he'd like to see the U.S.-Russia relationship return to a more normal footing.

The president during his recent contentious meeting with Zelenskyy grumbled that "Putin went through a hell of a lot with me," a reference to the federal investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election in which he beat Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Trump on Monday again underscored his view that Ukraine is not in a strong negotiating position. He said Russian forces have "surrounded" Ukrainian troops in Russia's Kursk region — amplifying an assertion made by Russian officials that's been refuted by Zelenskyy.

Ukraine's army stunned Russia in August last year by attacking across the border and taking control of an estimated 1,300 square kilometers (500 square miles) of land. But Ukraine's forces are now in retreat and it has all but lost a valuable bargaining chip, as momentum builds for a ceasefire with Russia.

Zelenskyy has acknowledged that the Ukrainians are on their back foot but refutes Russian claims that they have encircled his troops in Kursk.

Trump suggested that he's taken unspecified action that has kept Russia from slaughtering Ukrainian troops in Kursk.

"They're surrounded by Russian soldiers, and I believe if it wasn't for me they wouldn't be here any longer," Trump said.

Leavitt is one of three Trump administration officials who face a lawsuit from The Associated Press on First- and Fifth-Amendment grounds. The AP says the three are punishing the news agency for editorial decisions they oppose. The White House says the AP is not following an executive order to refer to the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America.

## **The \$300 billion question: What to do with Russia's frozen central bank money?**

By DAVID McHUGH, LORNE COOK and EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — With U.S. support for Ukraine in doubt, Kyiv's European allies are weighing whether to seize \$300 billion in frozen Russian assets and use the money to compensate Ukraine, support its military and help rebuild shattered homes and towns.

For now, the assets are still on ice, with opponents of seizure warning that the move could violate international law and destabilize financial markets.

Here are key things to know about the debate surrounding the Kremlin assets that were frozen shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion in early 2022:

What are the assets and where are they?

Originally, the money was in short-term government bonds held as reserves for the Russian central bank. By now, most of the bonds have matured and turned into cash piling up in custodian banks. Some 210 billion euros are in European Union member states, with the biggest chunk, some 183 billion euros, at Euroclear, a Belgian clearinghouse for financial transactions. Other amounts are at financial institutions in Great Britain, Japan, France, Canada, Switzerland, Australia and Singapore.

So far, the Group of Seven democracies have used the interest on the frozen cash to fund \$50 billion in



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upfront assistance to Ukraine by borrowing against future interest income. That solution avoids legal and financial complications associated with outright confiscating the money and giving it to Ukraine.

Who is calling for seizing the assets and why?

Some of Ukraine's friends — Poland, the United Kingdom and the Baltic states Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia — want to do more by taking the principal as well, given the enormous damage Russia has done. The World Bank estimates that reconstructing Ukraine will cost \$524 billion over 10 years, already more than the total of the Russian assets. If one or more Western governments resists seizing the assets, the others that want to could still go ahead.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's allies in Europe are contemplating stepping up their financial aid in the wake of statements by U.S. President Donald Trump that Europe must take care of its own security. Several of those allies — France and Belgium, for instance — are already saddled with troublesome debt levels above 100% of gross domestic product.

Why do France, Germany and Belgium oppose seizing the assets?

European leaders say seizing the assets now would mean they couldn't be used as a bargaining chip in any peace deal or to help enforce a ceasefire.

French Finance Minister Eric Lombard said Tuesday that it was against international law to seize assets in central banks. If Russian assets were seized without legal grounds, "it could pose a risk to European financial stability," he said.

"I advocate great caution when it comes to those frozen assets," Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever said at a March 6 EU summit. "At the moment, that is actually a chicken that also lays golden eggs. Those windfall profits are going to Ukraine."

Opponents of seizure also fear that countries and investors would hesitate to use European financial institutions if they are afraid assets could be seized, undermining the euro's role as an international currency for state reserves.

More specifically, governments worry that countries such as Saudi Arabia and China may sell European government bonds in response, said Elina Ribakova, an economist with the Bruegel think tank in Brussels. That would raise borrowing costs for governments already deep in debt.

She favors seizure, however, arguing that the European Central Bank has tools to thwart any unjustified bond selloff by purchasing government bonds.

Also looming over the issue are memories of the 2010-2012 European government debt crisis, in which borrowing costs spiked and raised concerns the euro currency could break up.

There is a "good deal of PTSD in the EU around messing with the EU sovereign bond market" because of that, said Tom Keatinge, director of the Centre for Finance and Security at the Royal United Services Institute in London.

Would confiscating the assets be legal under international law?

Some experts argue that seizure would be an appropriate "countermeasure." That's a specific legal term referring to an action that would normally be illegal but which is justified as a means to push Russia to stop its own violations of international law.

"There is no dilemma between using an aggressor's assets to protect its victim and maintaining a commitment to the rules-based order," wrote Nigel Gould-Davies, senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies and Britain's former ambassador to Belarus, in a legal analysis.

Other scholars say confiscation would not be a legitimate countermeasure.

One reason: justifying a countermeasure as compensation for damages — instead of merely as pressure to behave — would be "a very significant expansion of the way we have used countermeasures in the past," said Ingrid Brunk, professor of international law at Vanderbilt University Law School. "I would term it as a violation of international law on countermeasures."

Additionally, Brunk said international law grants strong protection to central bank reserves against seizure — a principle that has been "absolutely sacrosanct for a century."

"At a time when countries agree on almost nothing, this is a widely, universally accepted rule," Brunk

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said, cautioning against “destabilizing one of the few ironclad bases for the international financial system.”

Keatinge said the legal question is a “50-50 call.” It boils down to a question of “political will.”

Have other countries’ frozen assets been confiscated in the past?

Frozen state assets were used to compensate victims of Iraq’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait and Iran’s 1979 seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. Those actions were legally justified because they were part of post-conflict peace deals: a U.N. resolution in the case of Iraq, and by diplomatic accords in the case of Iran, noted Brunk.

What has Russia said or done about the frozen assets?

The Kremlin has repeatedly warned that the seizure of Russian assets would be illegitimate and erode investors’ confidence. “We view those intentions as unlawful, and any attempt to fulfill them would entail very serious legal consequences,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters earlier this month.

Russia could, in theory, seize the assets of the estimated 1,800 Western companies that continue to do business in Russia. Recent legislation would enable state seizure of companies based in countries designated as “unfriendly,” Russian news media report.

However, there’s less to seize on Russia’s end. Foreign companies have suffered more than \$170 billion in losses since 2022, often as they decided to leave Russia or scale back there, according to the Kyiv School of Economics.

## **Israel launches deadly wave of airstrikes across Gaza after ceasefire talks stall**

By WAFAA SHURAF and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel launched a wave of airstrikes across the Gaza Strip early Tuesday, saying it was striking dozens of Hamas targets in its heaviest assault in the territory since a ceasefire took effect in January. Palestinian officials reported at least 69 deaths.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he ordered the strikes because of a lack of progress in talks to extend the ceasefire. Officials said the operation was open-ended and was expected to expand.

“Israel will, from now on, act against Hamas with increasing military strength,” Netanyahu’s office said.

The surprise attack shattered a period of relative calm during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and raised the prospect of a full return to fighting in a 17-month war that has killed over 48,000 Palestinians and caused widespread destruction across Gaza. It also raised questions about the fate of the roughly two dozen Israeli hostages held by Hamas who are believed to still be alive.

In a statement, Hamas condemned what it called Israel’s “unprovoked escalation” and said it had put the fate of the hostages in jeopardy.

There was no immediate U.S. reaction. But over the weekend, U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff, who has been leading mediation efforts along with Egypt and Qatar, warned that Hamas must release living hostages immediately “or pay a severe price.”

An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the unfolding operation, said Israel was striking Hamas’ military, leaders and infrastructure and planned to expand the operation beyond air attacks. The official accused Hamas of attempting to rebuild and plan new attacks. Hamas militants and security forces quickly returned to the streets in recent weeks after the ceasefire went into effect.

Israel’s defense minister, Israel Katz, said the “gates of hell will open in Gaza” if the hostages aren’t released. “We will not stop fighting until all of our hostages are home and we have achieved all of the war goals,” he said.

Explosions could be heard throughout Gaza, and at least 69 people were killed in the morning airstrikes, according to four hospitals that received the bodies. The territory’s civil defense agency said its crews were having a difficult time carrying out rescue efforts because various areas were being targeted simultaneously.

Talks on a second phase of the ceasefire had stalled

The strikes came two months after a ceasefire was reached to pause the war. Over six weeks, Hamas

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released roughly three dozen hostages in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners in a first phase of the ceasefire.

But since that ceasefire ended two weeks ago, the sides have not been able to agree on a way forward with a second phase aimed at releasing the nearly 60 remaining hostages and ending the war altogether.

Hamas has demanded an end to the war and full withdrawal of Israeli troops in exchange for the release of the remaining hostages. Israel says it will not end the war until it destroys Hamas governing and military capabilities and frees all hostages.

Netanyahu has repeatedly threatened to resume the war, and early this month cut off the entry of all food and aid deliveries into the besieged territory to put pressure on Hamas.

"This comes after Hamas repeatedly refused to release our hostages and rejected all offers it received from the U.S. presidential envoy, Steve Witkoff, and from the mediators," Netanyahu's office said early Tuesday.

Taher Nunu, a Hamas official, criticized the Israeli attacks. "The international community faces a moral test: either it allows the return of the crimes committed by the occupation army or it enforces a commitment to ending the aggression and war against innocent people in Gaza," he said.

Gaza already was in a humanitarian crisis

The war erupted with Hamas' Oct 7, 2023, cross-border attack, which killed some 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage.

Israel responded with a military offensive that killed over 48,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and displaced an estimated 90% of Gaza's population. The territory's Health Ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and militants, but says over half of the dead have been women and children.

The ceasefire had brought some relief to Gaza and allowed hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians to resume to what remained of their homes.

But the territory is coping with vast destruction, with no immediate plans to rebuild. A resumption of the war threatens to reverse any progress made in recent weeks toward halting Gaza's humanitarian crisis.

A renewed Israeli ground offensive could also be especially deadly now that so many Palestinian civilians have returned home. Before the ceasefire, civilians were largely concentrated in tent camps meant to provide relative safety from the fighting.

The return to fighting could also worsen deep internal fissures inside Israel over the fate of the remaining hostages. Many of the hostages released by Hamas returned emaciated and malnourished and described harsh conditions in captivity, putting heavy pressure on the government to extend the ceasefire.

The released hostages have repeatedly implored the government to press ahead with the ceasefire to return all remaining hostages, and tens of thousands of Israelis have taken part in mass demonstrations in recent weeks calling for a ceasefire and return of all hostages.

Mass demonstrations are planned later Tuesday and Wednesday following Netanyahu's announcement this week that he wants to fire the head of Israel's internal security agency, the Shin Bet. Critics have lambasted the move, saying it is an attempt by Netanyahu to divert blame for his government's failures in the Oct. 7 attack and handling of the war.

Since the ceasefire in Gaza began in mid-January, Israeli forces have killed dozens of Palestinians who the military says approached its troops or entered unauthorized areas.

Still, the deal has tenuously held without an outbreak of wide violence. The ceasefire's first phase saw an exchange of some hostages held by Hamas in return for the freeing of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Egypt, Qatar and the United States have been trying to mediate the next steps in the ceasefire.

Israel wants Hamas to release half of the remaining hostages in return for a promise to negotiate a lasting truce. Hamas instead wants to follow the ceasefire deal reached by the two sides, which calls for negotiations to begin on the ceasefire's more difficult second phase, in which the remaining hostages would be released and Israeli forces would withdraw from Gaza. Hamas is believed to have 24 living hostages and the bodies of 35 others.



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## Putin and Trump will speak on Tuesday about the war in Ukraine

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump will speak with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday in a possible pivot point in efforts to end the war in Ukraine and an opportunity for Trump to continue reorienting American foreign policy.

Trump disclosed the upcoming conversation to reporters while flying from Florida to Washington on Air Force One on Sunday evening, while the Kremlin confirmed Putin's participation on Monday morning.

"We will see if we have something to announce maybe by Tuesday. I will be speaking to President Putin on Tuesday," Trump said. "A lot of work's been done over the weekend. We want to see if we can bring that war to an end."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Monday morning confirmed the plans for the two leaders to speak on Tuesday, but declined to give details, saying that "we never get ahead of events" and "the content of conversations between two presidents are not subject to any prior discussion."

European allies are wary of Trump's affinity for Putin and his hardline stance toward Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who faced sharp criticism when he visited the Oval Office a little more than two weeks ago.

Although Russia failed in its initial goal to topple the Ukrainian government with its invasion three years ago, it still controls large swaths of the country.

Trump said land and power plants are part of the conversation around bringing the war to a close.

"We will be talking about land. We will be talking about power plants," he said, a process he described as "dividing up certain assets."

Trump special envoy Steve Witkoff visited Moscow last week to advance negotiations.

Russia illegally annexed four Ukrainian regions after launching its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 — the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the east and the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions in the south-east of the country — but doesn't fully control any of the four. Last year, Putin listed Kyiv's withdrawal of troops from all four regions as one of the demands for peace.

In 2014, the Kremlin also annexed Crimea from Ukraine.

In the occupied part of the Zaporizhzhia region, Moscow controls the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant — the largest in Europe. The plant has repeatedly been caught in the crossfire since the invasion. The International Atomic Energy Agency, a U.N. body, has frequently expressed alarm about the plant because of fears of a potential nuclear catastrophe.

During his conversation with reporters on Air Force One, Trump said he was pushing forward with his plans for tariffs on April 2 despite recent disruption in the stock market and nervousness about the economic impact.

"April 2 is a liberating day for our country," he said. "We're getting back some of the wealth that very, very foolish presidents gave away because they had no clue what they were doing."

Trump has occasionally changed course on some tariff plans, such as with Mexico, but he said he had no intention of doing so when it comes to reciprocal tariffs.

"They charge us and we charge them," he said. "Then in addition to that, on autos, on steel, on aluminum, we're going to have some additional tariffs."

## Gunmen attack convoy evacuating medical staff after aid group in Haiti temporarily shuts hospital

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Doctors Without Borders said Monday that four of its vehicles came under fire while they evacuated staff from a hospital in Haiti's capital as gang violence in the city surges.

The aid organization said the attack occurred after it decided to suspend services at the Turgeau Emergency Center on Saturday given "brutal street fighting" that was moving closer to the facility. It noted that one of its convoys "was repeatedly and intentionally fired upon, despite prior coordination with authorities."

No one was killed, but staff members received minor injuries, said Benoit Vasseur, the group's head of

mission in Haiti.

"Currently, it is impossible to continue operations at the hospital, but we are committed to reopening our facility as soon as the situation allows us to do so safely," he said.

Doctors Without Borders said it is the second time in less than four months that it has been forced to suspend operations at that health facility in Port-au-Prince.

The Turgeau Emergency Center was one of the few remaining hospitals in Haiti's capital that was fully functional as gangs that control 85% of Port-au-Prince step up attacks in a bid to control more territory.

More than 5,600 people were killed across Haiti last year, with gang violence in recent years leaving more than one million people homeless, according to the U.N.

## **Homeland Security says professor deported to Lebanon with US visa supported Hezbollah leader**

By MICHAEL CASEY, RODRIQUE NGOWI and KATHY McCORMACK Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Homeland Security officials on Monday said that a doctor from Lebanon who was deported over the weekend despite having a U.S. visa "openly admitted" to supporting a Hezbollah leader and attending his funeral.

The department's statement, posted on social media, provides a possible explanation for Dr. Rasha Alawieh's deportation, which has sparked widespread alarm, especially after a federal judge ordered that she not be removed until a hearing could be held. Government lawyers have said customs officials did not get word until after Alawieh was sent back to Lebanon.

"A visa is a privilege not a right — glorifying and supporting terrorists who kill Americans is grounds for visa issuance to be denied. This is commonsense security," Homeland Security said in its statement.

It's the latest deportation of a foreign-born person with a U.S. visa, after Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil, who helped lead protests of the Gaza war at Columbia University, was arrested and a doctoral student's visa was revoked. The Trump administration also transferred hundreds of immigrants to El Salvador even as a federal judge issued an order temporarily barring the deportations.

Stephanie Marzouk, Alawieh's lawyer, said she would not stop fighting to get the 34-year-old doctor back in the U.S., "to see her patients where she should be."

Marzouk did not immediately return a request for comment surrounding Homeland Security's allegations that Alawieh supported a Hezbollah leader.

Some court documents are sealed

The Justice Department has also detailed its reasons for deporting Alawieh in court filings, but a federal judge has sealed those documents.

News outlets that obtained those records before they were sealed reported that Alawieh had photos on her phone of Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of the Lebanese militant group for the past three decades. The Boston Globe reported she also had pictures of Hezbollah "fighters and martyrs" on her phone.

"According to Dr. Alawieh, she follows him for his religious and spiritual teachings and not his politics," the court documents stated.

When asked why she deleted the photos days before arriving in Boston, Alawieh allegedly told officers: "Because I didn't want the perception. But I know I'm not doing anything wrong. I'm not related to anything politically or militarily."

Alawieh's deportation

Alawieh was granted the visa on March 11 and arrived at Boston Logan International Airport on Thursday, according to a complaint filed on her behalf by a cousin in federal court.

Alawieh, a kidney transplant specialist who previously worked and lived in Rhode Island, was detained at least 36 hours, the complaint said. She was to start work at Brown University as an assistant professor of medicine.

U.S. District Judge Leo Sorokin issued an order Friday that an in-person hearing be scheduled Monday, with Alawieh brought to court.

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On Saturday, the cousin filed a motion saying customs officials “willfully” disobeyed the order by sending Alawieh back to Lebanon.

Lawyers for the government said in a court filing Monday that U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers at the Boston airport did not receive notice of the order until she “had already departed the United States,” the judge noted. They asked that the petition be dismissed.

Alawieh worked at Brown prior to the issuance of her H1B visa, the complaint said. It said she has held fellowships and residencies at three universities in the U.S.

A spokesperson for Brown said Alawieh is an employee of Brown Medicine with a clinical appointment to Brown.

Brown Medicine is a not-for-profit medical practice that is its own organization and serves its own patients directly. It is affiliated with Brown University’s medical school.

## A rally in Rhode Island

On Monday, a handful of Alawieh’s colleagues stood outside Boston’s federal courthouse to support her. “She is one of three transplant nephrologists in the entire state of Rhode Island, which, you know, also serves the parts of Massachusetts and Connecticut,” said Dr. Susie Hu. “Her absence is really detrimental to our program.”

Dr. Douglas Shemin, who said he hired Alawieh at Brown Medicine, called her an “outstanding” clinician, physician and teacher who eagerly put in long hours without complaining.

Brown Medicine has roughly 300 to 400 patients awaiting kidney transplants, according to Shemin. Each needs regular evaluations.

More than 100 people gathered in the rain outside the Rhode Island Statehouse on Monday evening to rally in support of Alawieh, holding signs reading “Dr. Rasha Has Rights” and “We cannot tolerate this!”

Dr. Paul Morrissey, director of the organ transplantation division at Brown, said at the rally that he was shocked that Alawieh was deported and that patients will experience a delay in care because of it.

“Rasha is a first-class human being — a very talented physician — and it will be America’s loss if we can’t have her back in Rhode Island,” he said.

Speaking at the rally, Brown University student Kai Blades called the deportation part of a broader pattern of political repression.

“We’re here to stand in opposition to deportations, in opposition to racism and in opposition to the fascist state terror that has been used not only against our beloved community member Rasha, but others like Mahmoud Khalil,” Blades said. “We are here to stay. We’re going to stand up for our community and we’re going to be as loud as possible when they’re under attack.”

Dr. Mindy Saboda, an internal medicine colleague, said Alawieh had been returning to the U.S. after visiting family in Lebanon for the first time in six years.

Her daughter, Ada Sobota-Walden, a high school student, called the deportation upsetting.

“We need to stand up when things like this happen because otherwise they’ll keep happening,” Sobota-Walden said.

Mahmoud Khalil’s lawyers seek his release

Meanwhile, lawyers for Khalil, a Columbia University graduate student, requested Monday that he be released on bail or returned to New York from a Louisiana detention facility.

In papers filed in Manhattan federal court, the lawyers wrote that the treatment of Khalil meant “every noncitizen must wonder whether they will face retaliation for engaging in speech on issues of public concern or critical of the U.S. government.” It seemed designed to “prevent Mr. Khalil — and many others — from speaking in this country at all,” they added.

## **Pentagon restores a few webpages honoring servicemembers but still defends DEI purge**

By LEAH WILLINGHAM, JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER and TARA COPP Associated Press

The Pentagon said Monday that internet pages honoring a Black Medal of Honor winner and Japanese



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American service members were mistakenly taken down — but staunchly defended its overall campaign to strip out content singling out the contributions by women and minority groups, which the Trump administration considers “DEI.”

A Defense Department webpage honoring Black Medal of Honor recipient Army Maj. Gen. Charles Calvin Rogers was taken down last week. The department actually temporarily changed the web address to insert “deimedal-of-honor”, which then led to a “404 - Page not found” message, according to a screenshot captured by the Internet Archive on March 15.

A U.S. official said the website was mistakenly taken down during an automated removal process.

But it’s not the only one. Thousands of pages honoring contributions by women and minority groups have been taken down in efforts to delete material promoting diversity, equity and inclusion — a step that Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell defended at a briefing Monday.

“I think the president and the secretary have been very clear on this — that anybody that says in the Department of Defense that diversity is our strength is, is frankly, incorrect,” Parnell said. “Our shared purpose and unity are our strength. And I say this as somebody who led a combat platoon in Afghanistan that was probably the most diverse platoon that you could possibly imagine.”

But it isn’t resonating that way with veterans or communities who honor those groups — and raises questions as to whether the administration’s fixation on getting rid of images that highlight the contributions of women, minorities and members of the LGBTQ community will ultimately backfire and hurt recruiting. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and President Donald Trump have already removed the only female four-star officer on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Navy Adm. Lisa Franchetti, and removed its Black Chairman, Gen. CQ Brown Jr.

“The full throttled attack on Black leadership, dismantling of civil rights protections, imposition of unjust anti-DEI regulations, and unprecedented historical erasure across the Department of Defense is a clear sign of a new Jim Crow being propagated by our Commander in Chief,” said Richard Brookshire, co-CEO of the Black Veterans Project, a nonprofit advocating for the elimination of racial inequities among uniformed service members.

Rogers, a native of Fire Creek, West Virginia, was awarded the Medal of Honor in 1970 by then-President Richard Nixon, becoming the highest-ranking Black service member to receive the country’s greatest military honor. He was wounded three times while serving in Vietnam. Rogers joined the U.S. Army in 1951, six months before the racial desegregation of the U.S. military.

He remained outspoken throughout his life about the discrimination Black service members faced. In a 1975 interview with the Daily Press in Newport News, Virginia, Rogers described how difficult it was for them to rise into leadership positions and said the struggle for equal treatment in the military wasn’t over. “We still have and will have what the Department of Defense describes as institutional racism,” he said.

The story of Rogers’ web page removal was first reported by The Guardian. It was back online Monday night.

Another page that was removed featured the World War II Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team, U.S. Army spokesperson Christopher Surridge said Monday.

According to the Army, the 4,000 men who made up the unit were mostly American-born children of Japanese immigrants, known as Nisei soldiers. Their losses were so great the whole unit had to be replaced nearly 3.5 times, according to the Army. In total, about 14,000 men served, ultimately earning 9,486 Purple Hearts, 21 Medals of Honor and an unprecedented eight Presidential Unit Citations.

But their story was removed “in accordance with a Presidential Executive Order and guidance from the Secretary of Defense” when the service took down a website celebrating Asian American and Pacific Islander heritage.

“The Army is tirelessly working through content on that site and articles related to the 442nd Infantry Regiment and Nisei Soldiers will be republished to better align with current guidance,” Surridge said in a statement. “The Army remains committed to sharing the stories of our Soldiers, their units, and their sacrifice.”

The mostly Japanese American segregated unit was highly decorated despite facing prejudice after

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Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. After the removal of the 442nd page was reported by the Honolulu Advertiser and other media outlets, the U.S. Army's website prominently displayed a page with a "spotlight" label Monday featuring the unit's history.

After Japan's Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans were viewed with suspicion and initially prevented from enlisting for military service. Nearly 110,000 were sent to internment camps. Congress presented 442nd members and other Japanese American veterans of World War II its highest civilian honor — the Congressional Gold Medal — in 2011.

The erasure of the 442nd content also drew congressional ire. Democrat Hawaii Rep. Ed Case wrote Friday in a letter asking for the pages to be restored that "it is clear that the Army is intentionally removing these websites based solely on race without any consideration of or respect for historical context."

The Japanese American Citizens League also denounced the decision, calling it "an attempt to erase the legacy of thousands of soldiers who gave everything for a country that doubted them."

Bill Wright, whose father was an officer in the 442nd, said the page's removal is just one example of what's happening across Department of Defense websites reflective of current politics. "We don't have any control over that except at the ballot box," he said, adding that it won't deter him and others from continuing to educate people about the unit.

Mark Matsunaga, a former Honolulu journalist whose Japanese American father and uncles served in World War II, said he was grateful to see the 442nd's webpage restored, but that "one act doesn't solve the larger problem."

"They're still eliminating all kinds of content — photos, articles, social media posts — that all help Americans to understand how diverse their military is," he said. "Clearly this is part of an attempt to whitewash history."

## **Trump says he's ending Secret Service protection for Biden's adult children**

By ZEKE MILLER and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Monday he was ending "immediately" the Secret Service protection details assigned to Democrat Joe Biden's adult children, which the former president had extended to July shortly before leaving office in January.

The Republican president on social media objected to what he said were 18 agents assigned to Hunter Biden's protective detail while in South Africa this week. He said Ashley Biden has 13 agents assigned to her detail and that she too "will be taken off the list."

There was no immediate reaction from the former president's office.

Former presidents and their spouses receive life-long Secret Service protection under federal law, but the protection afforded to their immediate families over the age of 16 ends when they leave office. But outgoing presidents can extend protection for those who might otherwise not be eligible for up to six months after they leave office, something Biden did for his children and Trump did for his family after leaving office in 2021. Former Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush also extended protection for their families for a period.

"We are aware of the President's decision to terminate protection for Hunter and Ashley Biden," the agency said in a statement. "The Secret Service will comply and is actively working with the protective details and the White House to ensure compliance as soon as possible."

While touring the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Monday afternoon, a reporter asked Trump if he would revoke the protection for the former president's son.

"Well, we have done that with many. I would say if there are 18 with Hunter Biden, that will be something I'll look at this afternoon," Trump said, who added this was the first time he heard about the matter.

"I'm going to take a look at that," he said.

## The Tren de Aragua gang started in a Venezuelan prison. Now US politics are focusing on it

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Debates over U.S. President Donald Trump's hardline migration policies are focused on the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua, to some a ruthless transnational criminal organization and to others the pretext for an overhyped anti-migrant narrative.

Trump labeled the Tren de Aragua an invading force on Saturday when he invoked the Alien Enemies Act, a little-used authority from 1798 that allows the president to deport any noncitizen during wartime. Hours later, the Trump administration transferred hundreds of immigrants to El Salvador even as a federal judge issued an order temporarily barring the deportations. Flights were in the air when the ruling came down.

The Alien Enemies Act requires a president to declare the United States at war, giving him extraordinary powers to detain or remove foreigners to whom immigration or criminal laws otherwise protect. It had been used only three times — the last time to justify the detention of Japanese-American civilians during World War II.

The Trump administration has not identified the more than 200 immigrants deported, provided any evidence they are in fact members of Tren de Aragua or that they committed any crimes in the United States.

Gang gains notoriety in the U.S.

From the heartland to major cities like New York and Chicago, the gang has been blamed for sex trafficking, drug smuggling and police shootings, as well as the exploitation of the nearly 1 million Venezuelan migrants who have crossed into the U.S. in recent years. Trump told Congress this month that a Venezuelan migrant found guilty of murdering 22-year-old nursing student Laken Riley on the University of Georgia campus was a member of the gang.

The size of the gang is unclear as is the extent to which its actions are coordinated across state lines and national borders.

The Venezuelan gang entered U.S. political discourse after footage from a security camera surfaced on social media last summer showing heavily armed men entering an apartment in the Denver suburb of Aurora shortly before a fatal shooting outside. In response, Trump vowed to "liberate Aurora" from Venezuelans he falsely said were "taking over the whole town."

The city initially downplayed concerns. But most of the apartment complex was closed under an emergency order last month after officials said they suspected Tren de Aragua members in the kidnapping and assault of two residents.

Most of the men seen in the video have been arrested, with Immigration and Customs Enforcement accusing them of gang membership.

The Tren originated in an infamous prison

The Tren, which means "train" in Spanish, traces its origin more than a decade ago to an infamously lawless prison with hardened criminals in the central state of Aragua. It has expanded in recent years as more than 7.7 million Venezuelans fled economic turmoil under President Nicolás Maduro's rule and migrated to other parts of Latin America or the U.S.

Countries such as Peru and Colombia — all with large populations of Venezuelan migrants — have accused the group of being behind a spree of violence in a region that has long had some of the highest murder rates in the world. Some of its crimes have spread panic in poor neighborhoods, where the gang extorts local businesses and illegally charges residents for "protection."

The gang operates as a loose network in the U.S. Tattoos, which are commonly used by Central American gangs, are not required for those affiliated with the Tren, said Ronna Riskey, a Venezuelan journalist who wrote a 2023 book about the organization's origins.

Some recently deported Venezuelans have said they believe U.S. authorities wrongly judged their tattoos and then used them as an excuse to deport them.

Trump targets the Tren

On his first day in office, Trump took steps to designate the gang a "foreign terrorist organization"



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alongside several Mexican drug cartels. The Biden administration had sanctioned the gang and offered \$12 million in rewards for the arrest of three of its leaders.

Trump's executive order Saturday accused the gang of working closely with top Maduro officials — most notably the former vice president and one-time governor of Aragua state, Tareck El Aissami, — to infiltrate migration flows, flood the U.S. with cocaine and plot against the country.

"The result is a hybrid criminal state that is perpetrating an invasion of and predatory incursion into the United States, and which poses a substantial danger to the United States," Trump's executive order alleged.

Wes Tabor, who headed the Drug Enforcement Administration's office in Venezuela when the gang first came onto law enforcement radar, said Trump's decision to give the DEA and other federal agencies authority to carry out immigrant arrests is a "force multiplier" that will curtail the Tren's activities in the U.S.

Tabor said authorities need to build a robust database like they did when combating El Salvador's MS-13 containing biometric data, arrest information and intelligence from foreign law enforcement partners.

"We have to use a hammer on an ant because if we don't, it will get out of control," Tabor said. "We need to smash it now."

Venezuelan officials protest

In Venezuela, officials originally expressed bafflement at the U.S. interest in the Tren, claiming it had dismantled the gang in 2023 after retaking control of the prison where the group was born. They have also conditioned their cooperation with U.S. deportation flights on progress in other areas in the long-strained bilateral relationship.

Jorge Rodriguez, Maduro's chief negotiator with the U.S., accused Washington of spreading a false narrative about the gang, adding that most Venezuelan immigrants are decent people. He characterized the transfer of immigrants to El Salvador as kidnappings and said the government will challenge the "crimes against humanity" before the United Nations and other international bodies.

"They are not detaining them, they are kidnapping them and expelling them," he told reporters Monday. He added that Venezuelans transferred to El Salvador cannot be held behind bars there because they have not committed any crimes in that country.

"We want them all back," said Rodriguez, the leader of Venezuela's National Assembly. "We'll do anything we can ... we'll even speak with the devil, so that Venezuelans are sent back to their homeland."

## **Judge questions Trump administration on whether it ignored order to turn around deportation flights**

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

A federal judge on Monday questioned whether the Trump administration ignored his orders to turn around planes carrying deportees to El Salvador, a possible violation of the decision he'd issued minutes before.

District Judge James E. Boasberg was incredulous over the administration's contentions that his verbal directions did not count, that only his written order needed to be followed, that it couldn't apply to flights that had left the U.S. and that the administration could not answer his questions about the deportations due to national security issues.

"That's one heck of a stretch, I think," Boasberg replied, noting that the administration knew as the planes were departing that he was about to decide whether to briefly halt deportations being made under a rarely used 18th century law invoked by Trump about an hour earlier.

"I'm just asking how you think my equitable powers do not attach to a plane that has departed the U.S., even if it's in international airspace," Boasberg added at another point.

Deputy Associate Attorney General Abhishek Kamblí contended that only Boasberg's short written order, issued about 45 minutes after he made the verbal demand, counted. It did not contain any demands to reverse planes, and Kamblí added that it was too late to redirect two planes that had left the U.S. by that time.

"These are sensitive, operational tasks of national security," Kamblí said.

The hearing over what Boasberg called the "possible defiance" of his court order marked the latest

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step in a high-stakes legal fight that began when President Donald Trump invoked the 1798 wartime law to remove immigrants over the weekend. It was also an escalation in the battle over whether the Trump administration is flouting court orders that have blocked some of his aggressive moves in the opening weeks of his second term.

"There's been a lot of talk about constitutional crisis, people throw that word around. I think we're getting very close to it," warned Lee Gelernt of the ACLU, the lead attorney for the plaintiffs, during the Monday hearing. After the hearing, Gelernt said the ACLU would ask Boasberg to order all improperly deported people returned to the United States.

Boasberg said he'd record the proceedings and additional demands in writing. "I will memorialize this in a written order since apparently my oral orders don't seem to carry much weight," Boasberg said.

On Saturday night, Boasberg ordered the administration not to deport anyone in its custody through the newly-invoked Alien Enemies Act, which has only been used three times before in U.S. history, all during congressionally declared wars. Trump issued a proclamation that the law was newly in effect due to what he claimed was an invasion by the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua.

Trump's invocation of the act could allow him to deport any noncitizen he says is associated with the gang, without offering proof or even publicly identifying them. The plaintiffs filed their suit on behalf of several Venezuelans in U.S. custody who feared they'd be falsely accused of being Tren de Aragua members and improperly removed from the country.

Told there were planes in the air headed to El Salvador, which has agreed to house deported migrants in a notorious prison, Boasberg said Saturday evening that he and the government needed to move fast. "You shall inform your clients of this immediately, and that any plane containing these folks that is going to take off or is in the air needs to be returned to the United States," Boasberg told the government's lawyer.

According to the filing, two planes that had taken off from Texas' detention facility when the hearing started more than an hour earlier were in the air at that point, and they apparently continued to El Salvador. A third plane apparently took off after the hearing and Boasberg's written order was formally published at 7:26 p.m. Eastern time. Kambli said that plane held no one deported under the Alien Enemies Act.

El Salvador's President, Nayib Bukele, on Sunday morning tweeted, "Oopsie...too late" above an article referencing Boasberg's order and announced that more than 200 deportees had arrived in his country. The White House communications director, Steven Cheung, reposted Bukele's post with an admiring GIF.

Later Sunday, a widely circulated article in Axios said the administration decided to "defy" the order and quoted anonymous officials who said they concluded it didn't extend to planes outside U.S. airspace. That drew a quick denial from White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt, who said in a statement "the administration did not 'refuse to comply' with a court order."

The administration argues a federal judge does not have the authority to tell the president whether he can determine the country is being invaded under the act, or how to defend it.

After Boasberg scheduled a hearing Monday and said the government should be prepared to answer questions over its conduct, the Justice Department objected, saying it could not answer in a public forum because it involved "sensitive questions of national security, foreign relations, and coordination with foreign nations." Boasberg denied the government's request to cancel the hearing, which led the Trump administration to ask that the judge be taken off the case.

Kambli stressed that the government believes it is complying with Boasberg's order. It has said in writing it will not use Trump's invocation of the Alien Enemies Act to deport anyone if Boasberg's order is not overturned on appeal, a pledge Kambli made again verbally in court Monday. "None of this is necessary because we did comply with the court's written order," Kambli said.

Boasberg's temporary restraining order is only in effect for up to 14 days as he oversees the litigation over Trump's unprecedented use of the act, which is likely to raise new constitutional issues that can only ultimately be decided by the U.S. Supreme Court. He had scheduled a hearing Friday for further arguments, but the two organizations that filed the initial lawsuit, the ACLU and Democracy Forward, urged him to force the administration to explain in a declaration under oath what happened.

As the courtroom drama built, so did international fallout over the deportations to El Salvador. Venezuela's

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government on Monday characterized the transfer of migrants to El Salvador as “kidnappings” that it plans to challenge as “crimes against humanity” before the United Nations and other international organizations. It also accused Bukele’s government of profiting off the plights of Venezuelan migrants.

“President, I respectfully say to you, are you going to support this cruelty, this injustice ... of imprisoning noble, hard-working migrants, good people, without trial, without having committed crimes in El Salvador, without any kind of sentence issued by a Salvadoran court?” President Nicolás Maduro said on state television. “Is this legal? Is it fair? Is it humane?”

Trump’s proclamation alleges Tren de Aragua is acting as a “hybrid criminal state” in partnership with Venezuela.

Families of some Venezuelans in U.S. custody scrambled to find out if their loved ones had been sent to El Salvador. Multiple immigration lawyers said they had clients who were not gang members who were being moved for possible deportation late Friday.

Franco Caraballo was held by immigration authorities during a routine check-in Feb. 3. His immigration lawyer, Martin Rosenow, said Caraballo not been accused of a crime. Caraballo’s wife believes he’s been wrongfully accused of belonging to the gang because of a tattoo he got marking his daughter’s birthday.

He called his wife Friday night in a panic because he was being handcuffed and put on a plane to an unknown destination in Texas, from where flights to El Salvador departed.

That was the last the family heard of him and he’s disappeared from the federal immigration detainee locator system. “I’ve never seen anything like this,” said Rosenow.

## **Residents pick up the pieces after devastating storms scour the US South and Midwest**

By SAFIYAH RIDDLE and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

PLANTERSVILLE, Ala. (AP) — Kim Atchison was hunkered down in her grandmother’s storm shelter with her 5-year-old grandson Saturday night in their tiny Alabama hometown of Plantersville when her husband and son raced in.

“Get down; get all the way down to the bottom of the cellar,” they told her, saying they could see a twister coming.

Atchison said she remembers first the “dead silence” and then hearing the wind that felt like a funnel and things outside hitting against each other.

“All was quiet after that because it was that fast,” she said. “Like a snap of a finger and it was gone.”

Atchison and her family were among the fortunate ones to avoid being killed in the three-day outbreak of severe weather across eight states that kicked up a devastating combination of wildfires, dust storms and tornadoes — claiming at least 42 lives since Friday.

Two people were killed by a twister in Plantersville. One of the lives lost was that of 82-year-old Annie Free, who “just looked out for everyone,” Atchison’s husband said. The tornado struck Free’s home, leaving only the front patio behind.

Darren Atchison spent Monday delivering granola bars and sports drinks to the pummeled neighborhood, driving his all-terrain vehicle around downed trees.

More than a half-dozen houses were destroyed while others were left in rough shape, some with walls peeled clean off. The tornado flipped a trailer onto its roof and toppled trees in every direction.

When Heidi Howland emerged from her home after hiding in her bedroom underneath a mattress with her husband, kids and grandkids as the twister approached, she found fallen trees and broken car windows.

Many of her neighbors whose houses were damaged came to her front porch to take refuge from the rain after the storm passed Saturday night. One was Free’s daughter, who Howland said cried late into the night because the first responders couldn’t find her mother.

Free’s body wasn’t found until the morning.

Also killed was Dunk Pickering, a fixture in the community who often hosted live music events and helped neighbors during tough times. Neighbor John Green found Pickering’s body in the wreckage of a building



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just across the street from Green's home.

"Whether he knew you or not, he would help anyone," Green said. "I've known him for 20 years. He's been like that ever since the day I first met him."

Green and other neighbors spent at least five hours Saturday night pulling people from the rubble and carrying them to paramedics who were unable to reach the area because roads were blocked by debris.

## Wildfires in Oklahoma

Wind-driven wildfires across the state destroyed more than 400 homes over the weekend and will continue to be a threat in the coming days because of high winds.

Dozens of fires were still burning across the state on Monday, said Keith Merckx at Oklahoma Forestry Services, and much of the state including the Oklahoma City area remained under fire warnings.

While conditions over the weekend allowed crews to get a handle on most wildfires across Texas and Oklahoma, forecasters at the National Weather Service said extremely critical fire weather conditions were expected Tuesday over an area spanning from southeastern New Mexico through the Texas Panhandle and into western Oklahoma.

"These fires, once they get started, become really hard to stop. They move more quickly than our resources can keep up with," Merckx said.

Four deaths so far were blamed on the fires or high winds, according to the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management. More than 70 homes were destroyed by wildfire outbreaks Friday in and around Stillwater, home to Oklahoma State University.

## Tornadoes and high winds across the South

In Mississippi, six people died and more than 200 were displaced by a string of tornadoes across three counties, the governor said.

Within about an hour of each other on Saturday, two big tornadoes tore through Walthall County, Mississippi, according to the National Weather Service. The strongest one packed winds of 170 mph (274 kph) when it swept a well-built home from its foundation, leaving a pile of debris behind, the agency said in an updated report late Monday.

Three people died in the county, including 7-year-old Carter Young, who was in a mobile home, Walthall County Coroner Chris Blackwell said. The other two people killed — Gabrielle Pierre, 34, and Jeffery Irvin, 42 — were in a mobile home next door to the one where Young was found, Blackwell said.

Scattered twisters and storm damage led to the deaths of at least 13 people in Missouri, including a 30-year-old man who along with his dog was found dead from carbon monoxide poisoning after he was using a generator indoors during the storm, authorities said. In Arkansas, officials confirmed three deaths.

As the storm headed east, two boys ages 11 and 13 were killed when a tree fell on their home in western North Carolina early Sunday, firefighters in Transylvania County said. Firefighters found them amid the uprooted 3-foot-wide tree after relatives said they had been trapped in their bedroom, officials said.

A tornado touched down at about 3 a.m. Monday in a neighborhood in Perquimans County, North Carolina, destroying three mobile homes and damaging several others, according to the National Weather Service. Eight people were injured in the community, with no reported deaths, the weather service said. The community is about 50 miles (80 kilometers) south of Norfolk, Virginia.

## Dust storms in Kansas and Texas

High winds spurred dust storms that led to almost a dozen deaths in car crashes Friday.

Eight people died in a Kansas highway pileup involving at least 50 vehicles, according to the state highway patrol. Authorities said three people also were killed in car crashes during a dust storm in Amarillo in the Texas Panhandle.

## **Presidents have used autopens for decades. Now Trump objects to Biden's use of one**

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

President Donald Trump claimed Monday that pardons recently issued by Joe Biden to lawmakers and

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staff on the congressional committee that investigated the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot have no force because, Trump says, the-then president signed them with an autopen instead of by his own hand.

"In other words, Joe Biden did not sign them but, more importantly, he did not know anything about them!" Trump wrote on his social media site. Trump didn't offer any evidence to support his claims. Nor did the White House.

Trump asserted in his all-caps post that the pardons are void and have no effect in his estimation. But presidents have broad authority to pardon or commute the sentences of whomever they please, the Constitution doesn't specify that pardons must be in writing and autopen signatures have been used before for substantive actions by presidents.

A representative for Biden declined comment.

## WHAT IS AN AUTOPEN?

An autopen is a mechanical device that is used to replicate a person's authentic signature. A pen or other writing implement is held by an arm of the machine, which reproduces a signature after a writing sample has been fed to it. Presidents, including Trump, have used them for decades. Autopens aren't the same as an old-fashioned ink pad and rubber stamp or the electronic signatures used on PDF documents.

## WHY IS IT SUDDENLY AN ISSUE?

The Oversight Project at the conservative Heritage Foundation think tank recently said its analysis of thousands of pages of documents bearing Biden's signature found that most were by autopen, including pardons. Conservative media have amplified the claims, which have been picked up by Trump. He has commented for several days running about Biden's autopen use.

Mike Howell, the project's executive director, said in an interview that his team is scrutinizing Biden's pardons because that power lies only with the president under the Constitution and can't be delegated to another person or a machine. Howell said some of Biden's pardon papers also specify they were signed in Washington on days when he was elsewhere.

## WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

There is no law governing a president's use of an autopen.

A 2005 opinion from the Office of Legal Counsel at the Justice Department said an autopen can be used to sign legislation. Barack Obama became the first president to do so in May 2011 when he signed an extension of the Patriot Act. Obama was in France on official business and, with time running out before the law expired, he authorized use of the autopen to sign it into law.

Much earlier guidance on pardons was sent in 1929 from the solicitor general — the attorney who argues for the United States before the Supreme Court — to the attorney general. It says "neither the Constitution nor any statute prescribes the method by which executive clemency shall be exercised or evidenced."

## HAS TRUMP USED AN AUTOPEN?

Yes, but "only for very unimportant papers," he said on Monday.

He told reporters aboard Air Force One on Sunday night that, "we may use it, as an example, to send some young person a letter because it's nice. You know, we get thousands and thousands of letters, letters of support for young people, from people that aren't feeling well, etcetera. But to sign pardons and all of the things that he signed with an autopen is disgraceful."

## WHY IS HE SINGLING OUT THE JAN. 6 PARDONS?

Trump remains angry at being prosecuted by the Justice Department over his actions in inspiring his supporters to go to the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, in an attempt to stop lawmakers from certifying Biden's defeat of him in the 2020 election, though the case was dismissed after he won reelection. At the end of his term, Biden issued "preemptive pardons" to lawmakers and committee staff to protect them from any possible retribution from Trump.

On whether pardons must be in writing or by the president's own hand, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit has said the "plain language of the Constitution imposes no such limitation." Biden's statement accompanying those pardons make clear they were official acts, said Carl Tobias, professor at the University of Richmond law school.

Biden issued hundreds of commutations or pardons, including to members of his family, also because

he feared possible prosecution by Trump and his allies.

Trump vigorously used such powers at the opening of his presidency, issuing one document — a proclamation — granting pardons and commutations to all 1,500-plus people charged in the insurrection at the Capitol.

**HOW ELSE DO PRESIDENTS USE THE AUTOPEN?**

Presidents also use an autopen to sign routine correspondence to constituents, like letters recognizing life milestones.

During the Gerald Ford administration, the president and first lady Betty Ford occasionally signed documents and other correspondence by hand but White House staff more often used autopen machines to reproduce their signatures on letters and photographs.

## **Court puts a temporary hold on releasing records related to the deaths of Gene Hackman and his wife**

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — A New Mexico court granted a temporary restraining order Monday against the release of certain records related to the investigation into the recent deaths of actor Gene Hackman and his wife, Betsy Arakawa.

The order is in response to a request by Julia Peters, a representative for the couple's estate. She urged in a motion filed last week that the court seal records in the case to protect the family's right to privacy in grief under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Peters emphasized the possibly shocking nature of photographs and video in the investigation and potential for their dissemination by media.

A hearing has been scheduled for later this month to argue the merits of the request. For now, the Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office and the state Office of the Medical Investigator cannot release photographs and videos showing the couple's bodies or the interior of their home, autopsy reports or death investigation reports.

Hackman and Arakawa were found dead in their Santa Fe home in late February. Authorities have confirmed that Hackman died of heart disease with complications from Alzheimer's disease about a week after hantavirus pulmonary syndrome — a rare, rodent-borne disease — took the life of his wife.

The request to seal the records notes that the couple placed "a significant value on their privacy and took affirmative vigilant steps" to safeguard their privacy over their lifetime, including after they moved to Santa Fe and Hackman retired. The state capital is known as a refuge for celebrities, artists and authors.

"The personal representative seeks to continue to preserve the privacy of the Hackmans following their tragic death and support the family's constitutional right to remembrance and desire to grieve in peace," the document states.

New Mexico's open records law blocks public access to sensitive images, including depictions of people who are deceased. Experts also say that some medical information is not considered public record under the state Inspection of Public Records Act.

Still, the bulk of death investigations by law enforcement and autopsy reports by medical investigators are typically considered public records under state law in the spirit of ensuring government transparency and accountability.

Privacy likely will play a role as well as the couple's estate gets settled. According to probate court documents filed earlier this month, Hackman signed an updated will in 2005 leaving his estate to his wife while the will she signed that same year directed her estate to him in the event of her death. With both of them dying, management of the estate is in the hands of Peters, a Santa Fe-based attorney and trust manager.

A request is pending to appoint a trustee who can administer assets in two trusts associated with the estate. Without trust documents being made public, it's unclear who the beneficiaries are and how the assets will be divided.

Attorneys who specialize in estate planning in New Mexico say it's possible more details could come out if there were any legal disputes over the assets. Even then, they said, the parties likely would ask the court

to seal the documents to maintain privacy.

## **Top DC prosecutor, who promoted false 2020 voter fraud claims, forms 'election accountability' unit**

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The top federal prosecutor for the nation's capital, who promoted President Donald Trump's false claims that the 2020 election was rigged, has formed a "special unit" to investigate election offenses, according to an email sent to lawyers in his office on Monday.

Interim District of Columbia U.S. Attorney Ed Martin said the "Special Unit: Election Accountability" has already opened one investigation and "will continue to make sure that all the election laws of our nation are obeyed," according to the email reviewed by The Associated Press.

Martin, who is awaiting Senate confirmation to permanently take the position, was involved in the "Stop the Steal" movement, which was animated by lies about fraud after Trump lost the 2020 election to Democrat Joe Biden. Martin also served on the board of a nonprofit that raised money for Capitol riot defendants and their families and legally represented at least three defendants in Jan. 6, 2021 Capitol riot criminal cases, including a Proud Boys member who pleaded guilty to felony charges.

In the email announcing the new unit, Martin recounted uncovering "voter registration fraud" while serving as chairman of the Board of Elections in St. Louis years ago. That led to the implementation of "accountability measures to make sure that electronic machines had a paper trail," he wrote.

"Nearly 20 years later, Americans do not have confidence in our election systems," Martin wrote. "One of the best ways to restore that confidence is to protect our systems and demand accountability."

Martin did not provide additional details about the investigation his office has already opened, and spokespeople for the office didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. Officials at the Justice Department didn't immediately respond to questions about Martin's effort, which was first reported by Bloomberg Law.

Democrats reacted skeptically to Martin establishing the unit, noting his involvement with Trump's efforts to spread false claims about the 2020 election.

California Sen. Alex Padilla, the top Democrat on the Senate Rules Committee, which oversees elections, said he is concerned that the unit would be "more focused on attacking political enemies than protecting all Americans' right to vote in free and fair elections."

Maryland Rep. Jamie Raskin said Martin's new unit is "all about installing a nationwide policy of 'heads I win, tails you lose.'"

"If the GOP wins, there's a mandate to trash the Constitution; if they lose, it means the election was stolen," said Raskin, the top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee. "America is going to have to defend free and fair elections against these autocrats and veteran saboteurs of democracy."

The Trump administration had been expected to shift the Justice Department's priorities around investigating voting and elections. The agency has historically targeted voter suppression efforts and state laws that could disenfranchise certain groups, but conservatives have called for an increased focus on voter fraud.

The scope of Martin's unit is unclear and raises questions about whether he is seeking to investigate cases outside the realm of his authority, which is limited to the District of Columbia, said David Becker, a former U.S. Justice Department attorney who leads the Center for Election Innovation and Research, a Washington-based nonprofit.

"I'm waiting to see more about what this unit actually is, what jurisdiction it purports to claim, what authority it tends to seize and what laws it purports to enforce," Becker said.

Voting and elections experts expressed doubts that the new unit would improve American's confidence in elections.

The false idea that there is rampant fraud in U.S. elections "undermines public faith" in the vote, rather than bolstering it, said Sean Morales-Doyle, director of the voting rights program at the nonprofit Brennan Center for Justice,



There is no evidence of widespread fraud in the 2020 election. The results were confirmed through multiple recounts, reviews and audits. Trump lost dozens of court challenges, including before judges he appointed during his first term. His allies also have raised the specter of widespread illegal noncitizen voting in U.S. elections, though in reality this form of fraud is exceptionally rare.

Republicans in 2024 filed numerous lawsuits ahead of the presidential election about various aspects of vote-casting and voter roll management, setting the stage to contest the results if Trump had lost.

Martin has roiled the D.C. U.S. attorney's office since he was appointed to the job in January. He recently demoted senior leaders who handled politically sensitive cases and forced the chief of the office's criminal division to resign after directing her to scrutinize the awarding of a government contract during the Biden administration.

Martin has also raised eyebrows for describing federal prosecutors as the "president's lawyers," using his office as a platform for parroting Trump's political priorities and sending warning letters to at least two members of Congress for statements they had made. He recently sent a "letter of inquiry" to Georgetown University Law Center's dean that warned that his office won't hire the private school's students if it doesn't eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

## **Texas midwife accused by state's attorney general of providing illegal abortions**

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — A Texas midwife has been arrested and accused of providing illegal abortions, marking the first time authorities have filed criminal charges under the state's near-total abortion ban, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton announced on Monday.

Maria Margarita Rojas has been charged with the illegal performance of an abortion, a second-degree felony, as well as practicing medicine without a license, which is a third-degree felony.

Paxton alleges that Rojas, 48, illegally operated at least three clinics in the Houston area where illegal abortion procedures were performed in direct violation of state law.

"In Texas, life is sacred. I will always do everything in my power to protect the unborn, defend our state's pro-life laws, and work to ensure that unlicensed individuals endangering the lives of women by performing illegal abortions are fully prosecuted," Paxton said in a statement. "Texas law protecting life is clear, and we will hold those who violate it accountable."

Waller County District Attorney Sean Whittmore, whose office is located northwest of Houston, referred the case to Paxton for prosecution, according to the state Attorney General's Office.

Waller County court records show Rojas was arrested on March 6 and she was released on bond the next day.

Court records did not list an attorney for Rojas who could speak on her behalf.

A woman reached by phone at one of Rojas' clinics said Monday she did not know who Rojas was. Messages left at Rojas' two other clinics were not immediately returned. On their Facebook pages, the clinics advertise various services, including physical exams, ultrasounds and vaccines.

Texas is one of 12 states currently enforcing a ban on abortion at all stages of pregnancy. Texas' ban allows exceptions when a pregnant patient has a life-threatening condition. Opponents of the ban say it is too vague when it comes to when medically necessary exceptions are allowed. A bill has been filed in the current Texas legislative session to clarify medical exceptions allowed under the law.

The charge of illegal performance of an abortion carries a punishment of up to 20 years in prison while the charge of practicing medicine without a license carries a penalty of up to 10 years in prison.

Paxton's office said it has filed a temporary restraining order to close Rojas' clinics.

In the U.S., there have been few, if any, criminal charges filed alleging the operation of illegal abortion clinics since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 and opened the door to state abortion bans.

A Louisiana grand jury earlier this year indicted a New York doctor on charges that she illegally prescribed

abortion pills online to a Louisiana patient. Paxton has filed a civil lawsuit against the same doctor under a similar accusation.

## **Pope registers new slight improvements in pneumonia fight as Vatican gives details on hospital photo**

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis is registering new slight improvements in his monthlong treatment for pneumonia in both his lungs, the Vatican said Monday, as it also provided some details on the first photo of the pope released since his hospitalization.

The 88-year-old pontiff is now able to spend some time during the day off high flows of oxygen and use just ordinary supplemental oxygen delivered by a nasal tube, the Holy See press office said. Doctors are also trying to cut back on the amount of time he uses a noninvasive mechanical ventilation mask at night, to force his lungs to work more.

While those amount to "slight improvements," the Vatican isn't yet providing any timetable on when Francis might be released from the Gemelli hospital or confirming any upcoming events. Known events include a planned visit by King Charles III and Holy Week in April.

When Francis is being wheeled to his private chapel down the hall from his hospital room, he doesn't need to be attached to the oxygen, the press office said. It was at that moment that Francis was photographed on Sunday, from behind, as he sat in his wheelchair before the chapel altar in prayer without any sign of nasal tubes.

The photo, showing Francis wearing a Lenten purple stole, marked the first image of the pope since he was admitted to Gemelli Feb. 14 with a complex lung infection that developed into double pneumonia. It followed an audio message Francis recorded March 6 in which he thanked people for their prayers, his voice soft and labored.

Together, they suggested Francis is very much controlling how the public follows his illness to prevent it from turning into a spectacle. While many in the Vatican have held up St. John Paul II's long and public battle with Parkinson's disease and other ailments as a humble sign of his willingness to show his frailties, others criticized it as excessive and glorifying sickness.

Francis' doctors told reporters on Feb. 21 that the pope authorized them to clearly explain the gravity of his situation, in detail, and their regular medical bulletins have suggested that Francis is comfortable with such information being in the public domain.

The Vatican press office said Monday that Francis approved the photo of him being released. But the fact that his face was hidden suggested something of a compromise in terms of how he wanted his current state to be recorded visually.

Francis doesn't want to hide his illness and the difficult moment he is going through but he's "not dramatizing it either," La Repubblica's Vatican correspondent, Iacopo Scaramuzzi, wrote Monday.

The image certainly reassured some well-wishers who came to Gemelli on Monday to pray for Francis.

"After a month of hospitalization, finally a photo that can assure us that his health conditions are better," said the Rev. Enrico Antonio, a priest from Pescara.

At the Vatican, Sister Mary, a nun from Kenya, said she thought "he looks great."

"The situation was very critical. But now seeing the photo, it makes me smile. It makes me feel better," she said. "It makes me even feel safer that the church is still going on, that our pope can come back to us."

But Benedetta Flagiello of Naples, who was visiting her sister who is a patient at Gemelli, wondered if the photo was even real.

"Because if the pope can sit for a moment without a mask, without anything, why didn't he look out the window on the 10th floor to be seen by everyone?" she asked. "If you remember our old pope (John Paul II), he couldn't speak up, but he showed up."

The first three weeks of Francis' hospitalization were marked by a rollercoaster of setbacks, including respiratory crises, mild kidney failure and a severe coughing fit in which he inhaled vomit.

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Over the last week, his condition has stabilized and doctors said he was no longer in imminent danger of death. With gradual improvements, the Vatican has suspended morning updates and is issuing less frequent medical bulletins. The next one is not expected before Wednesday.

## **St. Patrick's Day brings boisterous parades and celebrations to New York and other cities**

By PHILIP MARCELO and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — St. Patrick's Day, the annual celebration of all things Irish, was marked by parades throughout the United States on Monday, from a procession through Manhattan to a rolling spectacle through Savannah's historic streets.

School marching bands and traditional Irish pipe and drum ensembles ambled down Manhattan's Fifth Avenue with uniformed delegations from the police and fire departments in New York City, which hosts one of the nation's largest and oldest parades.

The celebration made its way north past designer shops and St. Patrick's Cathedral, a stunning neo-Gothic landmark that's the seat of the Catholic Archdiocese of New York.

Mayor Eric Adams donned a green cap and scarf and waved an Irish flag while Catholic Archbishop Timothy Dolan greeted marchers wearing a green, white and orange sash -- the national colors of the Emerald Isle.

"It's fantastic to be here," Ryan Hanlon, vice chairman of the parade's board of directors, said as a light morning rain fell. "We're getting a little bit of rain at the moment, but as we Irish call it, it's just liquid sunshine."

The New York celebration, in its 264th year, dates to 1762 — 14 years before the U.S. Declaration of Independence. Monday's parade lasted through the afternoon, ending on the east side of Central Park, about 35 blocks from where it started.

That's much, much longer than the 98-foot route in the resort town of Hot Springs, Arkansas, which claims it hosts the World's Shortest St. Patrick's Day Parade.

And in Savannah, thousands of revelers in gaudy green costumes crowded sidewalks and oak-shaded squares as the South's largest St. Patrick's Day parade wound through the historic Georgia city. The parade marked its 200th anniversary a year ago, tracing its origins to the day Irish immigrants marched to church in March 1824.

Lindsey Dodd, who's been coming to Savannah's parade for about 15 years, sported green hair braids, green lipstick and shamrock-decorated socks as her group set up chairs in a prime spot for parade-watching. Children tooted plastic horns and grown ups raised their beers as pipe and drum bands marched and pickup trucks towed shamrock-decorated floats.

"I just enjoy the festivities, people watching, the chaos," Dodd said. "There's just something special about Savannah."

Some other American cities transformed by Irish immigration held festivities over the weekend. Chicago, turning its namesake river bright green with dye, celebrated Saturday. Boston and Philadelphia held their parades on Sunday. And the water in the White House fountain was dyed green, a tradition started by President Barack Obama.

Across the pond, the Irish capital of Dublin culminated its three-day festival with a parade, and cities such as Liverpool, an English city also transformed by Irish immigration, hosted their own celebrations on St. Patrick's feast day.

The parades are meant to commemorate Ireland's patron saint but have become a celebration of Irish heritage globally since they were initially popularized by Irish immigrant communities to show solidarity in times of discrimination and opposition in the U.S.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul reflected on her Irish ancestors, who she said had been struggling potato farmers and fishermen from County Kerry.

"I live the American dream because my Irish immigrant grandparents came to this country as teenag-

ers," the Democrat said as she walked the Manhattan parade route. "I'm humbled by that story. That is the story of so many New Yorkers."

## **After Trump halted funding for Afghans who helped the US, this group stepped in to help**

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Andrew Sullivan thinks of the people his organization has helped resettle in America, one particular story comes to mind: an Afghan man in a wheelchair who was shot through the neck by a member of the Taliban for helping the U.S. during its war in Afghanistan.

"I just think ... Could I live with myself if we send that guy back to Afghanistan?" said Sullivan, executive director of No One Left Behind. "And I thankfully don't have to because he made it to northern Virginia."

The charitable organization of U.S. military veterans, Afghans who once fled their country and volunteers in the U.S. is stepping in to help Afghans like that man in the wheelchair who are at risk of being stranded overseas. Their efforts come after the Trump administration took steps to hinder Afghans who helped America's war effort in trying to resettle in the U.S.

No One Left Behind helps Afghans and Iraqis who qualify for the special immigrant visa program, which was set up by Congress in 2009 to help people who are in danger because of their efforts to aid the U.S. during the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars.

President Donald Trump in January suspended programs that buy flights for those refugees and cut off aid to the groups that help them resettle in the U.S. Hundreds who were approved for travel to the U.S. had visas but few ways to get here. If they managed to buy a flight, they had little help when they arrived.

The White House and State Department did not respond to requests for comment.

Meanwhile, the situation for Afghans has become more tenuous in some of the places where many have temporarily settled. Pakistan, having hosted millions of refugees, has in recent years removed Afghans from its country. increased deportations. An agreement that made Albania a waystation for Afghans expires in March, Sullivan said.

Hovering over all of this is the fear that the Trump administration may announce a travel ban that could cut off all access from Afghanistan. In an executive order signed on Inauguration Day, Trump told key Cabinet members to submit a report within 60 days that identifies countries with vetting so poor that it would "warrant a partial or full suspension" of travelers from those countries to the U.S.

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said Monday that the review was ongoing and no list had been finalized.

But groups that work with Afghans are worried.

When funding was suspended, No One Left Behind stepped in. Their goal is to make sure Afghans with State Department visas don't get stuck overseas. Other organizations — many who got their start helping Afghans during the U.S. military's chaotic withdrawal from Kabul in 2021 — are doing the same.

To qualify for this visa, Afghans must prove they worked for the U.S. for at least one year. That means tracking down documentation from former supervisors, who were often affiliated with companies no longer in business. They also undergo extensive vetting and medical checks.

"Our view was, OK, we've got to act immediately to try and help these people," said Sullivan. "We've been in kind of an all-out sprint."

The organization has raised money to buy flights and help Afghans when they land. Between February 1 and March 17, the group said it successfully booked flights for 659 Afghans.

It also launched a website where visa holders can share information, giving Sullivan's group a starting point to figure out where they might live in the U.S.

Sullivan and the organization's "ambassadors" — Afghans and Iraqis who already have emigrated to the U.S., many through the special immigrant visa program — have gone to Albania and Qatar to help stranded Afghans.



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Aqila is one of those ambassadors who went to Albania. The Associated Press is identifying Aqila by her first name because her family in Afghanistan is still at risk.

Aqila said many of the families didn't know what would happen when they arrived in America. Would they be homeless? Abandoned? One man feared he'd end up alone in the airport parking lot because his contact in America — a long-haul trucker — couldn't come pick him up. She assured him that someone would be there.

They gave them cards with contact information for attorneys. They printed papers with information about their rights in English, Dari, and Pashto.

No One Left Behind reached out to family members and friends in the U.S. to help with the transition when they landed in America.

Mohammad Saboor, a father of seven children, worked as an electrician and A/C technician with international and U.S. forces for 17 years. Two months ago, he and his family boarded a plane to Albania in anticipation of soon being able to go to America. They landed in California on March 12, exhausted but safe.

The next day he and his family explored their new apartment in the Sacramento suburb of Rancho Cordova.

Saboor said he hasn't felt safe in Afghanistan since the Taliban took over the country in August 2021. He worried that he'd be killed as retribution for the nearly two decades he'd worked with the U.S. and its allies. He wondered what kind of future his children would have in a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

The family picked the suburb in the hope that the large Afghan population in the Sacramento area would help them get settled and find work. He envisions a bright future in America, where his kids can go to school and eventually give back to the country that took his family in. Arriving in the U.S., he said, gave them a "great feeling."

"I believe that now we can live in a 100% peaceful environment," he said.

Sullivan said he hopes there will be exceptions for Afghans in the special immigrant visa program if a travel ban is imposed. They've been thoroughly vetted, he said, and earned the right to be here.

"These are folks that actually served shoulder-to-shoulder with American troops and diplomats for 20 years," he said.

Aqila, the Afghan ambassador, said it's stressful to hear stories of what people went through in Afghanistan. But the reward comes when she sees photos of those who have arrived in America.

"You can see the hope in their eyes," she said. "It's nice to be human. It's nice to be kind to each other."

## **A look at the 42 deaths linked to severe storms in the US**

By BRUCE SHIPKOWSKI Associated Press

A series of storms that sparked tornadoes, wildfires, high winds and dust storms while barreling across eight states over the weekend have left at least 42 people dead and dozens injured.

Scattered tornadoes in Missouri killed over a dozen people, and a string of twisters in Mississippi — including two that hit near the same town within about an hour — left six people dead. Hundreds of homes and businesses were destroyed throughout the South and the Midwest.

The violent weather began Friday and earned an unusual "high risk" designation from meteorologists.

There were 46 tornadoes on Friday and 41 on Saturday, according to a preliminary count. The storm also spurred more than 130 wind-driven wildfires that damaged more than 400 homes in Oklahoma. Dozens of fires were still burning across the state on Monday, said Keith Merckx at Oklahoma Forestry Services.

Here's a look at how the storm impacted each state:

Missouri - 13 deaths

Missouri recorded more fatalities than any other state. Among those killed was a man whose home was ripped apart by a tornado as he slept. A woman in the home suffered serious injuries but was rescued by emergency responders who hiked through a field of debris to get to the residence.

The storms mainly hit late Friday and early Saturday in several of the state's southern counties.

Mississippi - 6 deaths

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A string of tornadoes across three counties in Mississippi killed six people and left more than 200 others homeless, Gov. Tate Reeves said.

The National Weather Service confirmed two of the twisters hit within about an hour of each other on Saturday in Walthall County, which is home to hard-hit Tylertown — where two adults and a child were killed and multiple people were injured.

Alabama - 3 deaths

Tornadoes killed three people in Alabama. A man who was sheltering inside his workshop in Plantersville, but his wife escaped injury. An 82-year-old woman was also killed, and residents described them both as well-loved members of the community.

Arkansas - 3 deaths

The National Weather Services says at least nine tornadoes hit Arkansas. Three people were killed in Independence County in the northeast section of the state, while 29 people were injured across eight counties.

North Carolina - 2 deaths

Two boys ages 11 and 13 were killed when a tree fell on their home in western North Carolina early Sunday, according to firefighters in Transylvania County. Firefighters found them amid the uprooted 3-foot-wide tree after relatives said they had been trapped in their bedroom, officials said.

Oklahoma - 4 deaths

Wind-driven wildfires across Oklahoma destroyed more than 400 homes, including more than 70 in and around Stillwater, home to Oklahoma State University. Four deaths were blamed on the fires or high winds, the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management said.

Officials in Oklahoma and Texas are warning that parts of both states will again face an increased risk of fire danger this week.

Kansas and Texas - 11 deaths

High winds spurred several dust storms that led to almost a dozen deaths in car crashes on Friday.

Eight people died in a Kansas highway pileup involving at least 50 vehicles, according to the state highway patrol. Authorities said three people also were killed in car crashes during a dust storm in Amarillo in the Texas Panhandle.

## **Things to know about the former megachurch pastor charged with child sexual abuse**

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — An Oklahoma woman recalled a traveling evangelist who preached at her family's church in Osage County more than 40 years ago.

The preacher, along with his wife and son, eventually befriended the woman's family and stayed in their home, she said. That's when the woman alleged the sexual abuse began, in 1982 when she was just 12 years old.

On Monday, former Texas megachurch pastor Robert Preston Morris, 63, surrendered to authorities in Osage County after being indicted on child sexual abuse charges.

Here are some things to know about the case:

Who accused Morris of sexual abuse?

Cindy Clemishire, Morris' accuser, told authorities that Morris' abuse began on Christmas 1982 when he was staying at her family's house at age 12 and continued over the next four years.

The Associated Press typically does not name people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they come forward publicly, as Clemishire, now 55, has done.

In a statement last week after the Oklahoma Attorney General's Office announced the charges, she said: "After almost 43 years, the law has finally caught up with Robert Morris for the horrific crimes he committed against me as a child. Now, it is time for the legal system to hold him accountable."

What has Morris said about the allegations?

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Morris has not returned telephone messages left at numbers associated with him, and his attorney, Mack Martin, declined to comment on the charges. Martin told The Associated Press that Morris will plead not guilty.

When asked about the allegations last year by The Christian Post, Morris said in a statement to the publication that when he was in his early 20s he was "involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with a young lady in a home where I was staying."

"It was kissing and petting and not intercourse, but it was wrong," he said in the statement. "This behavior happened on several occasions over the next few years."

Who filed charges against Morris?

Morris was indicted last week by Oklahoma's multi-county grand jury, an investigative body that meets in secret and is guided by the Oklahoma Attorney General's Office. The indictment was unsealed last week in Osage County.

He has been charged with five counts of lewd or indecent acts with a child. He faces up to 20 years in prison for each of the five charges.

According to the Attorney General's Office, Oklahoma's statute of limitations is not applicable in the case because Morris was not a resident of Oklahoma.

Who is Robert Morris?

Morris was the longtime pastor of Gateway Church, a megachurch located in the Dallas-Fort Worth suburb of Southlake and founded by Morris in 2000. The church has multiple locations in the area and says more than 100,000 people attend each weekend.

Morris, who resigned last year after Clemishire came forward with her allegations, has been politically active. He was among those on former President Donald Trump's evangelical advisory board, and the church hosted Trump on its Dallas campus in 2020 for a discussion on race relations and the economy.

The church said in a statement last week that its members are praying for Clemishire and "all of those impacted by this terrible situation."

"We are aware of the actions being taken by the legal authorities in Oklahoma and are grateful for the work of the justice system in holding abusers accountable for their actions," the statement said.

## **M23 rebels withdraw from Congo peace talks, citing international sanctions**

By MARK BANCHEREAU Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — The Rwanda-backed rebels who captured key areas of Congo's mineral-rich east said Monday they were withdrawing from peace talks this week with the Congolese government, saying that international sanctions on the group's members have undermined such dialogue.

The talks scheduled to start in the Angolan capital of Luanda on Tuesday "have become impracticable" as a result of the sanctions announced by the European Union against some of its members on Monday, M23 rebel group's spokesman Lawrence Kanyuka said in a statement. Alleged offensives still being carried out in the conflict-hit region by Congo's military also undermine the talks, he said.

"Consequently, our organization can no longer continue to participate in the discussions," he added.

Congo's government, after initially rejecting such talks, said Monday it would participate in the dialogue in Angola. A delegation representing Congo already had traveled to Luanda for the talks, Tina Salama, the spokesperson for President Felix Tshisekedi, told The Associated Press.

M23 also had sent a delegation to Luanda, the group's spokesperson Lawrence Kanyuka said on the X platform on Monday.

The conflict in eastern Congo escalated in January when the Rwanda-backed rebels advanced and seized the strategic city of Goma, followed by Bukavu in February.

Angola, which has acted as a mediator in the conflict, announced last week that it would host direct peace negotiations between Congo and M23 on Tuesday.

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Peace talks between Congo and Rwanda were unexpectedly canceled in December after Rwanda made the signing of a peace agreement conditional on a direct dialogue between Congo and the M23 rebels, which Congo refused at the time.

"A dialogue with a terrorist group like the M23 is a red line that we will never cross," Tshisekedi had said during a speech to the diplomatic corps on Jan. 18.

M23 is one of about 100 armed groups that have been vying for a foothold in mineral-rich eastern Congo near the border with Rwanda, in a conflict that has created one of the world's most significant humanitarian crises. More than 7 million people have been displaced.

The rebels are supported by about 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to U.N. experts, and at times have vowed to march as far as Congo's capital, Kinshasa, about 1,575 kilometers (978 miles) to the east.

The U.N. Human Rights Council last month launched a commission to investigate atrocities, including allegations of rape and killing akin to "summary executions" by both sides.

On Monday, Rwanda cut diplomatic ties with Belgium and ordered all its diplomats to leave, a month after Brussels suspended development aid to the East African country. Rwandan President Paul Kagame on Sunday accused Belgium of trying to destroy Rwanda.

International pressure is growing on Rwanda as the European Union sanctioned five Rwandan nationals, including the commander of Rwandan special forces deployed in eastern Congo on Monday. The EU also sanctioned four Congolese nationals, including the political leader of M23, Bertrand Bisimwa, and three other high ranking members of the rebel group.

Rwanda's only gold refinery, Gasabo Gold Refinery, also was sanctioned by the EU, which accused it of contributing to "illegal extraction and trafficking of natural resources" from eastern Congo.

Alongside gold, the region holds deposits of key minerals used in the production of smartphones and computers. Last year, the UN said M23 generated around \$300,000 a month in revenue through its control of a mining area in eastern Congo.

The U.S. State Department said last week it was open to a mining partnership in Congo and has confirmed that preliminary discussions had begun.

On Sunday, Tshisekedi met with the U.S. special envoy to Congo, Rep. Ronny Jackson, to discuss potential security and economic partnerships.

"We want to work together so that American companies can invest and work in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and for that we have to make sure there is a peace in the country," Jackson told reporters after the meeting.

## **Iguanas likely crossed the Pacific millions of years ago on a record-setting rafting trip**

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Researchers have long wondered how iguanas got to Fiji, a collection of remote islands in the South Pacific. Most modern-day iguanas live in the Americas — thousands of miles and one giant ocean away.

They thought maybe they scurried there through Asia or Australia before volcanic activity pushed Fiji so far away.

But new research suggests that millions of years ago, iguanas pulled off the 5,000 mile (8,000 kilometer) odyssey on a raft of floating vegetation — masses of uprooted trees and small plants. That journey is thought to be a record — further than any other land-dwelling vertebrate has ever traveled on the ocean.

Scientists think that's how iguanas got to the Galapagos Islands off of Ecuador and between islands in the Caribbean. Initially they thought Fiji might be a bit too far for such a trip, but in a new study, researchers inspected the genes of 14 iguana species spanning the Americas, the Caribbean and Fiji. They discovered that Fijian iguanas were most closely related to desert iguanas from North America, and that the two groups split off around 31 million years ago.



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The researchers created a statistical model using that information and other tidbits about where iguanas live today and how they may spread. It suggested that the iguanas most likely floated to Fiji from North America.

"Given what we know now, their result is by far the most strongly supported," said Kevin de Queiroz, an evolutionary biologist at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, who was not involved with the new study.

The research was published Monday in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

The journey from North America to Fiji could have taken a few months, but these desert iguanas would have been ideal passengers because they were adept at resisting dehydration and could have snacked on the plants underfoot.

"If you had to pick a vertebrate to survive a long trip on a raft across an ocean, iguanas would be the one," said study author Simon Scarpetta from the University of San Francisco, in an email.

Many Fijian iguana species are endangered, and an invasive green iguana roams the islands today, said study author Robert Fisher of the United States Geological Survey. Figuring out where these creatures came from can equip scientists with the tools to better protect them in the future.

## **Americans increased spending tepidly last month as anxiety over the economy takes hold**

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. shoppers stepped up their spending just a bit in February after a sharp pullback the previous month, signaling that Americans are shopping more cautiously as concerns about the direction of the economy mount.

Retail sales rose just 0.2% in February, a small rebound after a sharp drop of 1.2% in January, the Commerce Department said Monday. Sales rose at grocery stores, home and garden stores, and online retailers. Sales fell at auto dealers, restaurants, and electronics stores.

The small increase suggests Americans may be growing more wary about spending as the stock market has plunged and President Donald Trump's tariff threats and government spending cuts have led to widespread uncertainty among consumers and businesses.

Some economists were relieved the numbers weren't worse. Still, many expect consumer spending will grow just 1% to 1.5% at an annual rate in the first three months of this year, far below the 4.2% gain in the final quarter last year.

"Consumer spending is on track to slow sharply this quarter, but not by as much as we previously feared," Stephen Brown, an economist at Capital Economics, a consulting firm, said in an email.

On Friday, a measure of consumer sentiment fell sharply for the third straight month and is now down more than 20% since December. Respondents to the University of Michigan's survey cited policy uncertainty as a leading reason for the gloomier outlook. While the respondents were divided sharply by party — sentiment about the current economy fell among Republican by much less than for Democrats — Republicans' confidence in the economy's future dropped 10%.

Consumers from all income levels are feeling more strained.

Hunter Simmons of Austin, Texas, who is a lawyer and journalist, said that the uncertainty around the economy because of the stock market turmoil and tariffs has made him more cautious about spending. He said he used to buy the more expensive farm fresh eggs, but now he's going for the cheapest eggs he can find. He's also been buying fewer fresh vegetables and fruits and has turned to frozen versions. And lately Simmons started to pay for gas in cash and is joining fuel rewards programs.

"I am not a big spender in general, but I have been cutting back in small ways," he said.

A slew of earnings reports over the past few weeks from major retailers including Walmart, Macy's and Dollar General have cited a slowdown in spending.

Walmart, the nation's largest retailer and a bellwether for the retail sector, released a weak outlook last month citing uncertainty around tariffs.

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February sales also fell last month at gas stations, clothing stores, and sporting goods stores. The figures aren't adjusted for prices, and the cost of gas also declined in February, which likely accounts for most of the drop. Excluding gas and autos, retail sales rose 0.5%, a healthier figure but still modest after a plunge of 0.8% in January.

Also Monday, the National Association of Homebuilders said its index measuring builder sentiment fell three points to 39, the lowest level in seven months, as economic uncertainty dimmed builders' outlook and fewer potential buyers visited homes.

"Economic uncertainty, the threat of tariffs and elevated construction costs pushed builder sentiment down in March," the group said. The homebuilders estimate tariffs will add \$9,200 to the cost of a new home.

Macy's says its customers, even at its upscale chains Bluemercury and Bloomingdale's, are feeling angst and its financial outlook this month reflects that.

"I think the affluent customer that's shopping Macy's is just as uncertain and as confused and concerned by what's transpiring," Macy's CEO Tony Spring said at the time.

Hiring has mostly held up and there are no signs that companies are laying off workers. As long as Americans have jobs, spending could remain resilient. But that is not assured.

Dollar General CEO Todd Vasos said Thursday that the overall economic picture for his customers is not ideal and the company said it would close around 100 stores.

"Our customers continue to report that their financial situation has worsened over the last year as they have been negatively impacted by ongoing inflation," Vasos said during an earnings call. "Many of our customers report that they only have enough money for basic essentials, with some noting that they have had to sacrifice even on the necessities."

Spending patterns at Costco have changed to accommodate a soured view of the economy, including a shift toward ground beef and poultry instead of more expensive cuts of meat, said to Gary Millership, the company's chief financial officer.

American Eagle Outfitters CEO Jay Schottenstein said angst is particularly high among younger customers.

"Not just tariffs, not just inflation," said Schottenstein. "We see the government cutting people off. They don't know how that's going to affect them. And when people don't know what they don't know — they get very conservative."

The retail sales report mostly just covers goods purchases — as well as restaurant sales — but there are signs Americans are cutting back spending on services as well.

Airline executives at JP Morgan's airline industry conference last week said bookings have fallen.

"There was something going on with economic sentiment, something going on with consumer confidence," said Delta CEO Ed Bastian at the industry conference.

## **Ukraine and Russia have conditions that could affect a ceasefire. What are they willing to concede?**

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

A ceasefire in Russia's 3-year-old war in Ukraine hinges on Moscow accepting the U.S. proposal of a 30-day pause in fighting as a confidence-building measure for both sides to hammer out a longer-term peace plan.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has warned that Russian President Vladimir Putin will look to delay such a temporary truce with conditions meant to divert the peace process and lengthen the war. Ukraine, which faced pressure to accept the ceasefire after U.S. President Donald Trump blocked military aid and intelligence sharing, expects that he will threaten more sanctions on Moscow to push Putin into accepting the terms.

As he disclosed that he will talk to Putin on Tuesday, Trump said that land and power plants are part of the conversation around bringing the war to a close, a process he described as "dividing up certain assets."

But beyond the temporary ceasefire, both sides seem unwilling to make large concessions to the other, and both have red lines that they insist cannot be crossed.

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A look at the issues:

What are Russia's demands?

When Putin launched its full-scale invasion on Feb. 24, 2022, he demanded that Ukraine renounce joining NATO, sharply cut its army, and protect Russian language and culture to keep the country in Moscow's orbit.

Now, he also demands that Kyiv withdraw its forces from the four regions Moscow illegally annexed in September 2022 but never fully occupied — Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson.

Russian officials also have said that any peace deal should involve releasing Russian assets that were frozen in the West and lifting other U.S. and European Union sanctions. The Trump administration has proposed putting potential sanctions relief on the table.

Along with that, Putin has repeatedly emphasized the need to "remove the root causes of the crisis" — a reference to the Kremlin's demand to roll back a NATO military buildup near Russian borders that it describes as a major threat to its security.

He also argues that Zelenskyy, whose term expired last year, lacks legitimacy to sign a peace deal. Kyiv maintains that elections are impossible to hold amid a war. Trump has echoed Putin's view, speaking of the need for Ukraine to hold an election.

Russian officials also have declared that Moscow won't accept troops from any NATO members as peacekeepers to monitor a prospective truce.

What are Ukraine's demands?

Facing setbacks along the 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front, Ukraine has backed away from demanding that its state borders be returned to pre-2014 lines, because it does not have the military force capable of reaching that end. Ukraine is asking for a peace deal cemented with security guarantees from international allies that will ensure that Russia is never able to invade again.

In lieu of NATO membership — a long-sought desire by Kyiv that appears to be nearly impossible without U.S. backing — what those guarantees might look like is taking shape in parallel talks led by France and Britain. A "coalition of the willing" envisions European boots on the ground and a strong military response if Russia were to launch a new offensive.

Zelenskyy has insisted the Ukrainian army be strengthened to withstand future Russian offensives, a costly endeavor that will require quick and consistent support from international allies. A stockpile of weapons, capable of doing serious damage to Russian assets, is another demand. Kyiv also wants to bolster its domestic arms industry to lessen its reliance on allies, a reality that has set Ukrainian forces back throughout the war.

Ukraine has key demands from Russia as well. Kyiv refuses to cede more territory to Moscow, including those in partially occupied regions. Also, Ukraine is seeking the return of children illegally deported to Russia and thousands of civilians detained in Russian prisons.

Concessions and red lines

Both sides have red lines that are mutually exclusive making negotiations extremely challenging. The U.S. has said both sides must make concessions. The fate of one-fifth of Ukrainian land now under Russian control is likely to take center focus.

For Moscow, the presence of NATO member states, as either peacekeepers or a reassurance force outside of the alliance framework, is a red line. But Moscow hasn't mentioned any specific concessions.

For Ukraine, which is in a weaker position, the question of territory held by Russia that it does not have the military means to retake is central. For Kyiv, it is both a red line and a potential concession.

Zelenskyy has said his country will never recognize the territory as Russian. But Ukrainian officials concede that, while officially this always will be Kyiv's position, the occupied territories are likely to remain under Russian control for some time.

"Partners know our red lines — that we do not recognize the occupied territories as the territories of the Russian Federation, and we do not recognize them," Zelenskyy told journalists recently. "This is my political will as president. And this is the political will of our people. This is a violation of international law and the Constitution of Ukraine."

Ukraine also rejects restrictions on the size and capabilities of its armed forces as well as limits on its

ability to join international alliances such as NATO and the European Union.

## **'Danish Viking blood is boiling.' Danes boycott US goods with fervor as others in Europe do so too**

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

Ivan Hansen, a retired Danish police officer, loaded up his basket at the supermarket, carefully checking each product to avoid buying anything made in the United States. No more Coca-Cola, no more California Zinfandel wine or almonds.

The 67-year-old said it's the only way he knows to protest U.S. President Donald Trump's policies. He's furious about Trump's threat to seize the Danish territory of Greenland, but it's not just that. There are also the threats to take control of the Panama Canal and Gaza. And Trump's relationship with Elon Musk, who has far-right ties and made what many interpreted as a straight-armed Nazi salute.

On his recent shopping trip, Hansen returned home with dates from Iran. It shocked him to realize that he now perceives the United States as a greater threat than Iran.

"Trump really looks like a bully who tries in every way to intimidate, threaten others to get his way," he told The Associated Press. "I will fight against that kind of thing."

A growing boycott movement across Europe

Hansen is just one supporter of a growing movement across Europe and Canada to boycott U.S. products. People are joining Facebook groups where they exchange ideas about how to avoid U.S. products and find alternatives. Feelings are especially strong across the Nordic region — and very possibly strongest in Denmark given Trump's threats to seize Greenland.

Google trends showed a spike in searches for the term "Boycott USA," and "Boycott America," as Trump announced new tariffs, with the top regions including Denmark, Canada and France. At the same time, a global backlash is also building against Tesla as the brand becomes tied to Trump, with plunging sales in Europe and Canada. In Germany, police were investigating after four Teslas were set on fire Friday.

Elsebeth Pedersen, who lives in Faaborg on the Danish island of Funen, just bought a car and made a point of not even looking at U.S.-made options.

"Before Elon Musk started to act like a maniac a Tesla could have been an option. And maybe a Ford," she said.

French entrepreneur Romain Roy said his solar panel firm has bought a new Tesla fleet each year since 2021 but canceled its order for another 15 to take a stand against Musk's and Trump's policies.

Describing the United States as "a country closing in on itself," he cited Trump's withdrawal from the Paris climate accord and Musk's arm gestures. He said he was instead buying European models, even though it would cost an additional 150,000 euros (\$164,000).

"Individual consumers, society, our countries, Europe must react," he told broadcaster Sud Radio.

Responding to consumer demand, Denmark's largest supermarket chain, the Salling Group, created a star-shaped label this month to mark European-made goods sold in its stores. CEO Anders Hagh said it's not a boycott, but a response to consumers demanding a way to easily avoid American products.

"Our stores will continue to have brands on the shelves from all over the world, and it will always be up to customers to choose. The new label is only an additional service for customers who want to buy goods with European labels," he said in a LinkedIn post.

'I have never seen Danes so upset'

For Bo Albertus, "when Trump went on television and said he would by political force or military force take a piece of the Danish kingdom, it was just too much for me."

The 57-year-old said he felt powerless and had to do something. He has given up Pepsi, Colgate toothpaste, Heinz ketchup and California wine, and replaced them with European products.

He is now an administrator of the Danish Facebook page "Boykot varer fra USA" (Boycott goods from the U.S.), which has swelled to over 80,000 members.

"Drink more champagne," one user posted after Trump threatened 200% tariffs on EU wine and Cham-



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pagne.

Albertus, a school principal, told the AP he really misses the strong taste of Colgate. But he's been pleasantly surprised at finding a cola replacement that is half the price of Pepsi.

Trump's policies have "brought the Danish Viking blood boiling," said Jens Olsen, an electrician and carpenter. He is now considering replacing \$10,000 worth of U.S.-made DeWalt power tools even though it will cost him a lot.

He has already found European replacements for an American popcorn brand and California-made Lagunitas IPA beer, which he calls "the best in the world."

"I've visited the brewery several times, but now I don't buy it anymore," he said. He has mixed feelings because he is a dual Danish-U.S. citizen, and has spent a lot of time in the United States. But he can't contain his anger.

"I'm 66 years old and I have never seen the Danes so upset before," he said.

Michael Ramgil Stæhr has canceled a fall trip to the U.S. and is among many choosing to buy Danish instead of American-made, though he cannot pinpoint the exact moment he made the decision.

"Maybe it was when (Trump) announced to the world press that he intended to 'take' Greenland and the Panama Canal, and if necessary by military force. That and the gangster-like behavior towards the Ukrainian president in the White House," the 53-year-old Copenhagen resident said.

"The man is deadly dangerous and is already costing lives" in the developing world and Ukraine, added Stæhr, who works helping disabled war veterans, many of whom got injured serving alongside U.S. troops in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan. He himself served in Bosnia.

Rising anger in France, too

Edouard Roussez, a farmer from northern France, launched an online group, "Boycott USA, Buy French and European!" that in just two weeks has attracted over 20,000 members on Facebook.

Roussez believes a boycott of U.S. companies is a good way to express opposition to Trump's policies, especially "the commercial and ideological war" he believes Trump is waging against Europe.

"First of all, these are the companies that financed Donald Trump's campaign," he said on state-owned LCP television channel. "I'm thinking of Airbnb, I'm thinking of Uber, I'm thinking of Tesla of course."

The irony of it all? The group is on Facebook. Roussez said only the American online social media platform gave him the reach he needed. But he's working to migrate the group to other platforms with no U.S. funding or capital.

As for any impact on U.S. export profits or policymaking, that's unlikely, said Olof Johansson Stenman, a professor of economics at the University of Gothenburg.

The boycott could have a psychological effect on Americans who see the scale of anger, but "some may also say, 'We don't like these Europeans anyway,'" Stenman said.

Some choices are harder than others

Simon Madsen, 54, who lives in the Danish city of Horsens with his wife and 13-year-old twins, says the family has given up Pringles, Oreos and Pepsi Max. Not so hard, really.

But now they're discussing doing without Netflix, and that is a step too far for the kids.

He also wonders whether he should keep buying Danish-made Anthon Berg chocolate marzipan bars, which are made with American almonds.

It's important, he said, for people to use the power of the purse to pressure companies to change.

"It's the only weapon we've got," he said.

## **Who invented the March Madness bracket? Staten Island bar and Kentucky postal worker stake claims**

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Could it really be true? That of all of college basketball's urban myths, one of New York's five boroughs is actually the birthplace of filling out an NCAA Tournament bracket?

Before all those office pools truly defined March, betting the bracket was the supposed brainchild of an

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Irish pub owner in Staten Island — a “creative businessman,” his son calls him — whose straightforward idea of plunking down 10 bucks to pick the Final Four teams and the national champion turned the unassuming spot into a bustling attraction where the special of the day could be a million-dollar payout.

“We created a pool that just blew up over time,” current bar owner Terence Haggerty said. “Looking back at it now, how did we pull it off? How did we do it? It was crazy.”

Through the decades of Larry and Magic, of Jordan and Laettner, through word of mouth and an embarrassment of riches, the contest took off — so much so that the West Brighton neighborhood favorite, Jody’s Club Forest, stakes its claim (though not without at least one other contender to the crown) as the bar that helped ignite the bracket into a billion-dollar business.

Haggerty’s parents, Mary and Jody, opened the club in 1976, and by the next college basketball season, already had hatched the idea of running a college basketball pool to boost business. The rules were simple: Pay \$10 to pick only the Final Four teams, the national champ and total points as a tiebreaker in a winner-take-all format. The tournament field of 32 teams — no need to fill a line for every round — was dwarfed by the 88 total entries, with the winner netting \$880.

By the time Jody’s Club shut down the pool in 2006, under scrutiny from everyone from the IRS to Sports Illustrated, the jackpot was a whopping \$1.6 million to the winner.

“We never in a million years would have ever imagined where it got,” Terence Haggerty said.

Kentucky contender

Every March needs a Cinderella, and Jody’s Forest Club can punch its ticket as an originator in gambling-related contests.

But in the home of bourbon, basketball and the Louisville Slugger, could the idea of penciling in a winner for every line have taken its first swing in 1970s Kentucky?

Bob Stinson, who died at 68 in 2018, was a U.S. Postal Service worker who applied the idea of using his recreational softball league bracket and the furor over Kentucky Derby betting slips to create his own bracket for the 1978 NCAA Tournament.

“My dad just thought it would be fun to fill out the brackets,” said his son, Damon Stinson. “It was kind of a betting thing but not really. It was kind of a who-knows-college-basketball-better kind of thing.”

Stinson said his father used a ruler and unlined paper to sketch out brackets and required only a nominal entry fee. The winner earned more bragging rights than a life-changing bonanza, though that was just fine with Bob Stinson, who traveled around the country for his job and brought brackets with him every March.

“He was proud of it,” Damon Stinson said. “Instead of just watching the games, let’s fill this out. He self-promoted the idea. He was tech savvy back in the day. So when Excel came out, the first thing my dad did was build a tournament bracket off it. This was perfect. He really had the first bracket pool electronically that anybody had, and he emailed it to everybody. That’s how it grew into a much bigger pool and things got out of hand.”

Damon Stinson says he once almost got thrown out of Catholic school for peddling brackets to other students for \$10 each and was caught with \$350 and a “bunch of brackets in my backpack.”

Trying to prove the real inventor of the March Madness pool seems as implausible as, well, picking a perfect bracket.

Stinson said his father truly believed he made the first one.

“Yes, 100%. Because he traveled for work, nobody had seen what he was doing,” Stinson said. “He traveled a lot nationally around the same time he was coming up with the idea and spreading it. He truly believed. The true 1-64, we’re going to write them down, we’re going to go round-by-round, that literal format is what he started with.”

Hoop dreams

There is not a shred of acknowledgment at Jody’s Club that it was ever a hub for basketball bets. No banner outside, no photos of past winners or framed snapshots of winning tickets. The decor is mostly an homage to Haggerty’s parents, who raised their kids about 12 blocks away.

Haggerty conceded there’s no real proof the bar was the first spot to run an organized pool.

“If somebody said, ‘No, it’s mine,’ go right ahead,” Haggerty said. “Look around here. It’s not something

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we really promote. It's not how we were. It's not how my father was. It's definitely not how my mother was. If I celebrated that, I wouldn't feel right doing it."

Haggerty has no record of ticket winners — not even of the \$1.6 million jackpot — but on a recent trip to the pub, a past champion had a barstool seat, a pint and a pining for his share of a six-figure payout won in 2003. Jack Driscoll said he played nearly every year during the life of the pool and recalled the thrill of placing that first bet each March.

"The cutoff day for submitting tickets was as big as any other holiday around here," he said.

Driscoll struck it big when Syracuse won the national championship. He used the windfall to invest in home improvements, notably a new kitchen.

The real March Madness at Jody's Club was figuring out where to stuff piles and piles of cash. No ordinary cash register would hold the hundreds, then thousands, and — twice! — millions wagered in the pool. The family once asked a nun to hold a hefty wad of collections.

"It was sprinkled here, sprinkled there, a little bit of everywhere," Haggerty said. "Banks. It was hidden in houses at some point. It was quite the operation."

The pool was essentially a mom-and-pop business, and it took days in its beginning in an era without fast and reliable computers to enter all the picks. The lines to buy a ticket — firefighters, police officers, elected officials and even Mike and the Mad Dog, Haggerty said — snaked down the street. Haggerty said ticket collection was forced into a neighboring dry cleaner and even other local bars to ease the congestion and give everyone a fair shot at playing.

"It was the best week of the year," Haggerty said.

End of the pool

The jackpot swelled to about \$997,000 in 2004 and topped \$1.2 million the following year — again, much like in that first 1977 pool, the entry fee remained \$10, cash only — before it stretched to 166,000 entries and a \$1.6 million prize in 2006.

Thanks in large part to the swelling media attention, the numbers raised a red flag in the federal government. After the winner supposedly claimed the winnings on a tax form, the IRS came knocking on Jody's Club door. The bar was in the clear for the pool — no one skimmed off the top, and the bar never profited from the seasonal business — but the IRS found Jody Haggerty had underreported his income over three years. Haggerty pleaded guilty to tax-evasion charges, received probation and was forced to pay restitution.

The charges were the fatal blow to Jody's slice of March Madness.

Embarrassed by the notoriety, Jody Haggerty shut down the pool for good ahead of the 2007 tournament. He died in 2016 without another March bet placed in the pub.

"Part of it killed my father, I felt like," the 42-year-old Terence Haggerty said of the investigation. "My father was really never the same after it."

Even after his mother's death in 2019, Haggerty never had any serious thoughts of restarting the pool.

"What we were put through was horrible," Haggerty said. "But if I did it, I think it would skyrocket right away."

Jody's Club Forest remains a destination each March for basketball junkies who know of the bars' role — was it really the first? Does it even matter? — in making betting pools and the art of bracketology an integral part of March Madness.

"We started something that nobody's come close to since," Haggerty said.

## **Who are the NASA astronauts who have been stuck in space for 9 months?**

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams were barely known outside space circles when they strapped in for what was supposed to be a quick test flight of Boeing's Starliner capsule last June. Nine months later, they've captured the world's attention — and hearts — as NASA's stuck astronauts.

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Their homecoming is imminent now that a new crew has arrived at the International Space Station to replace them after launching from Florida last week. They'll fly back with SpaceX as soon as Tuesday, their problem-plagued Starliner having returned to Earth empty months ago, leaving them behind in orbit.

Here's a look at "Suni and Butch" and their drama-filled mission:

Who are the stuck astronauts?

The two test pilots came to NASA via the Navy. Wilmore, 62, played high school and college football in his home state of Tennessee before joining the Navy. Williams, 59, grew up in Needham, Massachusetts, a competitive swimmer and distance runner.

Wilmore racked up 663 aircraft carrier landings, while Williams served in combat helicopter squadrons.

NASA picked Williams as an astronaut in 1998 followed by Wilmore in 2000. Each had two spaceflights behind them including monthslong stints at the space station before signing up as Starliner's first crew.

While they accepted their repeated homecoming delays, they noted it was much harder on their families. Wilmore's wife Deanna has held down the fort, according to her husband. Their oldest daughter is in college and their youngest in her last year of high school.

Williams' husband, Mike, a retired federal marshal, has been caring for their two Labrador retrievers. She said her mother is the worrier.

What are the stuck astronauts looking forward to on Earth?

Besides reuniting with loved ones, Wilmore, an elder with his Baptist church, can't wait to get back to face-to-face ministering and smelling fresh-cut grass.

Wilmore kept in touch with members of his congregation over the months, taking part in occasional prayer services and calling ailing members via the space station's internet phone.

Williams looks forward to long walks with her dogs and an ocean swim.

Several other astronauts have spent even longer in space so no special precautions should be needed for these two once they're back, according to NASA.

"Every astronaut that launches into space, we teach them don't think about when you're coming home. Think about how well your mission's going and if you're lucky, you might get to stay longer," NASA's space operations mission chief and former astronaut Ken Bowersox said last week.

Why were the stuck astronauts in a political dust-up?

Wilmore and Williams found themselves in the middle of a political storm when President Donald Trump and SpaceX founder Elon Musk announced at the end of January they would accelerate the astronauts' return and blamed the Biden Administration on keeping them up there too long.

NASA officials stood by their decision to wait for the next scheduled SpaceX flight to bring them home, targeting a February return. But their replacements got held up back on Earth because of battery work on their brand new SpaceX capsule.

SpaceX switched capsules to speed things up, moving up their return by a couple of weeks. The two will come back in the capsule that's been up there since last fall.

"It's great to see how much people care about our astronauts," Bowersox said, describing the pair as "professional, devoted, committed, really outstanding."

Why did the stuck astronauts switch space taxis?

Astronauts almost always fly back in the same spacecraft they launched in. Wilmore and Williams launched aboard Boeing's Starliner and will return in SpaceX's Dragon.

Their first flights were aboard NASA's space shuttle, followed by Russia's Soyuz capsule. Both the Starliner and Dragon are completely autonomous but capable of manual command if necessary.

As test pilots, they were in charge of the Starliner. The Dragon had fellow astronaut Nick Hague in command; he launched in it last September with a Russian and two empty seats reserved for Wilmore and Williams.

What's the future of Boeing's Starliner?

Starliner almost didn't make it to the space station. Soon after the June 5 liftoff, helium leaked and thrusters malfunctioned on the way to the orbiting lab.

NASA and Boeing spent the summer trying to figure out what went wrong and whether the problems



would repeat on the flight back, endangering its two test pilots. NASA ultimately decided it was too risky and ordered the capsule back empty in September.

Engineers are still investigating the thruster breakdowns, and it's unclear when Starliner will fly again — with astronauts or just cargo. NASA went into its commercial crew program wanting two competing U.S. companies for taxi service for redundancy's sake and stand by that choice.

## **Pursuit of glory? Cold, hard cash? A new poll breaks down why people fill out March Madness brackets**

By LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As March Madness takes over this week, how many people are filling out NCAA brackets — and why?

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows what share of Americans typically take a shot at bracket predictions and their motivation for joining in the madness.

The survey found that about one-quarter of Americans fill out a men's March Madness bracket "every year" or "some years." But what about the women's tournament? High-profile NCAA women's basketball games have closed the gap with men's tournaments in terms of viewership and there is more money flowing in and around women's sports in general; women's teams will now be paid to play in the tournament, just like men have for years. It all points to higher interest in how women's teams fare even if the bracket frenzy has not quite caught up.

The survey found that 16% of U.S. adults fill out a women's tournament bracket "every year" or "some years." And it's much more common for bracket participants to only fill out a bracket for the men's tournament than the women's — about 1 in 10 U.S. adults only fill out a men's tournament bracket, while only 2% fill out only a women's bracket. Another 14% fill out a bracket for both tournaments at least "some years."

So, a sizeable chunk of Americans are into NCAA bracketology, but what's behind the hype?

Among those who fill out brackets at least "some years," about 7 in 10 say a reason for their participation was for the glory of winning, the chance to win money or the fact that other people were doing it.

They're less likely to be motivated by support for a specific school or team — and in particular, to say this was a "major" reason for their participation.

There's certainly a financial motivation for correctly predicting the Final Four, and it's hard to deny NCAA college basketball is in a betting-heavy era. More Americans can legally bet money on the NCAA men's and women's basketball tournaments than in previous years, and many will place a wager on their bracket's success.

Does that mean Americans think the tournaments are all about wagering, or that it's technically gambling to enter a friends-and-family pool with only a modest payout at stake?

Most U.S. adults — 56% — say that if someone enters a March Madness bracket pool for money, they consider that to be gambling. About 2 in 10 say it depends on the amount of money, and another 2 in 10, roughly, say this is not gambling.

Who are the March Madness bracket diehards?

Men tend to make up the bulk of the regulars who fill out a bracket at least "some years." Among the March Madness bracket regulars, about 6 in 10 are men, including about one-third who are men under the age of 45. These bracket regulars are less likely to be women; only about 4 in 10 are women, and they're about evenly split between being older or younger.

Those who only fill out a bracket for the men's tournament are also overwhelmingly men. About 7 in 10 people who fill out a men's bracket — and not a women's bracket — "every year" or "some years" are men. About 4 in 10 are men over 45, and about 3 in 10 are younger men.

If you can't beat them, avoid them?

Not everyone wants to risk a bracket buster and people avoiding the Madness this month are hardly alone.

About 7 in 10 U.S. adults say they "never" fill out a men's or women's bracket. This group leans more

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female: About 6 in 10 bracket avoiders are women. And roughly one-third in this group are women over 45.

## March Madness: Bracketology a settled national pastime as the 2025 NCAA Tournament arrives

By MICHAEL MAROT AP Sports Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — When Bryce Yoder needs a study break this time of year, the college student flips on a TV and attends his favorite March Madness class — bracket science.

The 19-year-old sports management major at Indiana University-Indianapolis studies hard to learn the secrets of picking winners in the nearly dozen NCAA Tournament bracket pools he hopes to enter before Thursday's first-round games. It takes time, patience and some lucky bounces to get those picks right.

Yoder is hardly alone. Millions of Americans — from hard-core sports junkies to casual fans and school alumni to those with no rooting interest — engage in this annual national pastime by filling out a tourney bracket and seeing how they fare. Winning is possible, though few hold out much hope of a perfect bracket: The NCAA says the odds of that are 1 in 9,223,372,036,854,775,808 if you wing it and a still-absurd 1 in 120.2 billion if you know a bit about hoops.

For players like Yoder, it's more about proving he's the best.

"The satisfaction of being right," he said in explaining why he fills out so many brackets. "Really, it's about having the best bracket possible, whether that's with my friends and family or just the leaderboard over a random bunch of people that I've never met. I'm just so competitive."

From online gambling to office pools to family contests, brackets are big business and a big distraction. A study released in 2023 by Challenger, Gray & Christmas, a work outplacement firm, estimated \$17.3 billion is lost in productivity during the three-week tourney. A Finance Buzz survey back then also found 36% of employees tune into the games during work hours, and nearly 25% use paid time off or sick days.

Even elective surgery companies now advertise that customers can have mid-March procedures so they can recover — and watch basketball — at the same time.

In the beginning

It seems almost unfathomable today, but brackets meant virtually nothing for about the first 50 years of the NCAA tourney, which dates to 1939 and this year is holding its 86th edition.

During the '70s, though, the changes began in earnest.

The NCAA tourney expanded from 25 to 32 teams in 1975, the first year leagues could send two teams. Seeding started in 1978, and the field grew to 40 in 1979 and to 48 in 1980 when organizers dropped the restriction on how many league teams could play.

But the real revolution really with the 1979 title game between Michigan State and Indiana State. That Magic Johnson-Larry Bird matchup drew a 24.1 television rating, still the tourney record, and it gave everyone a glimpse into what college basketball's biggest event could become at the same time an 8-year-old boy named Charlie Creme looked into his future.

"I cut the (men's) bracket out of the newspaper in 1979 and had it on the pantry door in my family's kitchen," said Creme, now ESPN's women's basketball bracketologist. "I was filling it out, making actual predictions and I couldn't wait till a game ended and I could run up to the pantry door and advance the next team in the tournament. Within a couple years, I was making my own brackets with big pieces of oak tag (paper) and a pencil and a ruler."

Soon, he'd have company as the tourney grew.

America's first all-sports network, ESPN, broadcast the 16 first-round games, 12 on tape delay, in 1980. CBS wrested the broadcast rights away from NBC in 1982 with a three-year deal for \$16 million annually and the promise of expanded coverage including the first televised selection show.

Suddenly, brackets mattered and broadcasters such as Dick Vitale stoked long debates over which teams belonged, which did not and who would win games. Live, daily telecasts on ESPN spurred interest, too, heading into 1985, the first 64-team field and introduced a future NCAA executive to fill out the bracket.

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"The first one I remember filling out was 1985," said Dan Gavitt, the son of Big East co-founder Dave Gavitt and now the NCAA senior vice president for basketball. "I had four Big East teams in the Final Four and I was right on three of them. Boston College got beat by Memphis in the regional finals."

Gavitt, like Creme, was hooked and brackets became fashionable.

Could it happen again on the women's side? Perhaps.

After seeing ticket sales, television ratings and coverage of the sport soar in the last few years with more to come thanks to stars such as Paige Bueckers, Hannah Hidalgo and JuJu Watkins, Creme thinks women's brackets are on a similar trajectory.

"We might be seeing 1985-95," Creme said. "Star players in the men's game back then, stuck around longer. Right now we're in that period where Caitlin Clark played four years in college and as the rules stand now, JuJu Watkins has to play four years and Paige could if she wanted — she's not going to — but could stick around another year. That's where the men's game was in that period."

Upset city, baby

In its infancy, the bracket phenomenon was geared to teenagers and college students like Yoder who watched multiple games.

Soon, office pools and games among family members with entry fees and prize money became popular, too. In some cases, all you did was pluck a name out of a hat.

Back then, the NCAA frowned on such practices, labeling it gambling. Today, the NCAA runs its own online bracket game as part of its "fan engagement."

Still, the prize pool only fueled interest. So did the 1980s national championship games that became must-see TV — and the upset factor.

From surprising title runs by North Carolina State in 1983 and Villanova in 1985 to Princeton's near-upset of Georgetown in 1989, it seemed every team was in the mix and nobody would pick all the winners.

"There will never be a perfect bracket," ESPN men's basketball bracketologist Joe Lunardi said. "That's just not going to happen. When Warren Buffet offered \$10 million for perfect bracket, he knew he wasn't going to pay that out."

Those daunting odds haven't stopped anyone from filling out brackets.

"If I feel really strongly about a game, I'll probably pick the same outcome more times than not," Yoder said, referring to how he handles multiple brackets. "But I try to throw some silly type of stuff that wouldn't necessarily have a good chance of happening, like upsets, because that's just naturally going to happen."

The tools

Figuring out how to pick teams and games has evolved the years.

Selection committee members use tangible measures such as wins and losses, strength of schedule and NET rankings to round out the 68-team field. Other measures include quad victories, which vary in how they're compiled and applied. In an era of analytics, sites such as kenpom.com have become regular components for hard-core and casual fans.

The NCAA certainly is paying attention.

Gavitt said he filled out brackets in the early years of the NET just to see how reliable the rankings were to results. And when the topic of expansion is broached, NCAA officials look to see how the potential new bracket would fit on a single printed page.

The question, of course, is how far can this go and whether artificial intelligence can become the next big thing when it comes to picking winners.

"If AI did it, then the analysis would not be as much fun or as interesting," Creme said. "I don't know that the NCAA would ever go that far. I kind of hope not because I like the human element. If it's eliminated, if we know the AI formula, then it's sort of over."

## What to know about Yemen's Houthi rebels as the US steps up attacks on Iran-backed group

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The United States under President Donald Trump has launched a new campaign of intense airstrikes targeting Yemen's Houthi rebels.

This weekend's strikes killed at least 53 people, including children, and wounded others. The campaign is likely to continue, part of a wider pressure campaign by Trump now targeting the Houthis' main benefactor, Iran, as well.

Here's what to know about the U.S. strikes and what could happen next:

Why did the U.S. launch the new airstrikes?

The Houthi rebels attacked over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two vessels and killing four sailors, from November 2023 until January this year. Their leadership described the attacks as aiming to end the Israeli war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The campaign also greatly raised the Houthis' profile in the wider Arab world and tamped down on public criticism against their human rights abuses and crackdowns on dissent and aid workers.

Trump, writing on his social media platform Truth Social, said his administration targeted the Houthis over their "unrelenting campaign of piracy, violence and terrorism." He noted the disruption Houthi attacks have caused through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, key waterways for energy and cargo shipments between Asia and Europe through Egypt's Suez Canal.

"We will use overwhelming lethal force until we have achieved our objective," Trump said.

Didn't the U.S. already target the Houthis with airstrikes?

Under former President Joe Biden, the U.S. and the United Kingdom began a series of airstrikes against the Houthis starting in January 2024. A December report by The International Institute for Strategic Studies said the U.S. and its partners struck the Houthis over 260 times up to that point.

U.S. military officials during that period acknowledged having a far-wider target list for possible strikes. While the Biden administration didn't go too far into explaining its targeting, analysts believe officials largely were trying to avoid civilian casualties and not rekindle Yemen's stalemated war, which pits the Houthis and their allies against the country's exiled government and their local and international allies, like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The Trump administration, however, appears willing to go after more targets, based on the weekend's strikes and public remarks made by officials.

"We're doing the entire world a favor by getting rid of these guys and their ability to strike global shipping," U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio told CBS News' "Face The Nation" on Sunday. "That's the mission here, and it will continue until that's carried out."

Rubio added: "Some of the key people involved in those missile launches are no longer with us, and I can tell you that some of the facilities that they used are no longer existing, and that will continue."

Israel also launched its own airstrikes on Houthi-held sites, including the port city of Hodeida, over the rebels' missile and drone attacks targeting Israel.

What could the new U.S. strikes mean for the wider Mideast?

In two words: More attacks.

The Houthis said last week they'll again target "Israeli" ships traveling through Mideast waterways like the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, because of Israel's blocking of aid to the Gaza Strip. No rebel attack targeting commercial shipping has been reported as of Monday morning.

However, the new U.S. campaign likely could inspire Houthi attacks at sea or on land beyond American warships. The rebels previously targeted oil infrastructure in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, two countries deeply involved in Yemen's war since 2015.

"Although the U.S. has been striking at Houthi targets for over a year, the scope and scale of this new campaign, including the targeting of senior Houthi figures, marks a significant escalation in the conflict," analysts at the Eurasia Group said Monday.



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Gulf Arab countries "will distance themselves from ongoing hostilities but now face threats to their major oil infrastructure. The Houthis will want to hit President Donald Trump where it hurts, oil prices."

Meanwhile, the Houthis likely will expand their possible targets for ship attacks, meaning shippers will continue to stay out of the region, said Jakob P. Larsen, the head of maritime security for BIMCO, the largest international association representing shipowners.

Where are the Iranians in all of this?

Iran long has armed the Houthis, who are members of Islam's minority Shiite Zaydi sect, which ruled Yemen for 1,000 years until 1962. Tehran routinely denies arming the rebels, despite physical evidence, numerous seizures and experts tying the weapons back to Iran. That's likely because Tehran wants to avoid sanctions for violating a United Nations arms embargo on the Houthis.

The Houthis now form the strongest group within Iran's self-described "Axis of Resistance." Others like Lebanon's Hezbollah and the Palestinian militant group Hamas have been decimated by Israel after the Oct. 7, 2023, attack by Hamas that sparked Israel's war of attrition in the Gaza Strip. Allied Shiite militias in Iraq largely have kept their heads down since the U.S. launched retaliatory attacks last year over a drone attack that killed three American troops and injured at least 34 others at a military base in Jordan.

While Iranian state television aired footage of civilian casualties from the weekend strikes in Yemen, top political leaders stayed away from suggestion Tehran itself would get involved in the fight. Revolutionary Guard chief Gen. Hossein Salami notably underscored the Houthis made their own decisions — while not offering any warning over what would happen if the strikes killed any members of the Guard's expeditionary Quds Force, who are believed to actively support the rebels on the ground.

"We have always declared — and we declare again today — that the Yemenis are an independent and free nation in their own land, with an independent national policy," Salami said.

Trump's national security adviser Mike Waltz, speaking to ABC's "This Week" on Sunday, warned Guard officials training the Houthis "will be on the table too" as possible targets for attack.

Meanwhile, Iran is still trying to determine how to respond to a letter from Trump aiming to restart negotiations over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Es-mail Baghaei said Monday officials continue to review the letter and will respond "after investigations are completed."

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi separately traveled Sunday to Oman, which long has been an interlocutor between Tehran and the West. The Houthis also operate a political office in the sultanate.

The attacks on the Houthis are "a not-so-subtle signal to Iran, as President Trump has been unequivocal in his insistence that Iran return to the negotiating table to deal with its nuclear program," the New York-based Soufan Center said in an analysis Monday.

## **Trump administration deports hundreds of immigrants even as a judge orders their removals be stopped**

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

The Trump administration has transferred hundreds of immigrants to El Salvador even as a federal judge issued an order temporarily barring the deportations under an 18th century wartime declaration targeting Venezuelan gang members, officials said Sunday. Flights were in the air at the time of the ruling.

U.S. District Judge James E. Boasberg issued an order Saturday temporarily blocking the deportations, but lawyers told him there were already two planes with immigrants in the air — one headed for El Salvador, the other for Honduras. Boasberg verbally ordered the planes be turned around, but they apparently were not and he did not include the directive in his written order.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt, in a statement Sunday, responded to speculation about whether the administration was flouting court orders: "The administration did not 'refuse to comply' with a court order. The order, which had no lawful basis, was issued after terrorist TdA aliens had already been removed from U.S. territory."

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The acronym refers to the Tren de Aragua gang, which Trump targeted in his unusual proclamation that was released Saturday

In a court filing Sunday, the Department of Justice, which has appealed Boasberg's decision, said it would not use the Trump proclamation he blocked for further deportations if his decision is not overturned.

Trump sidestepped a question over whether his administration violated a court order while speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One on Sunday evening.

"I don't know. You have to speak to the lawyers about that," he said, although he defended the deportations. "I can tell you this. These were bad people."

Asked about invoking presidential powers used in times of war, Trump said, "This is a time of war," describing the influx of criminal migrants as "an invasion."

Trump's allies were gleeful over the results.

"Oopsie...Too late," Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, who agreed to house about 300 immigrants for a year at a cost of \$6 million in his country's prisons, wrote on the social media site X above an article about Boasberg's ruling. That post was recirculated by White House communications director Steven Cheung.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who negotiated an earlier deal with Bukele to house immigrants, posted on the site: "We sent over 250 alien enemy members of Tren de Aragua which El Salvador has agreed to hold in their very good jails at a fair price that will also save our taxpayer dollars."

Steve Vladeck, a professor at the Georgetown University Law Center, said that Boasberg's verbal directive to turn around the planes was not technically part of his final order but that the Trump administration clearly violated the "spirit" of it.

"This just incentivizes future courts to be hyper specific in their orders and not give the government any wiggle room," Vladeck said.

The immigrants were deported after Trump's declaration of the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, which has been used only three times in U.S. history.

The law, invoked during the War of 1812 and World Wars I and II, requires a president to declare the United States is at war, giving him extraordinary powers to detain or remove foreigners who otherwise would have protections under immigration or criminal laws. It was last used to justify the detention of Japanese-American civilians during World War II.

Venezuela's government in a statement Sunday rejected the use of Trump's declaration of the law, characterizing it as evocative of "the darkest episodes in human history, from slavery to the horror of the Nazi concentration camps."

Tren de Aragua originated in an infamously lawless prison in the central state of Aragua and accompanied an exodus of millions of Venezuelans, the overwhelming majority of whom were seeking better living conditions after their nation's economy came undone during the past decade. Trump seized on the gang during his campaign to paint misleading pictures of communities that he contended were "taken over" by what were actually a handful of lawbreakers.

The Trump administration has not identified the immigrants deported, provided any evidence they are in fact members of Tren de Aragua or that they committed any crimes in the United States. It also sent two top members of the Salvadoran MS-13 gang to El Salvador who had been arrested in the United States.

Video released by El Salvador's government Sunday showed men exiting airplanes onto an airport tarmac lined by officers in riot gear. The men, who had their hands and ankles shackled, struggled to walk as officers pushed their heads down to have them bend down at the waist.

The video also showed the men being transported to prison in a large convoy of buses guarded by police and military vehicles and at least one helicopter. The men were shown kneeling on the ground as their heads were shaved before they changed into the prison's all-white uniform — knee-length shorts, T-shirt, socks and rubber clogs — and placed in cells.

The immigrants were taken to the notorious CECOT facility, the centerpiece of Bukele's push to pacify his once violence-wracked country through tough police measures and limits on basic rights

The Trump administration said the president actually signed the proclamation contending Tren de Aragua

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was invading the United States on Friday night but didn't announce it until Saturday afternoon. Immigration lawyers said that, late Friday, they noticed Venezuelans who otherwise couldn't be deported under immigration law being moved to Texas for deportation flights. They began to file lawsuits to halt the transfers.

"Basically any Venezuelan citizen in the US may be removed on pretext of belonging to Tren de Aragua, with no chance at defense," Adam Isacson of the Washington Office for Latin America, a human rights group, warned on X.

The litigation that led to the hold on deportations was filed on behalf of five Venezuelans held in Texas who lawyers said were concerned they'd be falsely accused of being members of the gang. Once the act is invoked, they warned, Trump could simply declare anyone a Tren de Aragua member and remove them from the country.

Boasberg barred those Venezuelans' deportations Saturday morning when the suit was filed, but only broadened it to all people in federal custody who could be targeted by the act after his afternoon hearing. He noted that the law has never before been used outside of a congressionally declared war and that plaintiffs may successfully argue Trump exceeded his legal authority in invoking it.

The bar on deportations stands for up to 14 days and the immigrants will remain in federal custody during that time. Boasberg has scheduled a hearing Friday to hear additional arguments in the case.

He said he had to act because the immigrants whose deportations may actually violate the U.S. Constitution deserved a chance to have their pleas heard in court.

"Once they're out of the country," Boasberg said, "there's little I could do."

## **Nearly 700 people were killed 100 years ago this week in the deadliest US tornado**

By JOHN O'CONNOR Associated Press

MURPHYSBORO, Ill. (AP) — From Logan School's top floor, 11-year-old Othella Silvey should have been able to see her house easily — it was less than two blocks away.

But after a monstrous tornado ripped through the Illinois town of Murphysboro on March 18, 1925, Othella saw nothing but flattened wasteland.

"She couldn't tell which direction was home," said Othella's daughter, 81-year-old Sylvia Carvell.

Deadliest twister in recorded U.S. history

The deadliest twister in recorded U.S. history struck 100 years ago Tuesday, touching down in southeastern Missouri and tearing up everything in its 219-mile (352-kilometer) path for nearly four hours through southern Illinois and into Indiana.

It left 695 people dead and more than 2,000 injured, not counting the casualties from at least seven other twisters that the main storm spawned which spun off through Kentucky and into Alabama.

Modern standards qualify the so-called Tri-State Tornado as an F5, a mile-wide funnel with wind speeds greater than 260 mph (418 kph).

Perhaps the best evidence of its destructive handiwork was found on the Logan School grounds: A wooden board measuring 4 feet (1.22 meters) long by 8 inches (20.32 centimeters) wide driven so deeply into the trunk of a maple tree that it could hold the weight of a man.

It's on display this month as part of the Jackson County Historical Society's centennial commemoration of the disaster.

"You know the numbers: 200 mph winds. It was a mile wide. But the force that it took to put that pine board into that maple tree, it really puts it all in perspective," said Mary Riseling, coordinator of the six-day remembrance. "To have one item that was witness to the force of those winds, it's a story all its own."

Perfect atmospheric mix for ferocious storm

The atmospheric stew that gave birth to the ferocious cataclysm was literally a perfect storm. A surface low pressure system located over the Arkansas-Missouri border moved northeast, blending with a warm front moving north, said Christine Wielgos, warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather

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Service.

That churn "provided the warmth, the instability, the moisture" which, when "married perfectly," produce long-track, violent tornadoes, Wielgos said.

Adding to the terror was the lack of notice. There was no reliable storm forecasting in 1925 and no warning system anyway.

"All they had was they looked off to the West and went, 'Looking a little dark out there,' and didn't even know what it was until it was right up on them and then you're scrambling to find shelter," Wielgos said.

Towns were obliterated

The storm took out 40% of the city of Murphysboro, 97 miles (156 kilometers) southeast of St. Louis. Its 234 deaths were the most of any municipality, with entire neighborhoods flattened. Other towns were virtually obliterated, too, including Annapolis, Missouri; Gorham, Illinois; and Griffith, Indiana.

The Mobile & Ohio Railroad yards, employing close to 1,100, were wiped out. At the twister's next stop, it ravaged the DeSoto School, killing 38 children.

Sheet music for "After the Tornado is Over," a morbid dirge written locally, reflects the mood of the odious aftermath:

"I once had a 'Home Sweet Home' here/With families so kind and dear/The Red Cross tells me they are dead/Among the debris straight ahead/Death seems to come to every door/The strong and weak, the rich and poor."

In Murphysboro, Pullman rail cars arrived to house visiting medical professionals and cleanup crews. The Red Cross supplied tents for the homeless.

With reports that the Silvey family had been killed and their home destroyed, Othella and her younger sister, Helen Silvey, 7, were shipped to Carbondale as orphans. However, it was their grandparents — who lived a block away — who had died, Carvell said. The sisters were eventually reunited with their parents.

Commemoration celebrates resilience

The city rebuilt. Othella Silvey's family erected a home identical to the one that had been leveled. First, they built a chicken coop, which supplied not only their primary dietary staple for months, but their shelter until the primary residence was finished, Carvell said.

To this day, the west side of Murphysboro is peppered with small backyard structures that were temporary quarters until families could rebuild larger homes at the front of their lots.

Dozens of families who toughed it out remain in Murphysboro, Riseling said. Jackson County Historical Society President Laura Cates Duncan said the commemoration honors those who died but also celebrates the resilience of those who carried on.

"They could have gone elsewhere, but they wanted to stay here," Duncan said. "Their roots were here."

## **Sho-time in Tokyo: Ohtani, Dodgers prepare to open MLB season vs. Cubs on Tuesday**

By DAVID BRANDT AP Baseball Writer

TOKYO (AP) — The Major League Baseball season kicks off Tuesday night at the Tokyo Dome when Shohei Ohtani and the defending World Series champion Los Angeles Dodgers face the Chicago Cubs.

It's the first of a two-game series and features five Japanese players. Ohtani, Yoshinobu Yamamoto and rookie Roki Sasaki pitch for the Dodgers while the Cubs have outfielder Seiya Suzuki and left-handed pitcher Shota Imanaga.

The two MLB teams have been in Tokyo for several days, playing exhibition games against two Japanese teams — the Hanshin Tigers and Yomiuri Giants.

All four exhibition games had a capacity crowd of roughly 42,000. A similar atmosphere is expected for the two MLB games.

"Everybody's very aware of the series, that's evident for sure, more than I feel like it would be America," Cubs manager Craig Counsell said. "More people are talking about it, absolutely. That's a great feeling. The players love big events, that's why we do this, that's why we love to do it."



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Here are five things to know heading into the MLB opener:

All-Japanese pitching matchup

The first game will feature the first all-Japanese pitching matchup on opening day in MLB history. Yamamoto will take the mound for the Dodgers against Imanaga of the Cubs.

Yamamoto is entering his second season with Los Angeles. He was 7-2 with a 3.00 ERA last season and was an important part of the team's World Series championship, with a brilliant performance in a Game 2 win over the Yankees.

Imanaga was an All-Star last year in his first season with the Cubs. The lefty finished with a 15-3 record and a 2.91 ERA in 2024.

The Dodgers will start Sasaki in the second game on Wednesday night.

Young Cubs

Third baseman Matt Shaw is expected to make his big league debut for the Cubs on Tuesday. Shaw is one of the team's top prospects and did enough this spring to earn the starting nod.

Shaw was drafted with the No. 13 overall pick in 2020 after playing college baseball at Maryland. He hit .284 with 21 homers and 71 RBIs last season, splitting time between Double-A and Triple-A.

Other young Cubs include third-year outfielder Pete Crow-Armstrong, who hopes to take a big step forward after an encouraging second half of 2024. Rookie second baseman Gage Workman could also make his MLB debut in Tokyo.

Ailing Mookie

Dodgers shortstop Mookie Betts will not play in either game against the Chicago Cubs because of an illness that's lingered for the past week.

Manager Dave Roberts said Monday that Betts is starting to feel better but has lost nearly 15 pounds and is still trying to get rehydrated and gain strength. Roberts added that the eight-time All-Star might fly back to the United States before the team in an effort to rest and prepare for the domestic opener on March 27.

Miguel Rojas will start at shortstop in Betts' place.

What time is the Tokyo Series?

Set your alarm if you're planning to view the two Tokyo games in the United States. Both games being at 7:10 p.m. in Tokyo, which means it'll be a 6:10 a.m. wake up call in the Eastern time zone.

Many Cubs and Dodgers fans will really need some coffee. Start time in Chicago is 5:10 a.m. while it's 3:10 a.m. in Los Angeles. The game will air nationally on Fox.

Tokyo history

This marks the 25th anniversary of the first MLB regular season games played in Japan. The New York Mets and Cubs played a two-game set at the Tokyo Dome in 2000.

Since that series, MLB returned in 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2019. The 2019 series featured the Oakland A's and Seattle Mariners, who celebrated the final two games of Ichiro Suzuki's career in his home country. Suzuki will be inducted into the Hall of Fame this summer.

It's the 10th time that MLB has played regular season games in a spot outside the 50 states. The locations include Japan, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Australia and last year's series in South Korea.

## **'Stagflation' risk puts Federal Reserve in tricky spot as it meets this week**

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Federal Reserve officials last met in late January, things looked pretty good: Hiring was solid. The economy had just grown at a solid pace in last year's final quarter. And inflation, while stubborn, had fallen sharply from its peak more than two years ago.

What a difference seven weeks makes.

As the Fed prepares to meet Tuesday and Wednesday, the central bank and its chair, Jerome Powell, are potentially headed to a much tougher spot. Inflation improved last month but is still high and tariffs could push it higher. At the same time, ongoing tariff threats as well as sharp cuts to government spend-

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ing and jobs have tanked consumer and business confidence, which could weigh on the economy and even push up unemployment.

The toxic combination of still-high inflation and a weak or stagnant economy is often referred to as “stagflation,” a term that haunts central bankers. It is what bedeviled the United States in the 1970s, when even deep recessions didn’t kill inflation.

Stagflation, should it emerge, is hard for the Fed because typically policymakers would lift rates — or keep them high — to combat inflation. Yet if unemployment also rises, the Fed would usually cut rates to reduce borrowing costs and lift growth.

It’s not yet clear the economy will sink into stagflation. For now, like businesses and consumers, the Fed is grappling with a huge amount of uncertainty surrounding the economic outlook. But even a mild version — with the unemployment rising from its current low level of 4.1%, while inflation stayed stuck above the Fed’s 2% target — would pose a challenge for the central bank.

“That’s the tangled web they’re in,” said Esther George, former president of the Federal Reserve’s Kansas City branch. “You have inflation stickiness on the one hand. At the same time, you’re trying to look at what impact could this have on the job market, if growth begins to pull back. So it is a tough scenario for them for sure.”

Fed officials will almost certainly keep their key rate unchanged at their meeting this week. Once the meeting concludes Wednesday, they will release their latest quarterly economic projections, which will likely show they expect to cut their rate twice this year — the same as they projected in December.

The Fed implemented three cuts last year and then signaled at the January meeting that they were largely on pause until the economic outlook becomes clearer.

Wall Street investors expect three rate reductions this year, in June, September, and December, according to futures prices tracked by CME Fedwatch, in part because they worry an economic slowdown will force more reductions.

One development likely to unnerve Fed officials is the sharp jump in inflation expectations this month in the University of Michigan’s consumer sentiment survey. It showed the biggest increase in long-term inflation expectations since 1993.

Such expectations — which basically measure whether Americans are worried inflation will get worse — are important because they can become self-fulfilling. If businesses and consumers expect higher costs, they may take steps that push up inflation, like demanding higher wages, which in turn can force companies to raise prices to offset higher labor costs.

Some economists caution that the University of Michigan’s survey is preliminary and for now based on only about 400 responses. (The final version to be released later this month typically includes about 800.) And financial market measures of inflation expectations, based on bond prices, have actually declined in recent weeks.

The most recent inflation readings have been mixed. The consumer price index dropped last week for the first time in five months to 2.8% from 3%, an encouraging change. But the Fed’s preferred price gauge, to be released later this month, is likely to be unchanged.

The jump in inflation expectations is also a problem for the Fed because officials, including Powell, have said they are willing to let inflation gradually return to their 2% target in 2027, because expectations have generally been low. If other measures show inflation worries rising, the Fed could come under more pressure to get inflation down more quickly.

“I do worry when I see consumer expectations moving in the opposite direction,” George said. “I think you just have to keep an eye on that.”

The last time President Donald Trump imposed tariffs — in 2018 and 2019 — overall inflation didn’t rise by much, in part because they weren’t nearly as broad as what he is currently proposing and some duties, such as those on steel and aluminum, were watered down with loopholes. Now that Americans have lived through a painful inflationary episode, they are likely to be more skittish about rising prices.

Powell referred such concerns in remarks earlier this month. He said tariffs could just have a one-time

impact on prices without causing ongoing inflation. But that could change "if it turns into a series" of tariff hikes, he said March 7, or "if the increases are larger, that would matter."

"What really does matter is what is happening with long-term inflation expectations," Powell added.

A week after his comments, those expectations shot higher in the University of Michigan survey.

## **Tariffs on lumber and appliances set stage for higher costs on new homes and remodeling projects**

By ALEX VEIGA and MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writers

Shopping for a new home? Ready to renovate your kitchen or install a new deck? You'll be paying more to do so.

The Trump administration's tariffs on imported goods from Canada, Mexico and China — some already in place, others set to take effect in a few weeks — are already driving up the cost of building materials used in new residential construction and home remodeling projects.

The tariffs are projected to raise the costs that go into building a single-family home in the U.S. by \$7,500 to \$10,000, according to the National Association of Home Builders. Such costs are typically passed along to the homebuyer in the form of higher prices, which could hurt demand at a time when the U.S. housing market remains in a slump and many builders are having to offer buyers costly incentives to drum up sales.

We Buy Houses in San Francisco, which purchases foreclosed homes and then typically renovates and sells them, is increasing prices on its refurbished properties between 7% and 12%. That's even after saving \$52,000 in costs by stockpiling 62% more Canadian lumber than usual.

"The uncertainty of how long these tariffs will continue has been the most challenging aspect of our planning," said CEO Mamta Saini.

**Bad timing for builders**

The timing of the tariffs couldn't be worse for homebuilders and the home remodeling industry, as this is typically the busiest time of year for home sales. The prospect of a trade war has roiled the stock market and stoked worries about the economy, which could lead many would-be homebuyers to remain on the sidelines.

"Rising costs due to tariffs on imports will leave builders with few options," said Danielle Hale, chief economist at Realtor.com. "They can choose to pass higher costs along to consumers, which will mean higher home prices, or try to use less of these materials, which will mean smaller homes."

Prices for building materials, including lumber, have been rising, even though the White House has delayed its tariffs rollout on some products. Lumber futures jumped to \$658.71 per thousand board feet on March 4, reaching their highest level in more than two years.

The increase is already inflating costs for construction projects.

Dana Schnipper, a partner at building materials supplier JC Ryan in Farmingdale, New York, sourced wooden doors and frames for an apartment complex in Nassau County from a company in Canada that cost less than the American equivalent.

Half the job has already been supplied. But once the tariff goes into effect it will be applied to the remaining \$75,000, adding \$19,000 to the at-cost total. Once JC Ryan applies its mark up, that means the customer will owe \$30,000 more than originally planned, Schnipper said.

He also expects the tariffs will give American manufacturers cover to raise prices on steel components.

"These prices will never come down," Schnipper said. "Whatever is going to happen, these things will be sticky and hopefully we're good enough as a small business, that we can absorb some of that. We can't certainly absorb all of it, so I don't know. It's going to be an interesting couple of months."

Sidestepping the tariffs by using an alternative to imported building materials isn't always an option.

Bar Zakheim, owner of Better Place Design & Build, a contracting business in San Diego that specializes in building accessible dwelling units, or ADUs, said Canada remains the best source for lumber.

By sticking with imported lumber, Zakheim had to raise his prices about 15% compared with a year ago.

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He also has 8% fewer jobs lined up compared with last year.

"I'm not about to go out of business, but it's looking to be a slow, expensive year for us," he said.

## Tariffs rollercoaster

On March 6, the Trump administration announced a one-month delay on its 25% tariffs on certain imports from Mexico and Canada, including softwood lumber. Tariffs of 20% on imports from China are already in effect. A 25% tariff on steel and aluminum imports — 50% on those from Canada — kicked in on March 12.

Tariffs on Mexican and Canadian goods slated to go into effect next month will raise the cost of imported construction materials by more than \$3 billion, according to the NAHB. Those price hikes would be in addition to a 14.5% tariff on Canadian lumber previously imposed by the U.S., ratcheting up tariffs on Canadian lumber to 39.5%.

On Air Force One, President Donald Trump said he was pushing forward with his plans for tariffs on April 2 despite recent disruption in the stock market and nervousness about the economic impact.

"April 2 is a liberating day for our country," he said. "We're getting back some of the wealth that very, very foolish presidents gave away because they had no clue what they were doing."

Building materials costs overall are already up 34% since December 2020, according to the NAHB.

Builders depend on raw materials, appliances and many other components produced abroad. About 7.3% of all products used in single-family home and apartment building construction are imported. Of those, nearly a quarter come from Canada and Mexico, according to the NAHB.

Both nations also account for 70% of the imports of two key home construction materials: lumber and gypsum. Canadian lumber is used in everything from framing to cabinetry and furniture. Mexican gypsum is used to make drywall.

Beyond raw materials, refrigerators, washing machines, air conditioners and an array of other home components are manufactured in Mexico and China, which is also a key source of steel and aluminum.

The tariffs will mean higher prices for home improvement shoppers, said Dent Johnson, president of True Value Hardware, which operates more than 4,000 independently owned hardware stores.

"The reality is that many products on the shelves of your local hardware store will eventually be affected," he said in a statement emailed to The Associated Press.

## Chilling effect

Confusion over the timing and scope of the tariffs, and their impact on the economy, could have a bigger chilling effect on the new-home market than higher prices.

"If consumers can't plan, if builders can't plan, it gets very difficult to know how to price product because you don't know what price you need to move it," said Carl Reichardt, a homebuilding analyst at BTIG. "If people are worried about their jobs, worried about the future, it's very difficult to make the decision to buy a new home, whatever the price."

The uncertainty created by the Trump administration's tariffs policy will probably result in increased volatility for home sales and new home construction this year, said Robert Dietz, the NAHB's chief economist.

Still, because it can take several months for a home to be built, the larger impact of from building materials costs are going to happen "down the road," Dietz said.

The impact tariffs are having on consumers is already evident at Slutsky Lumber in Ellenville, N.Y.

"There are not as many people getting ready for spring like they usually are," said co-owner Jonathan Falcon. "It seems like people are just cutting back on spending."

Falcon also worries that smaller businesses like his will have a tough time absorbing the impact of the tariffs.

"This is just like another thing that's going to be harder for small lumber yards to handle than the big guys and just sort of keep driving businesses like us to not make it," he said.



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## Today in History: March 18

### Deadliest U.S. tornado strikes Midwest states

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, March 18, the 77th day of 2025. There are 288 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 18, 1925, nearly 700 people died when the Tri-State Tornado struck southeastern Missouri, southern Illinois and southwestern Indiana; it remains the deadliest single tornado in U.S. history.

Also on this date:

In 1922, Mohandas K. Gandhi was sentenced in India to six years' imprisonment for civil disobedience. (He was released after serving two years.)

In 1937, in America's worst school disaster, nearly 300 people — most of them children — were killed in a natural gas explosion at the New London Consolidated School in Rusk County, Texas.

In 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an executive order authorizing the War Relocation Authority, which forced Japanese-Americans into internment camps during World War II.

In 1963, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Gideon v. Wainwright*, ruled unanimously that state courts were required to provide legal counsel to criminal defendants who could not afford to hire an attorney on their own.

In 1965, the first spacewalk took place as Soviet cosmonaut Alexei Leonov went outside his Voskhod 2 capsule, secured by a tether.

In 1990, two thieves posing as police officers subdued security guards at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum of Art in Boston and stole 13 works of art valued at over \$500 million in the biggest art heist in history.

In 2018, a self-driving Uber SUV struck and killed a pedestrian in Tempe, Arizona, in the first death involving a fully autonomous test vehicle.

Today's Birthdays: Composer John Kander is 98. Actor Brad Dourif is 75. Jazz musician Bill Frisell is 74. Filmmaker Luc Besson is 66. TV personality Mike Rowe is 63. Singer-actor Vanessa L. Williams is 62. Olympic speed skating gold medalist Bonnie Blair is 61. Rapper-actor Queen Latifah is 55. Actor-comedian Dane Cook is 53. Singer Adam Levine (Maroon 5) is 46. Actor Lily Collins is 36.